

The Aramaic Language

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[Aramaic](#) is an ancient living language that became the lingua franca of the entire Near East. In the 9th Century, the Assyrian Empire decided to make the Aramaic alphabet as an official system of communication between the various vassals of the vast empire. The alphabet was surely an easier and more convenient mean of communication compared to the more complex Assyrian Akkadian cuneiform system. However, the Assyrian spoken language continued to be in use. Consider the Turkish state decision to switch from the modified Arabic to Latin in 1928. However, this did not mean that the Turkish people stopped using the spoken Turkish language. Interestingly, cuneiform continued to be used in Assyria. Jean Bottero affirms that there existed Akkadian script that dates back to the year 74 of the Christian Era.¹ In fact, modern excavation discoveries have revealed that Assyrian Akkadian cuneiform was in use until the mid-3rd Century of the Christian Era.² This confirms without any doubt that the Assyrians were present in early Christianity and have continued to exist until today, because the Assyrian Christianity and Assyrian Aramaic use has been uninterrupted until modern days.

Aramaic is still spoken today by many Semitic people that include Assyrians, Mandeans (descendants of ancient Babylonians), Arameans, and a segment of Arabs and [Jewish population](#).

Andrew Gabriel Roth writes that many parts of the Arabic and Hebrew languages are borrowed from the Aramaic, including the alphabet. Prof. Yaacov Maoz states that modern Hebrew square script is called *Ktav Ashuri* or Assyrian writing.³ *Ashuri* is the Arabic and Hebrew name for the English Assyrian.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Aramaic Lexicon and Concordance' website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Home' and 'Aramaic Lexicon and Concordance' in English, and the title in Syriac script. Below this is a multilingual greeting bar: 'Greetings · Shlāma · Приветствия · Saludos · GrüÙe · Shālom · Χαϊροστασι· Bārev Dzez · 问候 · شلم · 挨拶'. The main content area features a search box labeled 'Enter Word to Search:' with a 'Search' button. Below the search box are radio buttons for 'English Search Field' (selected as 'English word (default)') and 'Aramaic Search Field' (with options for 'Aramaic word', 'Lexeme', and 'Root'). A note indicates '* Keystrokes of the Estrangelo Font character set. Help!'. A 'Popular dictionary searches' section lists terms like 'greetings, language, learn, love, family, God (God ~ Alah, Alaha | my God ~ Alaha | our God ~ Alahan | lord ~ maran | Jesus ~ Esho | Christ ~ Mshivkhaa), house, happy, honour, nation, unity, and strength. See also: names'. At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with links to 'AIM', 'Atour: The State of Assyria', 'Timeline', '1900's', 'Forums', 'Peshitta', and 'Forum archives'. A 'SHARE THIS INFORMATION' section contains various social media icons.

Ktav Ashuri is the term used in the Talmud. Meanwhile, the modern Hebrew term for the Hebrew alphabet is simply called Alphabet Hebrew. Consequently, the term *Ktav Ashuri* refers primarily to a traditional calligraphy used in writing the Torah. However, the term *Ashuri* is

¹ Jean Bottero. *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning and the Gods*. The University of Chicago Press.1995, p. 206.

² Geller, M. J. Paper titled "*The Survival of Babylonian Wissenschaft in Later Tradition.*" In *The Heirs of Assyria*. The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project. Sanna Aro and R. M. Whiting, ed. Helsinki, 2000.

³ Listen to what Prof. Yaacov Maoz states about the misconception that the Aramaic speaking people who migrated from Assyria to Israel were Kurds. He said this is a mistake. He states we Aramic speakers from Assyria and our writing script is Ashuri (Assyrian) and we are not related to Kurds in any way as the Kurds have oppressed, killed, persecute and enslaved us. Accessed 01/26/2025 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGNC1MazyU8>

often used in the Babylonian Talmud to refer to the contemporary "Hebrew alphabet", as opposed to Paleo-Hebrew (Proto-Hebrew or Old Hebrew) script. It is widely believed that the script *Ashuri* came to use, because the Jews brought it back with them when they returned from their exile in Assyria (*Ashur*). The script is also called *Ashurit*. The Jews selected *Ashurit* script and the sacred tongue for the Torah scroll and left Ivrit script and the Aramaic tongue for the commoners.⁴ It is called *Ashurit* because it is in Hebrew "*me'usheret*" meaning beautiful, praiseworthy or authorized.

Reference to the *Ashuri* script first appears in rabbinic writings of the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, referring to the formal script used in certain Jewish ceremonial items, such as Torah and Sifrei. According to the Talmud, Ezra was the first to mandate that the Sefer (singular form of Sifrei) Torah be written in the Aramaic alphabet rather than in the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet and permitted that the Book of Daniel be composed in Aramaic.

Roth continues to state that inscriptions of Aramaic have been known since the 9th Century BC which spread to the entire Near East replacing in the process Akkadian and Hebrew. Even during the Neo-Babylonian dynasty and the Persian conquests, Aramaic had remained as the International medium of exchange and remained as the vernacular language of the regions of Mesopotamia, Syria, Holy Land and beyond. The Aramaic finally ceded to Arabic in around the 9th Century of the Christian Era, but was never supplanted by Arabic. Aramaic was adopted by the deported Israelites of Transjordan, exiled from Bashan and Gilead in 732 BC by Tiglath-Pileser III, the tribes of the Northern Kingdom by Sargon II who took Samaria in 721 and the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom of Judah who were taken into captivity to Babylon by Nabuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Therefore, the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity brought Aramaic back with them to the Holy Land and this continued to be their native tongue throughout the lifetime of Jesus.

During the Hellenistic period of the Seleucids, Aramaic ceased to be a uniform language as various dialects began to form, due to regional influences. Some of these dialects became literary languages after the differences had increased.

Aramaic is classified as such:

- a) Old Aramaic 925-700 BC
- b) Official or Imperial Assyrian Aramaic 700-200 BC
- c) Middle Aramaic 200 BC – AD 200
- d) Late Aramaic AD 200 – 700 AD
- e) Modern Aramaic AD 700 – present.

The Aramaic in which the Bible called *Assakhta Peshitta* is written, also known as *Peshitta* Text, is in the dialect of Northern Mesopotamia as it evolved and was highly perfected in Urhai, once a

⁴ Accessed 01/26/2025 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ktav_Ashuri

city-kingdom, later called Edessa by the Greeks and now called Urfa in modern Turkiye. Harran, the city of Abraham's brother Nahor, is about 38 kilometers southeast of Urhai. The large colony of Urhai Jews and the Jewish colonies in Assyria in the kingdom of Adiabene whose royal house had converted to Judaism possessed most of the Bible in this dialect, the *Peshitta Tanakh*.

The *Peshitta* version of the Old Testament was taken over by the Churches in the East, which used, and still use, Aramaic, as far as India, and formerly in Turkestan and China. The *Peshitta Tanakh* was completed during Apostolic times with the writings of the New Testament.⁵ Of course, Adiabene, which included the modern regions of Arbil, Kirkuk, Mosul was the heartland of Assyria.⁶

The Greeks and later the West had used the term Syriac instead of Aramaic. This artificial word, i.e. Syriac, was not used in the East. It was forced on the people of the Near East who have recognized their language as *Lishana Aramaya* or the Aramaic Language. This Greek term Syriac was considered the Aramaic dialect of Edessa or Urhai, now Urfa in eastern Turkiye, an important center of early Christianity in Mesopotamia. The Syriac of Edessa was rapidly accepted as the literary language of all non-Greek eastern Christianity and was the primary vehicle for the Christianization of large parts of central and south-central Asia.⁷

Manuscripts in Eastern Aramaic are written in the ancient script called *Estrangela* (round, thick set) with no vowel markings. After the 5th Century AD, two different scripts developed. In the West, a script (of which half the letters no longer resemble the *Estrangela*), called 'Serto' (Strophe) is used, with five capital Greek letters for vowels, written on their side, above or below the letters. In the Eastern script, called *Madinkhaya* (Eastern) or 'Swadaya' (Contemporary) only five of the twenty-five letters have slightly modified. To indicate the seven vowels there are various accents, with two different strokes to indicate the semi-vowels, resembling the Jewish systems of Tiberias or of Babylon.

⁵ Andrew Gabriel Roth. *Ruach Qadim: Aramaic Origins of the New Testament*. Paul Younan description of the Aramaic. US. 2005. pp. 22-25

⁶ *Adiabene Was Assyrian, Not Kurdish*. Accessed 01/26/2025
https://www.fredaprim.com/pdfs/2007/Adiabene_Was_Assyrian.pdf

⁷ W. M. Thackston. *Introduction to Syriac. An Elementary Grammar With Readings from Syriac Literature*. IBEX Publishers. 1999.