‘Upon this Rock’:
Matthew 16.18 and the Aramaic Evidence

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Abstract

In the Greek text of Mt. 16.18 Peter’s name is Πέτρος, while the ‘rock’ is πέτρα. Many have assumed an Aramaic substratum to the text whereby the same Aramaic term נֶפֶל underlies both Greek words. An alternate view posits that while נֶפֶל lies behind Πέτρος, a different Aramaic term was most likely rendered by πέτρα. This article examines the Aramaic and Syriac evidence afresh and at the same time proposes a methodology for studying such issues. It concludes that נֶפֶל is a strong candidate for an original Aramaic background for πέτρα.

Keywords: Aramaic, Gospel of Matthew, Peter, Targum, Qumran, Syriac, Peshitta.

Matthew reports that when Jesus and his disciples were in Caesarea Phillipi, he asked them: ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ (Mt. 16.13). When they responded that the people thought he might be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or simply one of the prophets, he narrowed the question: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Matthew then records Peter’s famous confession of faith: ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the

1. Translations will follow the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.
living God’. Jesus then replied to Peter: ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’

This statement has proven to be quite controversial in church history. It formed the basis for the later Roman Catholic belief that Peter was the first Pope and that his papal authority passed on to each subsequent Bishop of Rome. Two major alternative explanations are that the ‘rock’ refers not to Peter but to his confession of faith (Chrysostom, Calvin, Zwingli) or to Jesus Christ himself (Origin, Augustine, Luther). Another controversy about the passage concerns its genuineness (i.e. whether it is actually traceable to Jesus in substantially its present form), with a wide variety of opinions being expressed.

2. The earliest traces of the teaching that the passage refers to the Bishop of Rome or to other bishops as successors of Peter appear in the early third century (see Oscar Cullmann, Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr: A Historical and Theological Study [trans. Floyd V. Filson; Library of History and Doctrine; London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1962], pp. 165-67). Some variety in Roman Catholic teaching on this passage was apparently replaced some time in the sixteenth century by a more unanimous view of Peter (and his successors) as the rock (see John F. Bigane, Faith, Christ or Peter: Matthew 16.18 in Sixteenth Century Roman Catholic Exegesis [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981]).


4. Cullmann thinks it is genuine but was originally a part of the complex of material dealing with the Last Supper (Peter, pp. 176-204). Cullmann offers a detailed discussion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship in regard to the genuineness of the passage (Peter, pp. 169-76), and this can be supplemented with Davies and Allison (Matthew, pp. 602-15). Ulrich Luz rejects the genuineness of the passage, taking Mk 8.27-30 as the source for Mt. 16.13-16, 20. Then v. 17 was created by Matthew as a transition to vv. 18-19, with v. 18 coming ‘from a time when it became important to look back to the time of the apostles as the foundation-laying time for the church’. Finally, Matthew ‘probably then created v. 19b, c as a doublet to 18.18’ (Matthew 8-20 [Hermeneia; trans. James E. Crouch; ed. Helmut Koester; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001] pp. 355-60). Luz seems representative of those who have argued that the author of Matthew composed the passage. Ben F. Meyer treats the issue in some depth, arguing both positively for the genuineness of the passage in its Matthean setting as well as rebutting some of the main arguments against its authenticity (The Aims of Jesus [London: SCM Press, 1979], pp. 185-97). Michael J. Wilkins calls Meyer’s arguments ‘quite convincing’ (The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής [NovTSup, 59; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988], p. 186).
Aramaic Substratum

A key issue that relates to these controversies concerns a possible Aramaic background for this section of Matthew. If an Aramaic substratum seems likely, then Matthew’s Gospel here would make use of an earlier source (written or oral) that contained the pronunciation on Peter’s name in its Aramaic form of אֵל אִישׁ (transcribed into Greek as Κηφᾶς). While many think that Jesus coined this as a nickname, there is a possibility that it was attested already in the Elephantine Papyri (fifth century BCE). It appears in the form אֵל אִישׁ in a list of witnesses, and ‘the best explanation is that it represents Kephâ’.

Still, the name is so rare that Jesus most likely

5. Stanley E. Porter lists Mt. 16.13-20 as one of several places in the Gospels that may record an occasion when Jesus instructed his disciples in Greek, listing several criteria for his conclusion (The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals [JSNTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], pp. 159-61). While it is plausible that all of the disciples and Jesus knew some Greek, it seems unlikely that such an intimate discussion would have been conducted in a language that was not their main language. None of the theological concepts seem too difficult for discussion in Aramaic, although the criteria listed below could also be explained from a Greek perspective.

6. There is a reasonable consensus that Jesus spoke Aramaic as his mother tongue, so it is likely that much of his teaching to Jewish audiences was also in Aramaic. It also is likely that he had a thorough acquaintance with his Hebrew Bible, perhaps to the extent that his Aramaic teaching contained many Hebrew terms and expressions. R. Buth thinks that Jesus probably did most of his teaching in a Hebrew that was heavily influenced by Aramaic, based on rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls (‘Aramaic Language’, in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter [eds.], Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], pp. 89-90). Maurice Casey thinks of parts of the Synoptic Gospels as ‘literal translations of written Aramaic sources’: (1) ‘the [Qumran] Scrolls provide part of the evidence that Aramaic was the lingua franca of Jesus’ environment, the language which he would have had to use in teaching normal Jews, and the natural language for his first followers to use when they reported his life and teaching’; (2) at least some of the Synoptic Gospels must contain ‘generally accurate accounts of what Jesus or his disciples, or both, said and did’, and such passages were likely transmitted in Aramaic; (3) ‘many details in such passages...are explicable only if they are part of translations of written Aramaic sources’ (‘An Aramaic Approach to the Synoptic Gospels’, Expository Times 110.9 [1999], pp. 275-78 [276]).

gave it to Peter as a nickname.\(^8\) Other terms or concepts in the passage can also be given a proper Aramaic background. The term ἐκκλησία (‘church’) corresponds to ‘the image of a building’ that occurs often in the Qumran Scrolls (1Q5s 8.5–9; 9.6; 11.8; 1QH 6.26; 7.9).\(^9\) Schnackenburg notes that 1QH 6.24–26 refers to ‘a solidly built city, founded on rock, [that] protects from the power of chaos and the “gates of death”’.\(^10\) The ‘gates of death’ occurs also in the Hebrew Bible (Job 38.17; Pss. 9.14; 107.18; Isa. 38.10), and ‘the gates of hell’ occurs in other Jewish literature with the same Greek terminology found in Mt. 16.18 (πύλα τῆς θανάτου; Wis. 16.13; 3 Macc. 5.51; Pss. Sol. 16.2). The reference appears to be to death itself, which will not be able to overcome the community.\(^11\)

Oscar Cullmann’s study of Peter lists the following additional evidences for an Aramaic substratum to the passage: (1) the designation of Peter’s father, Βαριωνᾶ (v. 17);\(^12\) (2) the use of ‘flesh and blood’ for men (v. 17); (3) the ‘word pair “bind and loose”’ (v. 19); (4) ‘the strophic rhythm—three strophes of three lines each—which is found similarly in other sayings of Jesus’ (Mt. 11.7-9, 25-30); and (5) ‘the illustration of the rock as foundation, to which there is an exact parallel in the rabbinical

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8. For the Greek name, Caragounis mentions Πέτρος (‘rocky’ or ‘stony place’) as a pre-Christian name and Latin Petro used as a ‘cognomen’ attested from the first century BCE. There is uncertainty about whether the latter name derives from ‘rock’ or from an Etruscan root relating to sheep (Peter and the Rock [BZNW, 58; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990], p. 19; Peter Lampe, ‘Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen—Matt. XVI.18’, NTS 25 [1979] pp. 227-45 [228]). Caragounis argues further that ‘since Πέτρος is frequently attested in the early Christian centuries as a name for pagans, it ought reasonably to be assumed that the name had a tradition among them, and that it was not adopted by pagans because one of the Christian Apostles had borne it, or because other Christians were doing so in imitation of him!’ (p. 24).


10. Schnackenburg, Matthew, p. 159.


12. ‘Simon, (son of) John’ in the Gospel of John (1.42; 21.15, 16, 17). Occasionally ‘John’ (Ἰωάννης) and ‘Jonah’ (Ἰωάννης) were confused in the LXX (2 Kgs 25.23; 1 Chr. 26.3; 1 Esd. 9.1, 23). Robert H. Gundry suggests that Matthew may have introduced the designation to make ‘Simon a spiritual son of Jonah, who was designated “the prophet” in [Matt.] 12.39 (but not in Mark 8.12; Luke 11.29)’ and to ‘associate Simon with “the sign of Jonah”, which was mentioned not only in 12.39 but also in v 4 of the present chapter (contrast Mark 8.12)’ (Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 332).
literature, where Abraham is mentioned as the rock of the world’. There may be Christian influence on the latter parallel, but Davies and Allison develop a similar comparison between Simon’s name change and Abram’s new name (Gen. 17). Both Simon and Abram were associated with the birth of a new people of God and each had ‘a name which symbolizes his crucial function’. Further support comes from Isa. 51.1-2 and John the Baptist’s use of it according to Mt. 3.9. ‘What we seem to have in Mt 16, 17-19 is the realization of John’s dire prophecy. Here the new people of God is brought into being, hewed not from the rock Abraham but instead founded on the rock Peter.’ The view assumes that Jesus first gave Simon his nickname at this point, whereas it appears from Jn 1.42 that he was given the name (Cephas, the Aramaic form) when Jesus first called him. Merrill Tenney explains the passage from John this way: ‘Jesus accepted Simon as he was but promised that he should become Cephas… The development of Peter as recorded in this Gospel demonstrates the progress of that change.’ Then, at the critical moment when Peter spoke of the Lord’s identity by divine revelation, the Lord revealed the full import of the name through the play on words.

Since the Greek text of Mt. 16.18 contains two different Greek words, Πέτρος (Peter) and πέτρα (‘rock’), the question immediately arises whether any underlying Aramaic would have one word or two to match the Greek. The Aramaic form of Peter’s name certainly has to be נָסִיך, since the name Cephas was used as a frequent substitute for Peter. The Gospel of John clearly connects the name Cephas with the name that Jesus gave to Simon and further notes that the translation of Cephas is Πέτρος (Jn 1.42). Paul used the name in 1 Corinthians (1.12; 3.22; 9.5; 15.5) and in Galatians (1.18; 2.9, 11, 14).

16. Mark 3.16 simply narrates the fact that Jesus gave Simon the name Peter and need not imply that Peter received the name when Jesus first called him.
A more difficult question concerns the Aramaic term that would underlie πέτρα. Many assume that the same Aramaic word was used for both Greek terms, especially since there seems to be a play on words in the Greek text. The fact that Πέτρος does not quite match πέτρα would be due to the greater suitability of the masculine form for Peter’s name. In this view πέτρα is thought to be a better match for נֵבֵית, with Πέτρος chosen for the personal name. A different perspective views Πέτρος as the most usual sense of נֵבֵית, while πέτρα emphasizes a finer nuance of a different Aramaic term that Jesus (or some Aramaic tradition) wished to highlight.

An answer to this question is two-pronged: exegetical and linguistic. The exegetical issue concerns the structure of the wordplay and how the term πέτρα fits with the overall context. The linguistic issue involves whether נֵבֵית would be an appropriate match semantically for πέτρα. It is this semantic background that is the concern of the present study, although to some extent the two approaches cannot be separated so neatly. It seems reasonably clear from the passage that πέτρα here refers to some type of foundation stone or bedrock.19 The metaphor of building on the πέτρα requires that sense. So, from a linguistic standpoint, it is necessary to determine whether נֵבֵית can bear such a meaning in the era of Jesus.20

Chrys Caragounis concludes that while נֵבֵית was an appropriate equivalent of πέτρος in the sense of ‘stone’, it might not have been viewed by native speakers of Aramaic as a good fit with πέτρα. While we know that נֵבֵית underlies Πέτρος, we have no way of knowing which Aramaic word underlies πέτρα. The evidence of the Aramaic Targums shows that נֵבֵית is as probable a candidate as נֵבֵית.21 If different Aramaic terms were used, then the Aramaic substratum as well as the Greek would both point to an original distinction between the name ‘Peter’ and the term ‘rock’.22 Likewise Peter Lampe concluded from his

19. Cf. the BDAG, which gives the meanings ‘rock, bedrock, or massive rock formation’ for πέτρα.

20. There is always the possibility as well that נֵבֵית could have been assigned such a meaning simply to fit with the wordplay. That is, while נֵבֵית would not normally have been chosen to designate a massive rock that could serve as a foundation, the context would give it that sense anyway. Still, it would not do to have too much semantic dissonance here. For example, one would not expect a term such as ‘pebble’ to fit into a context where it would mean ‘bedrock’, although ‘stone’ might work for that.


22. According to O. Cullmann, ‘in practice one cannot differentiate too strictly between πέτρα and Πέτρος; they are often used interchangeably’ (‘πέτρα’, in TDNT, VI,
study that an Aramaic speaker upon hearing the term בְּרֶשֶׁת would most naturally associate it with something like ‘stone’, ‘ball’, ‘clump’, ‘lump’, or the like.\textsuperscript{23}

Some Methodological Issues

Before examining the evidence for an Aramaic term that would lie behind πέτρα in this passage it would be helpful to consider some methodological issues. The methodology that Caragounis follows can be reconstructed along the following lines:

1. Establish that the two Greek terms (Πέτρος and πέτρα) have ‘no clear-cut distinction’ between them in both classical and biblical Greek. (pp. 9-15)
2. Establish that both Greek terms could be used for personal names in the first and second centuries even apart from Christian influence. (pp. 17-25)
3. Establish that more than one Aramaic term (esp. נְפִלֵי in addition to בָּרֶשֶׁת) could have been appropriate as an underlying term for πέτρα, meaning that the Aramaic evidence by itself is not decisive. For this procedure Caragounis relies heavily on the evidence of the Targums. (pp. 26-30)
4. Establish that the evidence of the Syriac translations shows that the two Greek terms ‘were understood to refer to two different entities’. (pp. 31-43)
5. Establish that examples of wordplay in the New Testament can be based often enough on ‘ideas rather than sound’ and that wordplay cannot be based on mere repetition (pp. 44-57)
6. Establish by the context of Mt. 16.13-20 that ‘the confession of Peter is...concerned with the dignity and office of Jesus in the

\textsuperscript{23} Lampe, ‘Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen’, p. 238. Lampe’s survey of various lexical works can be supplemented now with Michael Sokoloff’s \textit{A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period} (Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum, 2; Jerusalem: Bar Ilan University, 1990), which lists ‘stone, rock’ for בְּרֶשֶׁת (although all the citations of ‘rock’ appear to be smaller rocks) and ‘dome, vaulted chamber, soft round object’ for בָּרֶשֶׁת.
face of contradictions from almost all quarters and constitutes the threshold to the new emphasis of Matthew on the necessity of the Cross’. (pp. 69-81)

7. Establish from the ‘semantic structure of the pericope’ that ‘our text is concerned with the person of Jesus rather than the person of Peter, and that the interpretation of the crucial saying must be in harmony with this result’. (pp. 82-87)

8. Establish by exegesis of Mt. 16.18 that πέτρα refers not to Peter as the foundation for the church but to ‘the significance of the name Πέτρος [that] triggers off a word-play on the πέτρα-like character of Peter’s utterance, the content of which constitutes the foundation-ground for the building of the Church’. (pp. 88-110)

If there is no clear distinction between the two Greek terms, then it seems logical that the second term (πέτρα) could have been used for some purpose other than a semantic distinction. The author could have thought πέτρος more appropriate for a personal name than πέτρα or could have chosen a slight variant to avoid the repetition in the underlying Aramaic. The author could also have thought that using different terms was appropriate to represent two different terms in the Aramaic.

Caragounis does not lay out any particular method for how he approached his study of the Aramaic terminology. Something more explicit is needed. Maurice Casey has tried to put forward a sound methodology for reconstructing a possible Aramaic substratum to a passage from the Gospels. It is a given that one should start with any evidence available from the Dead Sea Scrolls, since these ‘are from the right language, the right culture, and very near to the right date’. After that, data from other dialects may be used ‘with caution’, starting from earlier documents and then moving to the Palestinian Talmud. The thought is to keep as close as possible to the date and dialects of Aramaic used in Palestine in the first century, although Casey points out elsewhere that ‘Aramaic was a relatively stable language over a period of centuries’.

24. For a contrary argument that the referent must be to Peter himself, see Wilkins, Concept of Disciple, pp. 189-94.


Casey thinks some help can be obtained from the Syriac versions, but 'we should never begin with them, because they are translations into the wrong dialect. At a late stage they may alert us to the possibilities we had not thought of, because they are in the right language and derive from a significantly similar culture.'^28 K. Beyer ascribes more importance to the Syriac. According to him, the Old Syriac Gospels may have originated in western Syria or northern Palestine about 200 CE, and their Old Syriac language contains elements of another Aramaic dialect. Thus he thinks that the Old Syriac Gospels have a 'clear Western Aramaic influence and in addition...an excellent knowledge of the Aramaic name-forms of Palestine'.^29 As for Old Syriac itself, Beyer argues that it 'came directly from' a local dialect. Written Imperial Aramaic had been supplanted by Greek by the end of the fourth century CE in the area of Syria, so that 'Old Syriac, the official language of the kingdom of Osrhoene' must have developed from a spoken rather than a written dialect.^30 On the other hand, Daniel Boyarin thinks that Greek did not replace Aramaic as a spoken language in Syria. It did not do that in Palestine, so why should it have done so in Syria? '[I]t seems not unreasonable to assume a continuous area of Aramaic speech up until the Arab conquest.'^31

Boyarin explains grammatical similarities between Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac through diffusion due to contact:

As is well known, Syriac shares isoglosses with the east; we hope to have shown the plausibility, at least, that it shares innovations with the west, as well.
We submit then that the convergence model of Middle Aramaic dialectal history is likely to be more appropriate that [sic] the divergence model.^32

While Syriac has often been considered an Eastern dialect, Boyarin and Edward M. Cook think more in terms of a dialect continuum for the Middle Aramaic period in which Syriac has a central position.^33 A

^32. Boyarin, 'Middle Aramaic Dialects', p. 644.
^33. Boyarin, 'Middle Aramaic Dialects', diagram on p. 645; Edward M. Cook, 'A New Perspective on the Language of Onqelos and Jonathan', in D.R.G. Beattie and
western feature of Syriac would be the preformative \textit{m}- for the infinitive of derived patterns, while an eastern feature is \textit{n}- as the prefix for the third person masculine singular of the imperfect. Casey thinks as well of a central classification for Syriac based on isoglosses that it shares with both eastern and western Aramaic dialects.\textsuperscript{34}

While Syriac is an important language to consider in reconstructing an Aramaic substratum for a New Testament pericope, it should be used with caution, as Casey advised. Even the Old Syriac of the Gospels is still not the same dialect that was used in Galilee of the first century.

Fitzmyer emphasizes the need to use early materials (no later than the second century) for purposes of establishing linguistic issues for first century Palestine. He notes, for example, that the large number of Greek borrowings in the Targums, in Syriac, and in ‘inscriptions from Palestinian synagogues from the third to the sixth centuries’ contrasts with Aramaic texts from Qumran where such borrowings are extremely rare.\textsuperscript{35} Fitzmyer also adduces various Aramaic names, words, and places in the New Testament, along with Aramaisms and ‘mistranslations’ as linguistic evidence for thinking that ‘Jesus’ words were by and large uttered originally in Aramaic and for the Aramaic substratum of various parts of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{36}

The method followed here may be summarized by the following points:

1. Evidence from a dialect closest in time and geography to the Aramaic of first-century Palestine is considered to carry the most weight.

2. Caution is exercised when dealing with Aramaic translations. The techniques of the translator(s) need to be considered as well as the particular dialect of Aramaic.

3. The checking of evidence for passages where the term in question is used in a parallel way in the New Testament is advocated.


Caragounis attempts to demonstrate that the semantic range of Aramaic קור is pretty much limited to a ‘stone’, making it unsuitable for a reference to Peter as the foundation for the church (Mt. 16.18). Caragounis’s study needs to be re-examined. First, he claims that Hebrew צור (‘rock’) ‘is never translated by Aramaic קור’. Instead, קור is the standard Targumic translation for צור. However, there is at least one exception in Targum Prophets to Isa. 8.14, which translates והלך נקך ולקח מכתש (‘a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over’) with הלך מעז וללקח ומחקל (‘and to a stone of striking and to a rock of making fall’). Perhaps the parallelism of Hebrew ובאר and צור and נקך and נקך forced the choice for the unusual term. Also, Targum Neofiti I has מן כל שיש מ(Conv for ‘from the stone of the flint of the rock’) for Hebrew בצרו הלוחם (‘from the rock of the flint’) at Deut. 8.15 and for שלחמו צור at Deut. 32.13. Possibly the translator used קור for ‘from flint of a rock’) at Deut. 50.7 translated סחי and added נקך צור as an additional gloss. Targum Prophets to Isa. 50.7 translated סחי with נקך הלוחם. It is also possible, though that Targum Neofiti I intended the term סחי to represent צור. Some confusion results from the normalization of the word order in the two passages from Deuteronomy. Hebrew צור occurs seven times in the book of Job (14.18; 18.4; 19.24; 22.24; 24.8; 28.10; 29.6), but unfortunately none of the passages are preserved in 11QTgJob or in 4QTgJob.

Aside from these exceptions, it appears to be correct that Hebrew צור is not normally translated by Aramaic קור, but does this have to have the significance that Caragounis claims for it? ‘That the Targumim abstain from using קור for צור indicates that קור could not cover semantically the meaning of צור.’ Perhaps the Targumists chose for צור פינוח because of a perceived closer etymological relationship. Also, they

38. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, p. 29.
39. All instances of Hebrew צור determined by concordance study were compared with the Targums. For Targum Onqelos and Targum of the Prophets the edition by Alexander Sperber was used (The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts [4 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962]). For Targum Neofiti I the edition by Alejandro Diaz Macho was consulted (Neophyti I: Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana [6 vols.; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968]).
41. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, p. 29.
simply may have wanted to maintain separate words for Hebrew מ SELF and מחת, the latter term being regularly rendered with מחת.

The evidence of the Targums has to be treated with some caution for two reasons. First, the translators could have used the terms in a stereotypical way, even when the actual semantics of the case would have corresponded better with a different term. The translators of the Peshitta, for example, were more nuanced in their work, exhibiting a less stereotypical translation procedure. For מחת they often used מחת but also מחת (‘a steep rock, crag, precipice’; e.g. Judg. 1.36; 15.8) and מחת (‘rock, a rock’; e.g. Ps. 40.3; Amos 6.12; Obad. 3). Hebrew מאות is rendered by מחת (‘flint, hard stone, rock’; e.g. Exod. 17.6; 33.21, 22), מחת (e.g. Judg. 6.21; 13.19), מחת (e.g. 2 Sam. 21.10; Ps. 27.5), and מחת (‘a mountain’; e.g. Job 18.4; Isa. 10.26; 51.1).

A second problem of the Targums is the issue of their date. Do they really reflect the linguistic situation in the first century? I would refer here again to Fitzmyer’s comparison of the use of Greek terms in the Targums vs. Qumran and other pre-Christian Aramaic as evidence for the lateness of the Targums. Lampe tries to get around this issue by citing examples from earlier Aramaic inscriptions, but surely the evidence is too restrictive for firm conclusions. If a clear reference to a ‘rock’ of the sort implied in Mt. 16.18 did occur in the Aramaic inscriptions, what would it look like? The Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions does not list any form similar to מחת; מחת has only the meaning ‘mountain’ (e.g. Ahiqar 62) and מחת signifies only ‘stone’ (the object or the material) or a ‘weight’.


43. Where possible the editions in the series The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972–) were utilized; otherwise, the publication by the United Bible Societies (1979) was consulted. According to a recent concordance on the Pentateuch, מחת translates מחת 88 times, מחת eight times, and מחת twice (The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version. Part V. Concordance. I. The Pentateuch [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997]).

44. Fitzmyer, ‘Languages of Palestine’, p. 42.

45. Lampe (‘Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen’, p. 236), citing DISO for the meaning ‘Stein’ for מחת. The more recent Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions (ed. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling; HO, 21; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995 [based on Hoftijzer’s DISO] 1.529) also gives the meaning ‘stone’, but it notes as well a ‘highly uncet. reading and interpret.’ of one reference for which it might mean ‘rock or sea coast’.
Caragounis also argues that since *Targum Proverbs* sometimes renders Hebrew בַּיָּדָה with כְּרֵם, it indicates a tendency for כְּרֵם to shift semantically toward ‘stone’ and away from the ‘rock’.

I have not been able to find anywhere in the Jewish Targums outside of Proverbs where כְּרֵם translates Hebrew בַּיָּדָה, and that also seems significant. The evidence from *Targum Proverbs*, in addition to being late, may not be entirely independent of the Syriac evidence adduced by Caragounis.

Philip S. Alexander notes that this Targum ‘is almost totally literal, and avoids midrashic interpretation even when such interpretation might reasonably be expected’, as in 8.22-31. Also, ‘none of the Rabbinic exegeses of Proverbs collected in Midrash Proverbs is reflected anywhere in *Tg. Prov.*’. Another peculiarity is that

in 300 verses out of 915 *Tg. Prov.* is verbally identical to Peshitta Proverbs, and on a number of occasions it agrees with the Peshitta against the MT (e.g., 1.7; 4.26; 5.9; 7.22-23; 9.11; 12.19; 16.4, 25), though it should also be noted that there are instances where it agrees with MT against the Peshitta (Maybaum 1871.89 fn).

Furthermore, the language is mixed, sometimes having clear ‘Syriacisms’. For example, the third person masculine singular imperfect prefix is either *n-* as in Syriac or sometimes *y-* as in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic. According to Alexander, there are two possible explanations. Either the *Targum Proverbs* is a very late adaptation from the Peshitta, or it is based on an early eastern, non-Masoretic Vorlage. Its language, then, was somewhat ‘unsystematically’ made to conform to ‘normal’ Targumic Aramaic.

Alexander concludes that ‘until its textual tradition has been fully investigated and clarified there is no solid basis on which to decide between these competing theories’.

M.P. Weitzman takes a more definite stance that the *Targum Proverbs* is in fact dependent on the Peshitta, an influence that did not occur any earlier than the Middle Ages. Weitzman demonstrates that some Jewish scholars of the tenth century were interested in Aramaic versions of the

Ketubim and were ready ‘to view biblical translation as common ground with the Church’.\textsuperscript{51} The evidence for viewing אָרְמָאִית as a translation ofאָרְמָאִית, then, is weak, especially since the Syriac, which normally renders either Hebrew אוֹר or Greek λίθος with κι'πα', may have influenced Targum Proverbs.

Of the two major manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum, one (A) regularly uses קִז for Hebrew אוֹר, while the other (J) uses the cognate אוֹר.\textsuperscript{52} In some places both manuscripts use אוֹר. Of eleven occurrences of Hebrew אוֹר in Job, three have been preserved in 11QtgJob, which also uses אוֹר (38.6, 40; 41.24). It seems, then, that little weight can be given to Aramaic renderings of אוֹר with אָרְמָאִית.

The fact that Aramaic אָרְמָאִית does render Hebrew שלט regulary is of some significance for the present study. The issue of the late date of the Targums has been rendered moot for this particular correspondence by the Targum Job found at Qumran (11QtgJob). Both of the only instances of שלט in Job (39.1, 28) have been preserved in this scroll as אָרְמָאִית. These two references alone show that the rendering of שלט by אָרְמָאִית is at least as old as the first century BCE. The following passages where שלט becomes אָרְמָאִית in the Targums need careful consideration:

1. Num. 24.21: ‘And your nest is set in the rock’ (Targum Neofiti I, מָרְקַמָה דָּרוֹן, ‘in the hollow of the rock’; Targum Onkelos resolves the figurative language; LXX, εν πέτρᾳ).

2. Judg. 20.45: ‘the rock of Rimmon’ (LXX, την πέτραν του Ριμμωου), ‘an outcropping of rock or a cave in the vicinity of Gibeah’.\textsuperscript{54}

3. Ezek. 26.4 (cf. v. 14): ‘I will scrape its soil from it and make it a bare rock’ (Targum Prophets, מַנְחַת הָרָא; LXX, λειοπετρίαν). This has to refer to the rock upon which Tyre was founded.

4. Obad. 3: ‘You that live in the clefts of the rock’ (LXX, εν ταῖς ὁποῖς τῶν πέτρων). Here is a case where the LXX uses the plural of πέτρας for שלט.


\textsuperscript{52} These comments are based on the edition by Abraham Tal (The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch: A Critical Edition [3 vols.; Texts and Studies in the Hebrew Language and Related Subjects, 4; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1980]).

\textsuperscript{53} Following the Göttingen edition for the LXX references.


\textsuperscript{55} Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus add πέτρα.
5. Job 39.1: ‘the mountain goats’ (i.e. ‘the goats of the rock’, LXX, τραχυελάφων πέτρας). This passage is preserved in 11QtnJob as כבש libo.56

6. Job 39.28: ‘It lives on the rock, and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag [MT, נמלת במלט].’ The LXX has a shorter text than the MT: οὐλίζεται ἐπ’ ἔξοχῳ πέτρας καὶ ἀποκρύφω (‘he lodges upon the prominence of a rock and a hidden place’). The Qumran scroll appears to support the MT, but unfortunately the text is broken: [ ... ] כבש תושב ויקש. The LXX must have omitted the first part of the verse, whereas 11QtnJob renders a text like the MT in that part.

These passages demonstrate how Aramaic כבש could be used to represent a large rock or rocky area, with one passage (Ezek. 26.4) even having the implication of the underlying foundation of a city. In later times the Aramaic root סבל could not have been used as a cognate translation, because the term meant only a ‘coin’ or a ‘round spot’.58

The Syriac Translations

When it comes to the data from the Syriac translations, the evidence is indirect, involving a translation from the Greek. The Syriac translators were confronted by the issue of the two Greek words Πέτρας and πέτρα, and whatever translation they gave was influenced by their interpretation of the Greek. Added to this is the fact that Syriac קること is feminine and is mostly used to translate λίθος in the New Testament. Also, Syriac is generally considered a later development in the Aramaic language.59 Caragounis agrees with this assessment of the Syriac evidence but still

56. Citations from 11QtnJob are from B. Jongeling, C.J. Labuschagne, and A.S. van der Woude (Aramaic Texts from Qumran with Translations and Annotations [SSS, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976]).

57. οὐλίζεται πέτρας καὶ ἀποκρύφω is placed between asterisk and metobelos, and the initial οὐλίζεται is the last word in v. 27, although it appears to correspond with מתיירמל, which is the second verb in the verse. There appears to be some textual corruption, probably in the Greek.

58. Sokoloff, Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.

59. Klaus Beyer classifies the language of the Peshitta as ‘Middle Syriac’ (fourth century on), a development from ‘Old Syriac’ (second century BCE to third century CE). The latter is attested only from some ‘inscriptions (mostly burial, cultic and commemorative) of the 1st–3rd cent. A.D. (from 6 A.D.) and from a deed of sale of 243 A.D.’ (The Aramaic Language, pp. 31, 43-44).
thinks that ‘the Syriac may have something to tell us about the development of the Aramaic kepha’\textsuperscript{60}. The following data for Mt. 16.18 are based on Caragounis:\textsuperscript{61}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Πέτρος (Peter)</th>
<th>πέτρα (rock)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Syriac (Curetonian)</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Christian) Palestinian</td>
<td>$ptrws$ (Petros)</td>
<td>$kyp^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curetonian (Old Syriac)</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peshitta</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
<td>$k'p^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harclean</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>$\delta\tau\nu'$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{*}Caragounis does not state how the Harclean (also known as Philoxenian) renders Πέτρος.

It would seem from the evidence of the Versions themselves that most of the Syriac tradition evidences the hypothesis that the underlying Aramaic of Mt. 16.18 used נָדָד twice. The Christian Palestinian version is not really Syriac but ‘the Aramaic dialect used in Palestine during the early Christian centuries’.\textsuperscript{62} The script is Syriac and some evidence suggests the version did not originate until after the fourth century.\textsuperscript{63} In any event it supports the reading $kyp^2$ for the second Greek term.

The Harclean version was a revision or edition of the Philoxenian New Testament by Thomas of Harkel. The Philoxenian translation was by Polycarp, ‘chorepiscopus in the diocese of Mabûg’, who revised the Peshitta ‘in accordance with Greek manuscripts’. Polycarp tried to make a ‘more theologically accurate’ version than the Peshitta.\textsuperscript{64} ‘The chief characteristic of the Harclean version is its slavish adaptation to the Greek, to the extent that even clarity is sacrificed.’\textsuperscript{65} The Christian Palestinian and Harclean versions, therefore, give some fairly late evidence for Christian interpretation of the Matthew passage. Both followed the Greek in maintaining two separate terms for Πέτρος and πέτρα. That the Christian Palestinian version transliterated Peter’s name from the Greek seems reasonable enough. The evidence of the Harclean is tainted by its tendency to adapt itself to the Greek. In other words, it evinces more translation technique than any underlying Aramaic term for πέτρα.

\textsuperscript{60} Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{61} Compiled from the discussion by Caragounis (Peter and the Rock, pp. 33-37).
\textsuperscript{63} Metzger, Early Versions, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{64} Metzger, Early Versions, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{65} Metzger, Early Versions, p. 69.
Syriac *kiʾpāʾ* of the Peshitta normally translates λίθος, even when the Greek refers to the large capstone of a building (Mt. 21.42-44; Mark 12.10; Luke 20.17-18; 1 Pet. 2.6-7), to a stone large enough to make someone stumble over it (Rom. 9.33; 1 Pet. 2.8), or to the large stone that would be rolled in front of a tomb (Mt. 27.60).<sup>66</sup> Even Greek λίθος itself may not always imply simply a small stone. In Rom. 9.33, λίθος and πέτρα are parallel, and the Peshitta uses *kiʾpāʾ* for both terms. The passage appears to reflect terminology from Isa. 8.14 and 28.16, which have בולע in the former verse and המית in the latter.<sup>67</sup> The Peshitta glosses בולע in each of the Old Testament passages with *kiʾpāʾ* and מית with *tarānāʾ*. The Syriac correspondent to מית in Isa. 28.16 appears to reflect an interpretive rendering.<sup>68</sup>

Greek πέτρα is rendered with *kiʾpāʾ* in Mt. 27.51, 60 (Peshitta only, the Old Syriac Gospels have *šīʾrāʾ*); Rom 9.33; and 1 Cor. 10.4. The evidence of Mt. 27.51 cannot be dismissed by merely insisting that the plural (*εὶς πέτραν*) ‘was misunderstood for individual stones’.<sup>69</sup> It is difficult to see how individual stones would be split apart by an earthquake. Possibly, though, some connection could have been made with the tombs that were opened (Mt. 27.52), in that a ‘stone’ (λίθος) was used to cover the entrance to the tomb (Mt. 27.60). In other words, the translator might have thought of these stone coverings as splitting and thus opening up the graves. Matthew 27.60 could also be taken as evidence that the translator (at least of the Peshitta) could see both λίθος and πέτρα as sometimes synonymous.<sup>70</sup> The evidence from the New Testament Peshitta should also be taken in conjunction with that of the Old Testament, where Syriac *kiʾpāʾ* can be used for Hebrew בולע, מית, or even מית רוחא.<sup>71</sup>


67. Isa. 8.14 also appears to be exceptional in that Targum of the Prophets has יְרוּם as its equivalent for רוחא. Given the rarity of Syriac *kiʾpāʾ* for πέτρα in the New Testament, it is tempting to suspect some influence of the Targum on the Peshitta New Testament.

68. בְּזָיו וּבָנֵר וּרְיָשׁ וּדְסֶר מָסִי (‘at the honored corner, the top of the foundation wall’).

69. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, p. 34.

70. Since the parallel passage in Mk 15.46 has *šīʾrāʾ*, Caragounis calls the use of *kiʾpāʾ* for πέτρα in the Peshitta ‘quite obviously a miss’ (Peter and the Rock, p. 34). The Old Syriac has *šīʾrāʾ* for both passages (F. Crawford Burkitt, Evangelion da-mepharreshe [2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904]).

71. See above.
Parallel Uses of Rock in the Gospels

The closest parallel to the use of 'rock' in Mt. 16.18 comes from Mt. 7.24, 25 and the parallel passage in Lk. 6.48. In both passages the Old Syriac Gospels and the Peshitta use šu‘ār. This is an important passage because Jesus spoke of the 'rock' as a foundation. Mark 4.5, paralleled by Mt. 13.5 and Lk. 8.6, is less similar but still speaks of hard ground that is 'stony' or full of rocks. Two Greek terms are used: πέτρος (Mt. 13.5; Mk 4.5) and πέτρα (Lk. 8.6). The Old Syriac Gospels and the Peshitta consistently use šu‘ār for both Greek terms.

These data show that šu‘ār would be a normal term to translate πέτρα or πέτρος, so why was ki‘pā used in Mt. 16.18? One could appeal to translation technique and argue that the Syriac translators attempted to mimic the wordplay in the Greek. Caragounis thinks this is the most likely explanation, and that does seem to be the case. However, that does not mean that ki‘pā was necessarily a bad choice. The translators could have been aware of a tradition that Jesus had made a pun on Peter’s name, but whether they were or not, ki‘pā could have been chosen as a suitable synonym, as has been shown above.

Wordplay

Wordplay in the Old Testament typically involves two words of the same or similar roots that have a different meaning. For example, the Hebrew root יַיְסָר is used both in the sense of 'summer fruit' and 'end' in Amos 8.2. The similarity in sound would be more significant for the wordplay than any strict linguistic etymology. Caragounis argues that the repetition of נָֽעֲר could not be a wordplay, because there has to be dissimilarity in order for wordplay to occur. However, the wordplay would still involve two meanings in that one form refers to the name of a person while the other refers to a physical feature. Also, the wordplay here should be compared with other cases when a new name is given to someone in light of something that characterizes them. Thus Jacob was given the name 'Israel', because 'you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed' (Gen. 32.29), combining a form of the root חָרָץ and לֶא. New Testament examples include Boanerges (Mk 3.17) and Barnabas (Acts 4.36), where someone else is said to have called them by that name.

72. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, p. 35.
73. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock, pp. 44-57.
'Boanerges' is especially pertinent, since it illustrates another instance of Jesus assigning a nickname. The precise relationship between the Greek form and an underlying Aramaic is uncertain for these names. It at least seems plausible that Jesus called Simon כבש because of what he perceived would be significant role in a new community.

**Conclusion**

The essential question about Mt. 16.18 is whether a different referent is intended for Πέτρος and πέτρα. In one respect, even if Peter himself is the referent for πέτρα, there is still a distinction between the terms. Obviously Peter would have to be the referent not physically but figuratively, and that would appear to point to Peter’s foundational function in the early church.

Ultimately, the issue can be solved only by a detailed analysis of the passage, which is beyond the scope of the present study. What this paper has established is that it is possible that Aramaic כבש could be behind both Greek terms. The Targums, including the *Targum of Job* from Qumran, show that כבש could represent something like a foundation rock, and the earliest Syriac versions have a tradition that the proper rendering of πέτρα in Mt. 16.18 was *ki’pâ*. It may be that the term כבש ‘gradually laid aside its original sense of “rock”, assuming the sense of “stone”, while the sense of “rock” was expressed by the term מינ’, but at least for the first century it appears that the sense of ‘rock’ was still quite possible. Perhaps another Aramaic term would have been possible as well, but if so what would be the connection between the new name for Simon and the statement that Matthew says Jesus made at the time of Peter’s confession? Perhaps the connection was more in the meaning than in the sound, but such a connection would not be as striking as the repetition of כבש.


75. Cf Wilkins (*Concept of Disciple*, pp. 187-89) for different views about the significance of Peter in relation to the foundational rock.
