

The Aramaic is one of the three great groups of the Northern branch of the Semitic languages, the other sister groups being the Assyro-Babylonian and the Hebraic. Its centre of gravity came to be the upper Euphrates valley, so that geographically it may be said to have occupied a middle place between its sisters.

The name "Aramaic" is taken from the name of the ethnical group called in the Bible Aram ( אַרַם ), or in the Assyrian, Arammu. The land par excellence of the Aram people came to be the regions of the upper Euphrates valley, the Padan Aram of Genesis (e.g., 25.20), to which was attached the Hinterland of the Mediterranean coast as far as the end of the Lebanon; to this whole region the name "Syria" (abbreviated from "Assyria") came to be given by the Greeks. Hence in occidental usage, as in the Bible, the people are called Syrians, and the Authorized Version denotes their language as "Syrian" (e.g., Ezra 4.7) or "Syriack" (Dan. 2.4). Unfortunately, in consequence of this language being put in the mouth of the "Chaldaeans" in the book of Daniel (2.4), the name of "Chaldee," or "Chaldaic," came to be used. This use has now necessarily been discarded, for we know now that the Chaldaeans were a Babylonian people and spoke Assyrian. As the name "Syriac" has been appropriated by the classical dialect of Edessa, it is best to revert to the original term "Aramaic," which has further to be qualified by limiting terms to express its literature and dialects.