

Jesus and the Use of Greek: A Response to Maurice Casey

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My recent proposal that Greek may well have been one of the languages of Jesus has struck at least one scholar as being a position difficult to defend. In responding to arguments against my position, I restate the gist of my argument, as well as cite relevant evidence, that Jesus not only spoke Aramaic, but also spoke and perhaps even taught in Greek. This position finds support in both recent discussion of the linguistic milieu of Palestine and the conclusions of other researchers on this topic.

Key Words: Greek, Jesus, Aramaic, language

The linguistic picture for first-century Roman Palestine is certainly far more complex than has often been appreciated in recent research and writing. Jesus, as well as many of his closest followers, who also came from Galilee, was probably multilingual, speaking Aramaic to be sure, and Greek to be almost as sure, and possibly even Hebrew.¹ (There is no significant evidence of Jesus' ability to speak Latin, the official language of the empire.) In discussing multilingualism, it is often useful to differentiate levels of linguistic competence. This is closely linked to the issue of literacy. According to recent estimates, probably only twenty to thirty percent of the males in a given Hellenistic community at the most would have been able to read and write, with a much lower percentage among those in the country. Literacy in the ancient world was directly related to levels of education, the resources for which were primarily focused upon the city, and

Author's note: An expanded form of this article appears in chapter 4 of my *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTSup 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

1. On the languages of Palestine, see J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Languages of Palestine in the First Century AD," *CBQ* 32 (1970) 501-31; repr. with corrections and additions in S. E. Porter (ed.), *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays* (JSNTSup 60; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 126-62.

tended to favor males, especially those with economic resources.² Multilingualism is a complex subject, for which there are many fuzzy boundaries to the categories.³ One way of characterizing multilingualism is in terms of diachronic categories, such as first language versus second or acquired languages, along with the age of acquisition and possible attrition of the first language. Another way is to describe one's ability in synchronic terms, distinguishing between active or productive and passive or receptive multilingualism, while realizing that the scale is a cline or continuum, rather than a disjunction. Active multilingualism involves the ability to understand and to express oneself in a language, whereas passive multilingualism involves being able to understand but not to express oneself in a language.⁴ There are also numerous sociolinguistic issues connected with when and how one switches from one language to another (code switching)⁵ and with group formation, identity, and acceptance.

According to the description above, Jesus probably would have been productively multilingual in Greek and Aramaic and possibly Hebrew, even though only Aramaic would have been his first language, and Greek and Hebrew second or acquired languages.⁶ If Hebrew were confined to use in liturgical contexts, it may have been that

2. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) esp. 116-46 on the Hellenistic era (see p. 141 for the statistics cited above). Note that Harris uses a range of evidence, including papyri, noting that inscriptions, the traditional source, cannot always be relied upon because of the role that social status played in their construction and the ability to read them (pp. 221-22). Not all would agree with Harris's statistics, but virtually all are agreed that the ancient world was predominantly, though certainly far from exclusively, an oral culture.

3. For a brief summary, see B. Spolsky, "Bilingualism," in *Linguistics: The Cambridge Survey*, vol. 4: *Language: The Socio-cultural Context* (ed. F. J. Newmeyer; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 100-118.

4. See H. Baetens Beardsmore, *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* (Multilingual Matters 1; Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1982; 2d ed., 1986) esp. 1-42, for useful definitions of a range of categories in bilingualism.

5. Code-switching, a very important topic in sociolinguistics, is discussed in W. Downes, *Language and Society* (London: Fontana, 1984) 65-71. In biblical studies, it is discussed in J. M. Watt, *Code-Switching in Luke and Acts* (Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics 31; New York: Lang, 1997).

6. Studies on bilingualism with regard to Greek and the NT include M. Silva, "Bilingualism and the Character of Palestinian Greek," *Bib* 61 (1980) 198-219; repr. in Porter (ed.), *Language of the New Testament*, 205-26; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 5: *Linguistic Essays* (New South Wales, Australia: Macquarie University, 1989) 23-26; S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (Studies in Biblical Greek 1; New York: Lang, 1989) 154-56, with extensive references to secondary literature. We have no way of knowing whether Jesus could read or write Greek or Aramaic. J. P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* [3 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991—] 1.268-78) thinks that Jesus was literate in Semitic languages.

Jesus was passively multilingual in Hebrew. He may have been passively multilingual in Latin, although if he had any knowledge of Latin at all it is likely that it was confined to recognition of a few common words. This depiction reflects the linguistic realities of the Mediterranean world of this time, including that of the eastern Mediterranean, supported by widespread and significant literary, epigraphic, and other evidence. As a result of the conquests of Alexander III ("the Great") and the rule of the Hellenistic kings (the Diadochi and their successors), the Greco-Roman world was one in which Greek became the language of trade, commerce, and communication among the now joined (if not united) people groups.⁷ In other words, Greek was the *lingua franca*⁸ for the eastern Mediterranean, displacing Aramaic.⁹ The conquerors brought with them and imposed, not only their language, but also their culture and various social and political institutions, which served as a major unifying factor for this Hellenistic world. Later, the Romans preserved and extended much of this culture, imposing their administrative structure upon a territory in which Greek remained and was extended as the *lingua franca*, even though more and more people spoke it as a first language, but also within which there were various local languages that were to varying degrees still used.¹⁰ Palestine appears to be one

7. Important and linguistically-informed histories of Greek, including its development into the Greco-Roman period, are to be found in L. R. Palmer, *The Greek Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980) 3-198; G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers* (Longmans Linguistics Library; London: Longman, 1997) esp. 3-127, the last undoubtedly now being the best work on the subject. For a summary of the issues applied to NT studies, see S. E. Porter, "The Greek Language of the New Testament," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter; NTTTS 25; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 99-130, esp. 99-104; and L. Rydbeck, "The Language of the New Testament," *TynBul* 49/2 (1998) 361-68.

8. A *lingua franca* is a common variety of language often used for commercial and other functional purposes where a language is needed to facilitate communication between people who often do not share the same first language, and hence some will be normative speakers of it. See R. A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; 2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 7.

9. Of course, even with the sudden onslaught of Alexander, the linguistic shift from Aramaic to Greek did not occur overnight. The transition was a gradual one throughout the Hellenistic period, in many ways working from the top socioeconomic levels down. But, as the evidence indicates, the transformation eventually was effected, so that Greek became the *lingua franca*. On the movement of Hellenism in the east, see the collection of essays in A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White (eds.), *Hellenism in the East* (London: Duckworth, 1987).

10. There have been a number of interesting studies of the relation of Greek to particular regions and indigenous languages (on Semitisms in Greek, see below). As a sample, besides sections in volumes mentioned in n. 7, above, see C. Brixhe, *Essay sur le Grec Anatolien: Au début de notre ère* (Travaux et mémoires: Études anciennes 1; Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1984); E. Gibson, *The "Christians for Christians"*

of these regions, in which there was continued use of Aramaic, the language of the Jews after the exile in the sixth century BC (Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Babylonian and later Persian worlds of their times),¹¹ and in some circles possibly even Hebrew for religious or liturgical purposes. This scenario is accurate for Jews as well as for other people groups distributed throughout the Greco-Roman world (at least three out of four Jews lived outside of Palestine).¹²

This is not the place to cite in detail the extensive evidence now available to illustrate the use of Aramaic in Palestine, or, and more importantly here, the use of Greek in Palestine, and by Jews, nor to raise the question of Semitisms and Semitic influence on the Greek of the NT.¹³ It is perhaps sufficient here merely to mention the kinds of evidence available to establish the use of these languages. The use of Aramaic rests upon the fact that the language of the Jews upon their return from exile in Babylon is found not only in the Aramaic portions of the biblical writings of Daniel and Ezra but also in the NT¹⁴ and in a variety of extrabiblical texts, such as *I Enoch*. It is also

Inscriptions of Phrygia (HTS 32; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1978); cf. R MacMullen, "Provincial Languages in the Roman Empire," *AJP* 87 (1966); repr. in his *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 32-40, 282-86. On such issues, see C. J. Hemer, "Reflections on the Nature of New Testament Greek Vocabulary," *TynBul* 38 (1987) 65-92, esp. 68-75.

11. See M. Wise, "Languages of Palestine," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. S. McKnight and J. B. Green; Downers Grove, Ill.; IVP, 1992) 434—44, esp. 437.

12. See W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 34. It is worth noting that, on the basis of this, the vast majority of Jews of the ancient Greco-Roman world were Greek-speaking as their first language, regardless of whether they also acquired the ability to speak Aramaic or Hebrew. See V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (trans. S. Applebaum; 1959; repr. New York: Atheneum, 1975) 347: "the Jews outside Palestine spoke, wrote, and generally thought in Greek," citing a variety of evidence in support, including Philo *Conf Ling.* 129, who refers to Greek as "our language" (pp. 524-25). The development of the Septuagint is one of the key pieces of evidence in this regard, parts of which have now, of course, been found in Palestine. Besides the *Minor Prophets Scroll*, note also 4QLXXLev^a, 4QLXXLev^b, 4QLXXNum, 4QLXXDeut, 7QLXXExod, and 7QEpiJer, besides a number of other Greek documents in Cave 7, the identification of which remain problematic. The ancient tradition regarding the Septuagint (*Let. Aris.* 32, 39, 46, 47-50) has 72 Palestinian Jewish elders performing the translation. This may simply be ancient apologetic for the translation, but it may also reflect realities regarding linguistic competence. See S. Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 30-58.

13. The questions of Semitisms in the Greek of the NT have been debated for years, often unproductively because of a failure to distinguish linguistic issues clearly. See Silva, "Bilingualism and the Character of Palestinian Greek," 205-27; Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 111-61, where a distinction is made between levels of Semitic influence.

14. For example, the use of such words as *amen*, *rabbi*, *abba*, and other words in such places as Mark 5:41; 7:34; 15:34 = Matt 27:46. J. Jeremias (*Neutestamentliche Theologie, vol. 1: Die Verkündigung Jesu* [Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971; ET *New Testament Theology, vol. 1: The Proclamation of Jesus* (NTL; trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM / New York: Scribners, 1971)] 4-6) counts a total of 26 Aramaic words in all used in the Gospels.

found in a large amount of inscriptional, ossuary, epistolary, papyrological, and literary evidence, especially that from Qumran and other Judean Desert sites such as Murabba^cat, Masada, and Nahal Hever, and evidenced in the targums and later rabbinic literature. Much of this evidence has only come to light in the last sixty or so years.¹⁵ Often overlooked, however, is the fact that there is a similar kind and an even larger quantity of evidence for the use of Greek in Palestine, including Galilee. The arguments for this posited use of Greek are based upon the role of Greek as the lingua franca of the Roman Empire, the specific Hellenized linguistic and cultural character of lower Galilee surrounded by the cities of the Decapolis, the linguistic fact that the NT has been transmitted in Greek from its earliest documents, and a range of inscriptional evidence (e.g., Jewish funerary inscriptions), numerous Greek papyri, and significant literary evidence, including Jewish books being written in Greek in Palestine.¹⁶ From this range of

15. Surveys and selections of this evidence may be found in J. A. Fitzmyer and D. J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts* (BibOr 34; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); K. Beyer, *Die Aramäische Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984); J. A. Fitzmyer, "Languages of Palestine," 147-58; idem, "The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament," *NTS* 20 (1973-1974) 383-407; repr. in his *Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1979) 85-113 (and now in his *Semitic Background of the New Testament* [Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Livonia, Mich.: Dove, 1997], with corrections); E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (3 vols.; rev. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973-1987) 2.20-26; and E. M. Meyers and J. F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity* (London: SCM, 1981) 73-78.

16. Surveys and selections of this evidence may be found in P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux (eds.), *Les grottes de Murabba^cat* (DID 2; Oxford: Clarendon, 1961) nos. 89-155 (pp. 212-67), 164 (pp. 275-77); J. N. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek? How Much Greek Could the First Jewish Christians Have Known?* (NovTSup 19; Leiden: Brill, 1968); M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Gegenung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2 Jh.s v. Chr.* (WUNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969; 2d ed., 1973; ET *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* [trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM / Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974]) 58-106; idem with C. Marksches, "Zum Problem der 'Hellenisierung' Judas im 1. Jahrhundert nach Christus"; ET *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM / Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989); Fitzmyer, "Languages of Palestine," 134-47; B. Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemus: A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974) esp. 259-306; Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 78-88; N. Lewis, *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Greek Papyri* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989); Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 2.29-80 (although he is skeptical regarding the use of Greek), 3/1.517-21, 528-31; E. Tov (ed.), *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll* (DJD 8; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); P. W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs: An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE-700 CE)* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 2; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991); H. M. Cotton and A. Yardeni (eds.), *Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek Documentary Texts from Nahal Hever and Other Sites* (DJD 27; Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 133-279.

evidence the logical conclusion can be drawn that in fact a sizable number of Jews in Palestine used Greek.

In previous studies, on the basis of these data, and the use of the traditional criteria for authenticity (including multiple attestation and dissimilarity to redactional tendencies),¹⁷ I discussed several passages where I thought that Jesus possibly spoke Greek. These included: Mark 7:25-30; John 12:20-28; Matt 8:5-13 = Luke 7:2-10; and Matt 16:13-20 = Mark 8:27-30 = Luke 9:18-21. From this I showed (at least to my satisfaction) that we may well have the words of Jesus recorded in Mark 15:2 (= Matt 27:11; Luke 23:3; John 18:33), οὐ λέγεις, "you say."¹⁸ Even though numerous scholars over the last one hundred years have entertained the idea that Palestine's linguistic environment was probably multilingual (with Greek and Aramaic, if not also Hebrew)¹⁹ and, therefore, that Jesus may have spoken Greek at least on occasion, in two recent works, Maurice Casey strongly disagrees with my findings on several accounts.²⁰ His arguments deserve a response.

One of the first points to notice is that Casey mischaracterizes my position. Regarding the question of the language in which Jesus taught, after rightly noting that most opt for Aramaic, Casey states that "those particularly expert in Greek or Hebrew have argued that he taught primarily in the one or the other. Recently, Professor S. E. Porter has reopened the question with a vigorous restatement of the view that Jesus taught in Greek. A regrettable feature of Professor Porter's work is that he downplays or even omits important Aramaic evidence."²¹ I explicitly reject the disjunction that Casey tries to force me into. The question, to my mind, is not whether Jesus taught in Aramaic or Greek, but whether there is evidence that he *also* taught in

17. On the criteria for authenticity, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.167-95; C. A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU 25; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 13-26.

18. This opinion has been published, in several different forms, in S. E. Porter, "Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans; NITS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 123-54; idem, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?," *TynBul* 44/2 (1993) 199-235; idem, *Studies in the Greek New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Greek 6; New York: Lang, 1996), pp. 139-71; cf. idem, "Greek Language of the New Testament," 110-12; and L. M. McDonald and S. E. Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, forthcoming), chap. 3; and is to be developed further in S. E. Porter, *The Language of Jesus and His Contemporaries* (Studying the Historical Jesus; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

19. A number of these are cited in my articles, noted above. This is not to say that there have not been those who have disputed this linguistic situation.

20. P. M. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" *ExpTim* 108/11 (1997) 326-28; the bulk of this article is repeated in his *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTSMS 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) esp. 65-68.

21. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 326; cf. idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 63.

Greek, without necessarily downgrading the fact that he undoubtedly taught in Aramaic. In one article I state:

Regarding the question of the languages Jesus may have known and used in his itinerant ministry, current scholarly opinion follows the conclusion of Dalman, who stated that, though Jesus may have known Hebrew, and probably spoke Greek (N.B.), he certainly taught in Aramaic.²² With this conclusion long maintained, it might seem unnecessary to undertake again an investigation of this topic, except for the fact that it is still not commonly recognized just how strong the probability—even likelihood—is that Jesus not only had sufficient linguistic competence to converse with others in Greek but also even to teach in Greek during his ministry.²³

Not only that, but I recognize that, "Although it was once thought by some scholars that Aramaic had entered a period of decline in the two centuries on either side of Christ's birth, in the last fifty years many important discoveries have confirmed the significant place of the Aramaic language."²⁴ After recognizing some limitations to the Aramaic evidence, I conclude that "Nevertheless, [the Aramaic] theory has many important supporters and almost assuredly will continue to dominate scholarly discussion."²⁵

After the above statements, Casey then cites evidence for the use of Aramaic, much if not most of which is listed in my articles, and summatively mentioned above. On the evidence from the Gospels, I agree again that there is evidence that Jesus taught in Aramaic, although Casey's evidence is less substantial than he seems to think. That Jesus is recorded as using Aramaic in prayer or on the cross, that Jesus gave Aramaic epithets to his inner group of disciples, and that his disciples are recorded as occasionally using Aramaic words (all examples that Casey cites) says nothing about the language in which Jesus taught. Of the examples he notes, only Jesus' use of "son of man" seems germane.²⁶

22. In a footnote, I cite G. Dalman, *Jesus–Jeshua: Die drei Sprachen Jesu, Jesus in der Synagoge, auf dem Berge beim Passahmahl, am Kreuz* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922; ET *Jesus–Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* [London: SPCK, 1929]) 1-37, along with others who discuss the language options.

23. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?" 199-200; idem, *Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 139-40; cf. idem, "Jesus and the Use of Greek," 123, for a shorter, though similar, statement, and 124, for much the same statement.

24. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?" 200-201; idem, *Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 140; cf. idem, "Jesus and the Use of Greek," 124-25.

25. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?" 202; idem, *Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 141; cf. idem, "Jesus and the Use of Greek," 125-26. At this point I offer a lengthy footnote giving a number of scholars who argue for the Aramaic hypothesis and Jesus' use of the language.

26. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 327; cf. idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 65.

Even regarding this material, however, with which I am in substantial agreement, Casey has introduced several points that I must question. One is his use of the term *lingua franca*. On the basis of the Temple inscription warning Gentiles of the penalty for entry to the inner-court (*OGI* 2.598; *SEG* 8.169; *CII* 2.1400) being in Greek and the inscription on the shekel trumpets being in Aramaic, and on the basis of Gamaliel purportedly writing three letters, one to Galilee, in Aramaic, Casey claims to have shown that "Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of Israel."²⁷ His further argument that some inscriptions have survived in Aramaic proves nothing, since some—if not more—have survived in Greek as well. However, his understanding of a *lingua franca* is obviously limited. No one is disputing that Jews in Palestine often had Aramaic as a first language and communicated with each other in Aramaic.²⁸ At the time of the return from exile, it is true, Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire, and the Jews had adopted this language for the obvious reasons of enabling them to communicate and do business with their overlords. The extent of a people group, including the Jews, adopting the language of their dominators (whether this is economically, politically, or culturally—they often go together) is well illustrated by this point. However, by the time of the first century, the *lingua franca* was Greek, even for many Jews in Palestine and even if they also used Aramaic to communicate with each other.

Further, Casey cites the fact that Josephus claims to have written his *Jewish War* first in Aramaic but needed assistance from Greek speakers when he wrote it in Greek as supposed evidence that "Aramaic continued to be used in Israel for centuries."²⁹ Of course, no one is disputing that Aramaic continued to be used in Palestine. These statements by Josephus, however, are not as straightforward as Casey represents them. Several issues merit brief discussion. Josephus states in *Ag. Ap.* 1.50 that he had assistance with rendering the *Jewish War* into Greek, and in *J. W.* 1.3 that he "translated" it (cf. *Ant.* 10.218).³⁰ However, Josephus makes no comment on the same process taking place with regard to his *Antiquities*. In fact, he states contrary evidence. In *Ant.* 20.263-65, after admitting that his Jewish knowledge outstripped that of others, he states,

27. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 326.

28. See Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 155. Nevertheless, Jews from outside of Palestine almost assuredly spoke Greek probably as their first language, as noted above, so even Casey's generalization about Jews in Palestine is subject to question.

29. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 326.

30. The word often rendered "translate" (μεταβάλλειν) has a range of meanings, from simply change or transform to translate. See T. Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 176.

I have also laboured strenuously to partake of the realm of Greek prose and poetry, after having gained a knowledge of Greek grammar, although the habitual use of my native tongue has prevented my attaining precision in the pronunciation. For our people do not favour those persons who have mastered the speech of many nations, or who adorn their style with smoothness of diction, because they consider that not only is such skill common to ordinary freemen but that even slaves who so choose may acquire it. . . . Consequently, though many have laboriously undertaken this training, scarcely two or three have succeeded. . . . (LCL)³¹

This tangled statement raises a number of questions—was it or was it not easy to learn Greek? Was it something that everyone could and did know, or was it not? Fitzmyer minimizes the significance of this as evidence for the Palestinian linguistic milieu, since Josephus composed his writings in Rome.³² However, there is probably more to be learned from this statement than some have realized. Josephus admits respecting the historian Justus, author of a history of the Jewish wars against Vespasian (and known only through what is said about him by Josephus), for his knowledge of Greek, acquired in the Greek educational system in Tiberias (*Life* 34-42, 336-60; cf. also 65, 88, 175-78, 186, 279, 390-93, 410). Further, it is not uncommon to find ancient authors commenting on their literary inadequacies.³³ As a result, Rajak argues that it was not that Josephus did not have a knowledge of what she calls "the ordinary language, spoken or written," but that Josephus had not been formally educated in the language and could not write the kind of Atticistic prose that would have been desirable in Rome, probably due to the aversion of some Jews of the time to this level of Greek education.³⁴ Thus, regarding the *Antiquities*, Rajak believes that it may well have been possible by AD 80 or 90

31. As Louis Feldman reminds readers (L. H. Feldman [trans.], *Josephus Jewish Antiquities Book XX General Index* [LCL, 456; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965] 139-40), "there were many Jews, including rabbis, who knew the Greek language and literature well." The classic example, perhaps, is the statement in Rabbi Simeon, son of Gamaliel I that, of his father's 1000 students at the beginning of the second century, 500 studied Torah and 500 studied Greek wisdom (*t. Sotah* 15.8; *b. Sotah* 49b). Numerous loanwords from Greek have been found in Jewish writings, including over 1500 in the Talmud, and Greek personal names were often found in Jewish writings. It is difficult to know how much use of Greek these factors suggest. What is noteworthy is that despite the two Jewish revolts in Palestine, which may well have turned Jews away from Greco-Roman culture, the evidence for Jewish loanwords is apparently heaviest in the third and fourth centuries AD.

32. Fitzmyer, "Languages of Palestine," 139.

33. See Rajak, *Josephus*, 47—48, who cites A. Postumius Albinus, rebuked by the elder Cato for his undue modesty, according to Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* 11.8.2) and Polybius (39.12). See also Cicero, *Brutus* 81; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.7.2.

34. Rajak, *Josephus*, 51-52; and Wise, "Languages of Palestine," 440.

(after composition of *Jewish War*) for Josephus to write a lengthy work such as the *Jewish Antiquities* in Greek.³⁵ Regarding the *Jewish War*, Rajak raises the question of whether there is in fact any resemblance between the Greek text (which she contends has no Semitisms) that we have and the supposed original Aramaic version. It may be that he revised an earlier draft, which has now disappeared without trace, since later Christians did not preserve the manuscript, possibly because it was of minimal value compared to the Greek version.³⁶ In other words, one may view these statements of Josephus in very different ways than does Casey.

With regard to my arguments for Greek, Casey cites one sentence in one of my footnotes as indicating my belief that Jesus did not speak Aramaic. In the midst of my presentation of the evidence for Aramaic, already noted above, I refer to the fact that the position that Jesus' primary language was Aramaic is argued by inference. In the footnote I state that "some may be surprised that I refer to the 'inference' that Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic. The confirmatory 'proof' often marshalled that Jesus taught in Aramaic is the several quotations from Aramaic cited in the Gospels. By this reasoning it is more plausible to argue that Jesus did most of his teaching in Greek, since the Gospels are all Greek documents."³⁷ Of course, taking the last sentence out of context, and disregarding how it is used, one could understand the opposite of what the context of my discussion indicates. Casey makes further sweeping statements about my supposed failure to differentiate material properly. When I refer to Galilee being "completely surrounded by hellenistic culture," he counters that "this hellenistic culture was however Gentile, and its presence in cities such as Tyre and Scythopolis is entirely consistent with its rejection by Aramaic-speaking Jews."³⁸ Several points may be made here. The first is that this rejection of Hellenistic culture is not as complete as Casey would like to suppose, since there has been a range of evidence of various types of economic, linguistic, and other forms of acculturation. Perhaps the most obvious are the Jewish funerary inscriptions.³⁹ Casey, admitting that they date from the first

35. Rajak, *Josephus*, 233.

36. *Ibid.*, 176.

37. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?" 201 n. 7; *idem*, *Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 141; *idem*, "Jesus and the Use of Greek in Galilee," 125 n. 9. The last sentence is cited by Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 327; *idem*, *Aramaic Sources*, 65.

38. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 327; *idem*, *Aramaic Sources*, 66.

39. See van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 23-24: "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

to the sixth centuries, claims that I do not draw the necessary conclusion regarding *how many* Jews in first-century Capernaum spoke Greek.⁴⁰ There seems to be some confusion on Casey's part here. On the one hand, he claims that in Galilee there was rejection of Hellenistic culture. On the other hand, assuming that the use of Greek for funerary inscriptions admits of at least some acceptance of Greek culture, Casey now admits that such evidence exists but criticizes me for not specifying the number that used Greek. Since my point is that some from that area, including possibly Jesus, used Greek, it appears that Casey has made my case for me, since I am not necessarily arguing that all or even a vast majority used Greek, only that some did, as he seems to be admitting. Casey does not mention the fact that all of these funerary inscriptions at Beth She'arim (near Scythopolis) from the first two centuries AD are in Greek.⁴¹ Elsewhere in the article he admits that the lingua franca of the eastern half of the Roman Empire was Greek.⁴² Surely, he does not mean to say the eastern half except Galilee or Palestine, or does he? Whatever Casey may mean, his comment is clearly out of keeping with recent research on Galilee. The latest work on mobility indicates that lower Galilee was fully

60%). . . . It is only in Jerusalem that the number of Semitic epitaphs seems to equal approximately the number of those in Greek. Of course these data shed significant light on the much discussed problem of the hellenization of Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. . . . If even rabbis and their families phrased their epitaphs in Greek, there is only one natural explanation for that phenomenon: Greek was the language of their daily life." There have been questions raised regarding the linguistic competence demonstrated by the inscriptions in Palestine. But as van der Horst indicates (*Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 24), as poor as the Greek is, it is no different from that of pagan non-literary sources of the time. Further, van der Horst notes that regional variation in the percentage of inscriptions in Greek (e.g., in Rome 78% are in Greek but only 1% are in Hebrew) seems to confirm his view that Greek was actually used by those buried with Greek epitaphs: "One should not assume that they used Greek only on their tombstones as a kind of sacred language . . . for their sacred language remained Hebrew, as is witnessed by the many Greek and Latin inscriptions ending in the single Hebrew word *shalom*, or the expressions *shalom 'al mishkavo* or *shalom 'al Yisrael*" (*Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 23).

40. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 327; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 66.

41. Meyers and Strange, *Archaeology*, 85. Eighty percent of the inscriptions there from the first four centuries AD are in Greek (p. 101). One might well see a trend here that Casey misses. The inscriptions from Beth She'arim are in M. Schwabe and B. Lifshitz (eds.), *Beth She'arim*, vol. 2: *The Greek Inscriptions* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, for the Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1974). However, the Greek documents from Masada would tend to confirm the multilingual culture of Jews over a range of socioeconomic levels at the time. See H. M. Cotton and J. Geiger, *Masada: The Y. Yadin Excavations*, 1963-65, vol. 2: *The Latin and Greek Documents* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989) esp. 9-10.

42. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 67. Casey also notes that Greek was used throughout Israel (*Aramaic Sources*, 73).

participatory in the Roman world of its day, connected together by a complex trade network that allowed movement of people and goods. Even if people maintained different private beliefs, their public lives were a part of this Roman world.⁴³ Responding directly to the kinds of claims that Casey makes, Meyers notes: "While it is commonplace to assume that the cities of the Decapolis represented a band of gentile cities that contained the extent and spread of Jewish culture, such assumptions are quite misleading." He goes on to note the complex interplay of Judaism with various cities of the Decapolis and cites other research that indicates that there was "a far greater economic exchange system at work between Jewish areas and sites and the cities of the Decapolis than previously assumed."⁴⁴

Regarding multilingualism, Casey rejects my view that in Palestine the prestige language was Greek. He states that

We may imagine this view being held at the court of Herod Antipas, and in a technical sense among Aramaic-speaking Jews who used Greek for business purposes. Porter gives us no reason to believe that this was the view of chief priests, scribes, Jewish peasants, or the Jesus movement. In a sense, the prestige language was Hebrew, the language of the Torah. . . . From another perspective, instruction in the halakhah was given to most Jews in Aramaic, into which the Torah was translated. This could be perceived as the central factor, and peasants and craftsmen might operate only among Aramaic-speaking Jews. From this perspective, politics, education and economics were run in Aramaic. Fundamentally, therefore, Jewish people could take a different view of what a prestige language was from that found in the multicultural research on which Porter depends.⁴⁵

43. J. F. Strange, "First Century Galilee from Archaeology and from the Texts," in *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 39-48, esp. 47; cf. also D. Edwards, "First Century Urban/Rural Relations in Lower Galilee: Exploring the Archaeological and Literary Evidence," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 27; ed. D. J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 169-82, esp. 171; idem, "The Socio-economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. L. I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America / Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 53-73, esp. 55-60.

44. E. M. Meyers, "Jesus and His Galilean Context," in *Archaeology and the Galilee* (ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 57-66, esp. 62.

45. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 66. Casey does not mention what this "multicultural research" is, but it can surely be of no less inherent relevance than the few citations of work in multilingualism and translation that he makes (*Aramaic Sources*, 55, 93-106). Casey's reference to "the Aramaic into which the Torah was translated" reflects his apparent belief in the targumic tradition's being already firmly established by the time of the first century AD on the basis of targums found at Qumran (*Aramaic Sources*, 33-35). Besides the *Targum of Job* (4QtgJob), Casey only refers to the fragmentary (and questionable) 4Q156 (= Lev 16:12-21).

The issue of prestige languages involves consideration of a range of social, economic, linguistic, and political issues and is not nearly so straightforward a matter of personal choice as Casey seems to imply.⁴⁶ It is true, however, that the hierarchy of languages in a multi-lingual environment and their relation to first and second languages may vary, as is the case between Egypt and Palestine.⁴⁷ Further, one may well admit that Hebrew would have been the prestige language for Jews in a religious or liturgical context. That is not at issue here. The issue is the relation of Greek and Aramaic and their relation to the lingua franca. It may be that there were some Jews who never had any contact with those other than Aramaic-speaking Jews and may also have only spoken Aramaic (I am doubtful that there were many if any, but include it for the sake of argument). Their only speaking Aramaic does not mean that their language constituted the lingua franca, as discussed above. However, what was the situation for a number of craftsmen and others who did business with those other than Jews in Palestine? Casey admits that some might have been in that situation but wishes to exclude the Jesus movement. On what basis? The Gospels depict a movement that traveled fairly widely and extensively within Palestine and had numerous contacts recorded with those who were not Jewish and not presumably Aramaic-speaking (since the prestige argument that Casey constructs would only apply to Jews). Jews may have wished to take a view such as Casey's, but if they wished to communicate in their line of work or for any other purpose with anyone other than Jews, they would have needed to know the prestige language, Greek. Jesus is depicted in the Gospels as such a person, since he was a carpenter or craftsman (Mark 6:3), economically a middle-level vocation. Being from Nazareth, near Sepphoris, a thoroughly Hellenized city, a man in his work would probably have needed to be involved in reciprocal trade, which was widespread in that region.⁴⁸ As Kee concludes in his discussion of Jesus in Galilee, "This means that for Jesus to have conversed with inhabitants of cities in the Galilee, and especially of cities of the Decapolis and the Phoenician region, he would have had to have known Greek, certainly at the conversational level."⁴⁹

46. On prestige languages, where issues of society, power, and economics are crucial, see E. Haugen, "Problems of Bilingualism," *Lingua* 2 (1950) 271-90, esp. 278; idem, "Dialect, Language, Nation," *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966) 922-35; repr. in J. B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 97-111; Hudson, *Sociolinguistics*, 31-34.

47. See Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 154-55.

48. See Edwards, "First Century Urban/Rural Relations," 172-76; idem, "Socio-economic and Cultural Ethos," 55-60; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1.278-85.

49. Kee, "Early Christianity in the Galilee," 21.

The last issue that Casey raises is that of interpreters. The first instance is that of Titus negotiating with those in Jerusalem. Casey questions my suggestion that it is unknown whose fault it is that Titus was not understood when he addressed the rebels, requiring that Josephus speak in the "native tongue" (Josephus *J.W.* 5.360-61).⁵⁰ Casey states that "It is perfectly well known" whose deficiency it was.⁵¹ Casey is of course correct that Titus was reportedly fluent in Greek (Suetonius *Titus* 3.2). That does not mean that the situation is as clearcut as Casey contends, since even if Aramaic was "the lingua franca [*sic*—see above] of Jerusalem Jews"⁵² he must contend further that none of those listening had any knowledge whatsoever of Greek. Here is not the place to get involved in the recent debate over the nature of the Jewish uprising and the social composition of the rebels.⁵³ It is sufficient to note, however, that the major groups of rebels represented those from both rural and urban settings, priestly and nonpriestly classes, and from all over Palestine (including Idumeans).⁵⁴ Is Casey contending that none of the Jews in Jerusalem during the siege spoke Greek? The episode gives no evidence of even a passive understanding of Greek. From the evidence, one cannot determine whether at least some in Jerusalem spoke Greek or not. The situation was a highly politically charged one, where entering into direct communication with the Romans, even if one spoke the same language, may have been politically unwise. There is also the possibility of dialectal interference and the possibility that if Greek were being used it was being used by some for whom it was a first and others a second or acquired language. A somewhat similar incident is possibly recorded in Mark 15:34, where Jesus reportedly spoke Aramaic but was apparently misunderstood by those standing by. Does this mean that the listeners did not speak or understand Aramaic (if we follow Casey's logic)? This is certainly one interpretation but not the only one. When one considers that some of the Jewish rebels came from Galilee, where Greek was spoken, and some were linked to rebels at Masada, where Greek documents have also been found dating to the time of the rebellion, one cannot help but think that

50. Note that this is one of only two places in *Jewish War* that Josephus refers to his "native tongue," the other being 1.3, treated above. See Rajak, *Josephus*, 230-31.

51. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 67.

52. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 67.

53. See J. S. McLaren, *Turbulent Times? Josephus and Scholarship on Judaea in the First Century CE* (JSPSup 29; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) esp. 122-78.

54. See D. Rhoads, *Israel in Revolution: 6-74 C.E., A Political History Based on the Writings of Josephus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 94-149, who discusses the major rebels or rebel groups and their possible origins and social levels: the Zealots, the Sicarii, John of Gischala, the Idumeans, and Simon Bar Giora.

other factors besides linguistic competence entered into the scenario. The situation may well have involved conscious code-switching, in which the rebels intentionally reverted to their "private" language (unknown by the Romans) and feigned inability to understand Greek in order to force the Romans to deal with them on their own terms, that is, by translating into Aramaic. In any event, we certainly cannot conclude from the episode, in which Titus's Greek was not understood but Josephus's "native language" was, that no one in Jerusalem could speak Greek.

Regarding Jesus' trial before Pilate, Casey criticizes me for not realizing that an interpreter must have been present, since the Synoptic Gospels are "uninterested in interpreters,"⁵⁵ and other documents do not mention interpreters. Casey is of course right that there are a number of problems regarding the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' trial, but it does not seem necessary to invent more problems than there really are. For example, in Josephus, interpreters are specifically mentioned in *War* 6.129 and 327, indicating that at least some writers are interested in them and do mention them. I may be wrong that there was no interpreter at the trial of Jesus, but I am not alone in thinking that the scenario may be accurate. It is the conclusion of H. I. Marrou regarding Roman officials as follows: "in fact Roman officials could understand Greek and speak it, and they found it better to do without interpreters, so that, in the East, the cross-examination of witnesses, and the court proceedings generally, were carried on in Greek" (citing Valerius Maximus 8.7.6; Suetonius *Tiberius* 71).⁵⁶ To my suggestion that there is a possibility that we may have some of the actual words of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, a conclusion that seems logically to follow from the evidence that I have mentioned above, Casey says that it is a "fundamentalist's dream," and "ultra-conservative assumptions are required to carry it through."⁵⁷

Is it such an unrealistic dream? Are ultraconservative or uncritical assumptions required to conclude in this way? Scholars other than simply myself might well have something to say on these questions. As has recently been recognized, the "problem of the language(s) Jesus spoke has to be raised anew in the light of recent discoveries."⁵⁸ Certainly, Aramaic is thought to have been widely used by

55. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; cf. idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 67.

56. H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris: Seuil; 3d ed., 1948; ET *A History of Education in Antiquity* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1956]) 256.

57. Casey, "In Which Language Did Jesus Teach?" 328; cf. idem, *Aramaic Sources*, 67, where Casey changes "ultraconservative" to "uncritical."

58. H. D. Betz, "Wellhausen's Dictum 'Jesus Was Not a Christian, but a Jew' in Light of Present Scholarship," *ST* 45 (1991) 83-110; repr. in idem, *Antike und Christentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze IV* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 1-31, quotation p. 11. I

Jesus, but "the fact is that none of Jesus' sayings is transmitted in Aramaic."⁵⁹ More to the point, "The Gospel writers take it as self-evident that Jesus and his contemporaries spoke and taught in Greek. Even the author of Acts, the only New Testament author to raise the language question, does not doubt Jesus' ability or practice of speaking Greek."⁶⁰ And, indeed, there are Aramaic loanwords and peculiar expressions in the Gospels, as well as place-names and other proper names that reflect Palestinian culture. However, "we now also know that the New Testament sources, even the older ones, are not thoroughgoing translations from the Aramaic. . . . There is no reason, however, to assume that long stretches of texts have been translated from the Aramaic. Most of even the oldest layers of the synoptic tradition give the impression that they existed in Greek from the start."⁶¹ This formulation raises many questions, a few of which can be pursued here. For example, "the situation does mean, first of all, that the question of Jesus' language(s) cannot be answered on the basis of the New Testament texts"; any estimation of Jesus' language must "be based on the linguistic environment of Palestine, and not the New Testament."⁶² The evidence indicates that the assumption of an Aramaic background must be reassessed in terms of seeing Palestine as bilingual or multilingual.⁶³ In fact, "There was never an early Christian community that spoke only Aramaic which was then succeeded by a Greek-speaking church." Instead, there was a complex multilingual environment, in which "anyone involved in teaching would certainly have expected to be multilingual, at least to a degree."⁶⁴

What of Jesus in this scenario? The "evidence we now have is such that a knowledge of Greek can no longer be denied to Jesus."⁶⁵ As a craftsman, who did business in Galilee, Jesus would have needed to be able to converse in Greek. This conclusion "fits with the picture of the synoptic tradition, according to which Jesus has no difficulty in conversing in Greek with the centurion from Capernaum, Pilate or the Syro-Phoenician woman. . . ." ⁶⁶ Thus, the "roots of the "Jewish-Christian/Hellenistic" or more precisely the Greek-speaking Jewish-

note that much of what Betz says clearly resonates with what I have published. I am only sorry that I did not know of his article earlier.

59. Betz, "Wellhausen's Dictum," 12.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., 13.

63. Ibid., 14, citing Hengel with Marksches, "*Hellenization*" of *Judaea*, 7-8.

64. Betz, "Wellhausen's Dictum," 15.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

Christian community in which the message of Jesus was formulated in Greek for the first time clearly extend back to the very earliest community in Jerusalem'.⁶⁷ If it is true that the Jesus tradition, at least in significant parts from the outset, existed in Greek, the "question is, rather, whether the assumption of an Aramaic *Vorlage* should not be given up altogether. It would be much more consistent with both the gospel tradition and the multilinguistic culture to assume that Greek versions of Jesus' sayings existed from the beginning."⁶⁸

These preceding statements, made by no less than Hans Dieter Betz, provide a suitable backdrop for continuing the discussion regarding the knowledge of Greek in Palestine by Jews, including Jesus, and the use of Greek by him and his first and subsequent followers.⁶⁹ I cannot help but think that Casey has not adequately refuted the case that has been made for use of Greek, and that a way forward would be to avoid unhelpful disjunctive thinking, and to recognize the complex multilingual world of first-century Palestine.

67. Ibid., here quoting Hengel with Marksches, *"Hellenization" of Judaea*, 18.

68. Betz, "Wellhausen's Dictum," 16. Betz goes on to note that, "if at that time Aramaic versions of sayings of Jesus also existed, they have not been preserved. The existence of Aramaic sayings of Jesus can be assumed, but without further evidence there is no way to either prove or disprove such an assumption" (p. 16). However, one does not need to conclude as a result that, if Jesus spoke Greek, he was a Cynic philosopher. See H. D. Betz, "Jesus and the Cynics: Survey and Analysis of a Hypothesis," *JR* 74 (1994) 453-75; repr. in idem, *Antike und Christentum*, 32-56, where he is critical of the hypothesis.

69. Betz ("Wellhausen's Dictum," 16) differentiates whether Jesus taught in Greek from the question of whether he was able to speak Greek, concluding that one cannot be certain whether Jesus taught in Greek, apart from considering whether Jesus' disciples spoke Greek. At this point, he contends, the answer is unknown, but he advocates further critical questioning. I am not as skeptical as Betz is at this point, in the light of the linguistic milieu in Palestine, especially Galilee, that he outlines above.