

ORIENS

I

Series Minor

Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

Echoes from the Near East
Between Nabataean Aramaic, Arabic,
Syriac and Greek



EDITORIAL SINDÉRESIS
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**Echoes from the Near East: Between Nabataean Aramaic,
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Author: Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala

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Calle Princesa, 31, planta 2, puerta 2
28008 Madrid, España
info@editorialsinderesis.com
www.editorialsinderesis.com

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FOREWORD

The three studies gathered in the present volume are intended to inaugurate a new series whose purpose is to bring together works that may contribute to the advancement of Semitic Studies in any of their manifold fields. As the number of collections devoted to such studies is exceedingly scarce –often restricted to particular areas and, consequently, excluding others– this new series seeks to fill that gap within the Spanish bibliographical landscape. Thus, linguistic, literary, historical, epigraphic, and related studies shall all find their place within this collection, which bears the name *Oriens*.

Of the three chapters herein presented –all of them unpublished– the second and third were, at different times, delivered at international conferences that, for various reasons, were never or will never be published. The second chapter of this volume was presented at the conference *Monks as Translators: Translation Methods in Early Syro-Arabic Melkite Literature*, held at the Freie Universität Berlin between the 10th and 20th of June, 2025. The third, on the other hand, was read as a paper at an international conference held in 2008 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the National *Hellenic Research Foundation* (Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ερευνών) in Athens (Greece). The first of the three chapters, likewise unpublished, has not been presented at any academic gathering.

When the opportunity arose to inaugurate this collection, it seemed the proper occasion to bring these studies to light, particularly the first and third, which had long lain forgotten in a drawer. Naturally, insofar as

circumstances allowed, we have revised these two somewhat aged articles, introduced certain modifications, and added new references in order to bring them up to date. Though time had inevitably taken its toll, we discovered that the ideas contained therein still held potential interest for some of our colleagues. Thus, before consigning them to the eternal sleep of oblivion, we resolved to breathe new life into them, hoping that they may yet be of value to someone.

The combination of the various elements of research that converge within these three chapters, under the benevolent aegis of Philology, may –so we trust– serve as both an inspiration and encouragement to all those who wish to contribute to the establishment of a firm and lasting foundation, one that might preserve a legacy for fellow scholars, students, and all those with a genuine interest in a discipline now in serious peril of extinction.

Unless we take seriously, and with a sense of urgent haste, the task of overcoming that lethal adversary of Semitic Studies –an adversary that threatens not only this field but culture itself, education, and the very intellectual edifice inherited from our teachers, which has for decades been deliberately dismantled– we risk losing far more than a mere academic discipline. Let us hope that there is still time, each of us in whatever manner we can, to remedy this cultural catastrophe that looms over us all.

Indeed, as this modest volume takes its first breath in the academic world, it does so not merely as a compilation of studies, but as a quiet act of defiance, a testament

FOREWORD

to perseverance in an age increasingly deaf to the murmurs of ancient tongues. *Oriens* thus begins its journey as both remembrance and renewal: a bridge between what was and what may yet endure. If these pages should inspire even a single reader to pause, to listen once more to the voices buried beneath centuries of dust, then their revival will not have been in vain. For scholarship, like the desert rose, blooms not despite the silence that surrounds it, but because of it.

Córdoba, Autumn 2025

I

¿Χαγείρας < *hjeir* (< *hujayr* < *hagīrū*)? Once again on
the cognomen χαγείρας/ἀγίρας (χωλός) in Josephus’
Bellum Judaicum V,11,5 § 474

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in his *Bellum Judaicum* —the original of which appears to have been composed in Aramaic language—,¹ when referring to the disturbances that occurred against the Romans under the command of Simon Bar Giora during the conquest of Jerusalem in the year 68 CE,² mentions, among others, a figure he describes as “an Adiabene, son of a Nabataean,” to whom he also gives the cognomen ἀγίρας,³ “lame” (χωλός), which the Latin version renders as *cujus est interpretatio claudus* (< ὅπερ σημαίνει χωλός), “which means (lit. whose interpretation is) lame”.

The Greek text, followed by its Spanish translation, reads as follows:

- ¹ Louis H. Feldman, *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered*, SJSJ 107 (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 317.
- ² S. Krauss, ‘Bar Giora, Simon’, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, dir. Cyrus Adler et al., 12 vol. (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1902-1912), I, pp. 502-503; Uriel Rappaport, ‘Bar Giora, Simeon’, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Second Edition), ed. Fred Skolnik (New York – Jerusalem: Macmillan – Keter Publishing House, 2007), 22 vol., III, pp. 150-151.
- ³ For the variants found in the manuscripts, cf. *Flavii Iosephi opera*. Vol. VI, ed. Benedictus Niese (Berlin: Weidmann, 1894), p. 499 *apparatus ad locum* (BJ V,11,5 § 474).

Τεφθέος δέ τις ἀπὸ Γάρις πόλεως τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ Μαγάσσαρος τῶν βασιλικῶν Μαριάμμης θεράπων, μεθ' ὧν Ἀδιαβηνός τις υἱὸς Ναβαταίου, τοῦνομα κληθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς τύχης καὶ ἀγίρας, ὅπερ σημαίνει χωλός, ἀρπάσαντες λαμπάδας προεπήδησαν ἐπὶ τὰς μηχανάς.⁴

A certain Tephthaeus from the city of Garis in Galilee, and Magassaros, servant of Queen Mariamme, together with an Adiabene, son of a Nabataean, whose name, derived from his condition, was also called agiras, which means lame, seized torches and rushed upon the engines.

The Latin translation, for its part, offers the version which we transliterate below, together with the Spanish translation:

*Tephthaeus autem quidam ex Garsi ortus, civitate Galilaeae, et Megassarus ex regalibus famulis Mariamnes, cumque his Adiabemus quidam, filius Nabataei, nomen habens ex fortuna Agiras, cujus est interpretatio claudus, raptis facibus in machinas evol-arunt.*⁵

A certain Tephthaeus, born in Garis, a city of Galilee, and Megassarus, one of Queen Mariamne's royal servants, together with an Adiabene, son of a Nabataean, bearing the name Agiras derived from his condition,

⁴ BJ V,11,5 § 474.

⁵ BJ V,11,5.

whose interpretation is “lame”, seized torches and rushed upon the engines.

The term *ἀγίρας*, the expression *τις υἱὸς Ναβαταίου*, and the epithet *χωλός*, all of which refer to our character, have given rise to differing interpretations regarding their meaning, to the point that the possibility of a potential distortion of the passage has even been proposed, as was indeed formulated some years ago by Retsö.⁶ Others, however, consider the text credible but suggest that the term *ἀγίρας* actually refers to the name *Χαγείρας*,⁷ or, according to others, should be read as *ἀγήρας*,⁸ resulting from a phenomenon of itacism; all of them with evident Semitic resonances.

To the problems concerning the identification of the reading of the Greek term must be added the correspondences proposed for the identification of the Semitic name:⁹ *inter alia* the Aramaic *ḥgr*,¹⁰ the Palmyrene

⁶ Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their history from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 379, 389, n. 125, *cf.* 585-587.

⁷ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *A complete concordance to Flavius Josephus*. Volume I. A – Δ. In cooperation with Erwin Buck, Eberhard Güting, Bernhard Justus, Heinz Schreckenber, 4 vol. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973-1983), p. 8.

⁸ H.S.J. Thackeray, Josephus. *The Jewish War*, Books IV–VII, vol. III, LCL (Cambridge, Mass – London, 1928), p. 348, n. 2.

⁹ *Cf.* Michał Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene and Adiabene: Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia Between East and West* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017), p. 324, data

ḥgwr,¹¹ or the Arabic ḥjr,¹² which do not always resolve the morphophonological aspects raised by the Greek forms. To this should be added the fact that there were Nabataean queen consorts whose name was Ḥagirū.¹³

Among all the proposals put forward, special attention should be given to the nominal form ḥgyr' (חגירא), which in some varieties of Aramaic corresponds to the meaning

obtained from Tal Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part II: Palestine 200 – 650*, TSAJ 148 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 343-344.

- ¹⁰ Moshe Kosovsky, *Concordance to the Talmud Yerushalmi. Onomasticon, Thesaurus of Proper Names*, 10 vol. (New York – Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities – The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1985), III, p. 503.
- ¹¹ Jürgen Kurt Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 87b.
- ¹² Gerald Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 177; cf. A.F.L. Beeston – M.A. Ghul, W.W. Müller and J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary* (Louvain-la-Neuve – Beirut: Peeters – Librairie du Liban, 1982), p. 67 s.v. ḥgr I; Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*, HSS 25 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 166-167.
- ¹³ About queens Hagirū I, II and III, see Christian-Georges Schwentzel, *Juifs et Nabatéens. Les monarchies ethniques du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain*. Préface de Bernard Legras (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013), pp. 191, 192, 194.

“lame” (חַגְרָא/חַגְרָה/חַיְגָר),¹⁴ although in Samaritan Aramaic the term may mean either “blind” or “lame” (חַגְרָה).¹⁵ Equivalents of this form, in addition to those found in Christian Palestinian Aramaic¹⁶ and in Syriac-Aramaic¹⁷

¹⁴ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. With an Index of Scriptural Quotations (London – New York: Luzac and Co. – G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), I, pp. 424-425. Cf. Jacob Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Theil des rabbinischen Schriftthums* (Leipzig: Gustav Engel, 1866), p. 238b; J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. With appendices by R. C. Steiner, A. Mosak Moshavi and B. Porten (Leiden – New York – Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), I, p. 348; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, DTMT II (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1992), p. 187a; M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Period*, DTMT III (Ramat-Gan, Baltimore – London: Bar Ilan University Press – The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 430a-b; Joseph A. Fitzmyer – Daniel J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts*, BO 34 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2002), p. 22 (5:14.10, Targum of Job 7:15-16); Edward Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos*. According to Alexander Sperber’s Edition, SAIS 6 (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 80.

¹⁵ Abraham Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, 2 vol. (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill, 2000), I, p. 246.

¹⁶ Cf. M. Sokoloff, *Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, OLA 234 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), p. 118a.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*. Collegerunt S. M. Quatremere et al., 2 vol. + 1 Supplement (Oxford: Clarendon