

acquainted with it, exhibits little likeness to either Susianian or Sumerian.

The history of the Semitic languages themselves can now be traced back to about 4000 B.C., thanks to recent discoveries in Babylonia. From the same source we have learnt that two thousand years later the languages of southern Arabia and of Canaan—those, namely, which in later days were known as Minæan and Sabæan on the one side and as Phœnician and Hebrew on the other—were so closely alike as to be almost indistinguishable from one another. Epigraphic research, moreover, has enabled us to define the position of Aramaic more accurately than could be done a few years ago. It was, in fact, one of the latest members of the Semitic family of languages to come into existence. It originated in the contact of the Arabian and Canaanitish dialects, and in the form in which we know it, it first took shape in the seventh or eighth century B.C. The earliest monuments of it yet found—those of Sinjerli north of the Gulf of Antioch—still present so many West Semitic features that their first decipherers believed them to be in a Canaanitish or Hebrew form of speech.

These monuments belong to about 730 B.C. and are written in the Aramaic branch of the so-called Phœnician alphabet. Our ideas in regard to the origin of this alphabet have been very much modified by the new facts which have come to light since the first publication of my book. I have left what I then wrote untouched, since there are many scholars who still adhere to the old views; my own views, however, have undergone considerable change. No inscription in the so-called