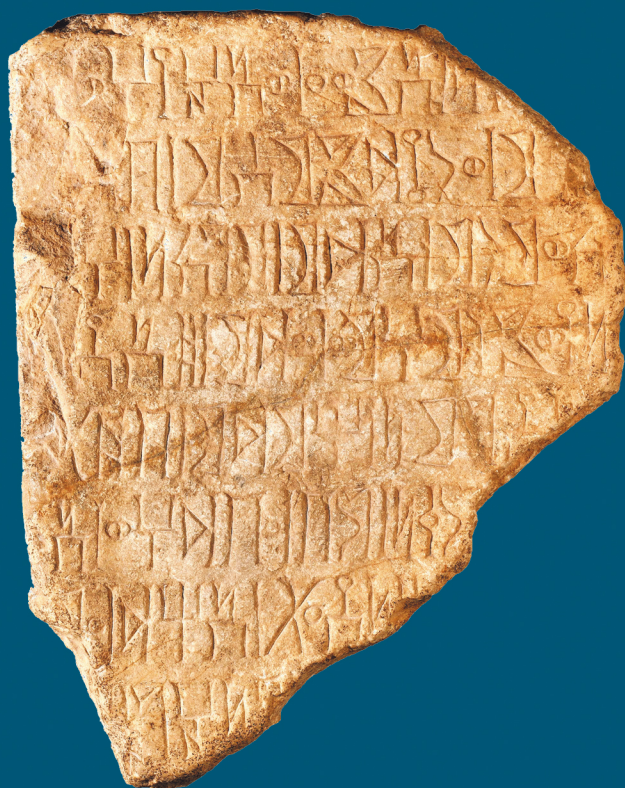


SEMITICA 59

REVUE

PUBLIÉE PAR L'INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES SÉMITIQUES
DU COLLÈGE DE FRANCE



PEETERS

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Direction :

M. Thomas Römer, professeur au Collège de France.

Éditeur scientifique :

M. Michael Langlois.

Comité de rédaction :

MM. Michaël Guichard, David Hamidović, Jürg Hutzli, Michael Langlois, André Lemaire, Hans-Peter Mathys, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, et Arnaud Sérandour.

Correspondance :

Semitica

Institut d'études sémitiques, Collège de France

52 rue du Cardinal-Lemoine, 75231 Paris cedex 05

contact@semitica.fr – www.semitica.fr

Pour la vente :

Peeters

Bondgenotenlaan 153

B-3000 Leuven

peeters@peeters-leuven.be – www.peeters-leuven.be

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“Linguistica, Epigraphica et Philologica”. The Scientific Work of Giovanni Garbini

Giancarlo Toloni

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia

Résumé. En marge du Colloque « Giovanni Garbini, L'Évangile araméen de Matthieu. Mémorial d'un maître dans son dernier ouvrage », tenue à l'Université Catholique du Sacré-Cœur, au siège de Brescia, trois mois après sa mort, nous rappelons ici les grandes lignes de la recherche de l'éminent orientaliste (1931-2017), qui émergent aussi de l'œuvre posthume.

The scientific work of Giovanni Garbini, along with the man himself, one of the most prominent Italian names in Oriental Studies, were recalled three months after his death at the Catholic University of Brescia with a conference sponsored by the “Francesco Vattioni” Archive of Ancient Near East Bibliographic and Documentary Sources. From studies of Semitic linguistics and epigraphy in the Near-Eastern civilizations, Garbini had gradually moved on to Semitic religions, before continuing with the history and philology of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament writings.

Emeritus of Semitic Philology at “La Sapienza” University of Rome and member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Garbini began to work as a university professor at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples, before transferring to the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa. Student of Sabatino Moscati at “La Sapienza”, he studied Semitic languages from a comparative historical perspective and deepened his understanding of the different aspects of the Amorite, Phoenician, Jewish and pre-Islamic Arab cultures through important archaeological missions in Israel, Malta, Yemen and Ethiopia. Indeed, he regarded the historical development of the Semitic languages as the cultural and historic backdrop for the various peoples he studied. His interest in epig-

raphy was a natural consequence of his studies, given that, in this area, inscriptions are the only direct source.

On these themes, Garbini published numerous essays and more than fifty monographs (*L'opera di Giovanni Garbini. Bibliografia degli scritti 1956-2006*, Brescia, Paideia, 2007); many of them have been revised, translated and distributed abroad. His scientific studies, which resulted in him dealing with biblical texts, led him to attempt a historical reconstruction of ancient Israel and to stand out thanks to the methodology he used for the study, drawing on various biblical and extra-biblical proofs.

1. Semitic languages, civilisations and religions

The commemoration of Garbini was led by Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti, Emeritus of Semitic Philology at the University of Turin, and one of the first students of Garbini. He had already given a speech in May 2016 at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, with Thomas L. Thompson, to present the Festschrift *Finding Myth and History in the Bible*, dedicated to the professor by the last generation of his students.

Pennacchietti now recalled the scientific figure through a review of major publications that marked the progress of his research. He met Garbini in 1959 at “La Sapienza”, where the most prestigious Italian names in Oriental studies of the period came together, including Giorgio Levi della Vida, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Giuseppe Furlani, and Francesco Gabrieli. Garbini was the first student of Sabatino Moscati who, in 1957, had written the celebrated essay *Chi furono i Semiti*, allowing Italian culture to discover this civilization, before turning to the study of the Phoenicians in 1959.

The scientific debut of Garbini took the shape of an important volume, *L'Aramaico antico* (1956), which marked the birth of his dual passion for linguistics and epigraphy. He devoted himself with enthusiasm to the study of inscriptions and published two important works: *Storia e problemi dell'epigrafia semitica* (1979) and *Introduzione all'epigrafia semitica* (2006), followed later by the more

challenging *Avvio alla lettura delle iscrizioni “pseudo-geroglifiche” di Biblo* (2009). His contribution has been fundamental in the field of linguistics, where, with *Il Semitico di nordovest* (1960) he lay the path for a new vision, elaborated in his later pursuits, especially in *Le Lingue semitiche: studi di storia linguistica* (1972, 2nd ed. in 1984). Pennacchietti stressed that Garbini’s ability to read each event from a historical perspective led him to the conclusion that these languages developed with the emergence of the Amorites—the predecessors of the Aramaeans—which in fact altered the languages of the Canaanite area, and above all of what later became Aramaic, and also influenced North Arabian and later a part of South Arabian. According to Garbini, Semitic languages originated in Syria; then they partially split, moving into Mesopotamia, gradually taking the place of Sumerian; thus the so-called Eastern Semitic language was formed, while in the Western world Canaanite remained along the coast, gradually giving way to Amorite and Aramaic.

Garbini continued to deal with linguistics in *Introduzione alle lingue semitiche* (1994) and *Il semitico nordoccidentale* (1988), through the study of inscriptions. His contribution to the field of Yemeni epigraphy was very important and required great expertise due to the presence of less pronounced lexical proximities in Southern Semitic than in Northwest Semitic.

At the same time he became interested in ancient Israel’s ideological heritage, developing a new methodology for the study of history and philology, whose manifesto he had begun sketching out in the work *Storia e ideologia nell’Israele antico* (1986). But a substantial change of perspective was also introduced with his *Cantico dei Cantici* (1992). As aware as Moscati of the unified historical development of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean, Garbini found in the *Song of Songs* the traces of the influence of Alexandrian erotic poetry, and continued to demonstrate all possible relationships between the classical world and the Orient, as well as the resulting changes, because he understood that over time the socio-cultural, linguistic and religious situation necessarily changed, and that a text of that kind could be situated historically only within a later period. In 1998 he published *Note di lessicografia ebraica*, beginning to propose a new vision of the his-

tory of ancient Israel. On the same theme was his *Il ritorno dall'esilio babilonese* (2001) and *Mito e storia nella Bibbia* (2003), followed by *Scrivere la storia di Israele* (2008) and *Letteratura e politica nell'Israele antico* (2010). Like Moscati, Garbini often focused on the Phoenician civilisation, making it one of the most original parts of his work: he viewed their world as culturally superior to the Hebrew world, and the Hebrew language as a dialect of Phoenician. Through this study he then reaches the Philistines, who he identifies with the *Peleset*, one of the Sea Peoples who attacked Egypt under Ramesses III and then settled in Canaan between the 11th and the middle of the 9th century BC, giving their name to the region. Pennacchietti adds that Garbini regarded the Philistines as rulers of most of the Mediterranean from the 13th to 10th century BC, and as he identified in the iconographic production of this civilisation some archaeological remains found on the banks of the Po, in Sardinia and in Sicily. On this subject Garbini published *I filistei: gli antagonisti di Israele* (2012), preceded by *I Fenici. Storia e religione* (1980), and by *La religione dei fenici in Occidente* (1994). His research, strictly from a historical perspective, proceeded with a continuous contextualization, as he was convinced that to understand the older literature of the Bible a comparison between the civilisations and religions surrounding it was necessary, as evidenced in *Dio della terra, dio del cielo* (2011) and *Il poema di Baal di Ilumilku* (2014).

In his latest works Garbini began to discuss the NT with the *Vita e mito di Gesù* (2015) and *Il vangelo aramaico di Matteo* (2017). He assumed that no text of a normative nature, transmitted through a long oral tradition, can remain free from intentional tampering (integrations, deletions, omissions), justified by the gradual changing of religious beliefs, cultural experiences and socio-political conditions. As for the Bible, Pennacchietti points out that the various aspects of social life and religious practice, accepted as normal in earlier times, could not be excluded as they are unpopular for succeeding generations and culturally higher levels, the custodians of tradition. They were the social classes that were most exposed to the influence of the surrounding peoples such as the Phoenicians, then the Assyrians and the Babylo-

nians, and later the Persians and the peoples of the Greek civilisation.

2. History and philology of the Hebrew Bible

Garbini's long scientific career, inaugurated in 1956 with the famous volume *L'Aramaico antico*, ended with *Il vangelo aramaico di Matteo e altri saggi* (Turin, Paideia, 2017), published posthumously. This last work, of which he had managed to review the drafts before it was printed, is therefore a sort of memorial, since it provides in fact the inspiration for remembering his multifaceted career and his main lines of research, highlighting the singular methodology that made Garbini a true leader for entire generations of Semitists.

The book, presented by the writer of this paper, who also had the honour of organising the Colloquium *in memoriam*, is a collection of recent essays, some previously unpublished, that range from the history and culture of ancient Israel to the birth of Christianity. In the analysis, the essays on the Hebrew Bible have been given priority as they best represent Garbini's innovative research, inherent in the philological-linguistic study from a historical and religious perspective.

His most original contribution to textual criticism is the re-evaluation of the contribution of the MT, albeit only as a starting point for the study. In fact, if it is true that in the search for the *Ur-text* biblical philology currently tends to highlight the *Vorlage* of LXX, reaching it through *Old Greek*, which does not exist but must be reconstructed in each case, since the Greek we know is a result of a traditional ecclesiastical reworking, Garbini wanted to bring our attention back to the MT. He was convinced that, even though it is the product of ideological interpretations of the Judaic revision, to the careful eye it often reveals the criteria that the rabbis would have used to alter the text for religious purposes. Garbini, with his “philological dig” has been able to reconstruct many original texts, and so track down historical information that the Masoretes “masked”.

For example, in the contribution that opens the volume with a striking and provocative title, *Chi ha creato Adamo?*, he concludes that it is possible to identify already in the story of Gen 1–2 traces of the trinitarian statement in God, since Yhwh was assisted in the creation (Prov 8:22–23) by Wisdom (*ḥokmâ*), of female gender, created in turn by the Spirit (*rûah*), also female, who in the beginning “was hovering over the waters” (Gen 1:2). So a Triune God, both male and female, created Adam, who was created both male and female (Gen 1:27) since he was created by God “in his own ‘figure’ (*ṣelem*) and likeness” (Gen 1:26). The Judaic revision had altered the text, as they were unable to tolerate this affirmation, even though some trace of it was left here and there: for example, the third person male singular pronoun (*hûʾ*), often used with the feminine value (*hiʾ*) and therefore in the *Qere Perpetuum* it is sometimes transcribed with the unreadable form (*hwʾ*), consisting of the male consonants and the female *hireq* point; and in the same way the term *naʿar*, “boy”, is sometimes used to express the feminine, “girl”, despite there being a regularly attested female noun *naʿârâ*, “girl”.

According to Garbini, therefore, the resemblance between God and his creature consisted of the male and female being, and it was produced by the divine “figure”: the God who created Adam was a triune “figure”, Yhwh, Spirit, Wisdom, who would one day present himself to Abraham to foretell Isaac’s birth in Gen 18. The existence of a plurality in God is evidenced by the use of the plural verb by the Creator in Genesis 1:26–27 (“Let us make”), which refers, according to Garbini, “those who were near” God, who “worked with him”. He then shows that the word *ṣelem* was chosen to “hide the true nature of what made mankind like God”, a real similarity that was not, however, to be declared explicitly.

The essays that make up this collection attest to the variety of Garbini’s interests. They deal above all with historical books, which he examines from a minimalist point of view, thus proposing a lower dating of the texts (mostly from the Persian era, but also from the Greek and Roman period), because of their unreliable statements on a historical level. One of the most significant is *La conquista di Gerusalemme*, from the biblical text attributed to David. For Garbini it never took place “because Jerusalem had al-

ready belonged to the Benjamin tribe for several generations before Saul”; or that on *Gionata e i giorni di Gabaa* (the corruption of *Gilbōa*), which initially investigates the true nature of the bond between Jonathan and David, reinterpreted based on the friendships of the heroes of the classical age, before converging on the study of the David figure, designed after the exile from a doubling of Saul, as his own name reveals, *dāwid*, “beloved”, epithet reserved for political figures of David’s circle; or, finally, the essay on the *Serpente di Mosè*, about the poor consistency of the historical figure of Moses, who was introduced into the text in order to make him the founder of Yahwism, with resumption of a Moses who was a blacksmith and prophet and saved his people from a plague with his snake.

3. The gospel in Aramaic

The last contribution, illustrated by Antonio Zani, addresses the problem of the existence of an Aramaic gospel of Matthew, according to Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (Frigia), who lived in the beginning of 2nd century AD. The hypothesis of Garbini begins with a fragment of Papias’ writing of which we can read only a few lines, reported by Eusebius of Caesarea, which cites: “Matthew wrote the speeches of Jesus in Hebrew and everyone translated them as well as they could.” Today no one discusses the authenticity of this news, which offers an authoritative witness to the existence of a gospel that Garbini demonstrates as being written “in Aramaic”, the language spoken in Judea at the time of Jesus. This is the gospel that is deemed as the source and example for all the gospels.

For Garbini, from this Aramaic gospel, the gospel texts in Greek *koiné* were born—that is, they translated them into Greek from this Aramaic gospel “as well as they could”; from these gospels therefore came the ones we know today, first of all that of Mark. *Il vangelo aramaico di Matteo* is the punctual confirmation that in the Greek text of Matthew there are very obvious and recurring Aramaisms, attestations of an undoubtedly Semitic, and probably Aramaic, *Vorlage* that emerge from the *koiné*: it was used

for the editing of the text transmitted to us in Greek, which in terms of syntax, style and lexicon reveals a Semitic logical-conceptual scheme, with linguistic adaptations to the language of the Hellenistic-Jewish community of the Egyptian diaspora, who used a very similar vocabulary to that of the Greek of the documentary papyrus.

Zani states that Enrico Norelli, in *Papia di Hierapolis, Esposizione degli oracoli del Signore* (Milan, Paoline, 2005) had already approached the same fragment of Papias' text, without departing from the assumption of Garbini, which, however, in addition offers his own "philological dig" into the text. The figure of Jesus who, for Garbini, comes from this Aramaic gospel, the first gospel, has little in common with what we know from the gospels we have today, which speak of a merciful father who rejoices when the prodigal son returns, or a shepherd who leaves the flock to go in search of the lost sheep; the Jesus reconstructed by Garbini in the Aramaic gospel is in fact more in keeping with Jewish thought and is more of a messianic figure. The author of this alleged Aramaic gospel believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, but he had the traits of a judge who is to announce the judgment of the Father, rather than being the merciful Father and the Good Shepherd. It is then a later textual tradition that integrates this vision—that cannot be expunged from the gospels—with a richer perspective.

4. The gift of his library

The ceremony was finally a happy occasion for the Pro-Rector, Mario Taccolini, to pay grateful tribute to the memory of Giovanni Garbini for the donation of valuable books from his personal library to the Catholic University of Brescia. His books, ranging from comparative Semitic linguistics to epigraphy, history, civilization and ancient Semitic religions up to Biblical philology, will enrich the Archives dedicated to his friend Francesco Vattioni, a

Semitical philologist from Brescia, with whom Garbini shared his studies and research interests.¹

¹ Cf. G. Toloni, “‘Biblica et Semitica’: L’œuvre scientifique de Francesco Vattioni”, *Semitica* 58 (2016) 297-305.