

CAULDRON: PEER REVIEWED SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

WAS PETER CAPABLE OF WRITING THE GREEK OF 2 PETER? AN EXPLORATION - DONALD L MORCOM

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Abstract

Among the many arguments advanced against the notion that the Apostle Peter was the author of the New Testament letters bearing his name, it is alleged that as an uneducated Galilean fisherman Peter was not capable of writing the kind of Greek found in these letters. This paper challenges that particular allegation. Utilising evidence from elsewhere in the New Testament, exploring the history of investigation into the language/s spoken by Jesus and his disciples, and harnessing some recent advances in our understanding of the extent of the Hellenisation of Peter's Galilee, this paper explores the plausibility of Peter possessing the necessary Greek linguistic skills to be the genuine author of 2 Peter.

Introduction

A recent project required me once again to consider the thorny issue of the authenticity of 2 Peter. For many in the academy, of course, the issue is past being thorny – the vast majority of contemporary New Testament scholars (including many of a more conservative stripe) would agree with the judgement of James Dunn that “There are several factors which point firmly to the conclusion that Peter was not the author of 2 Peter.”¹ He further declares unequivocally, if (in my view) not quite accurately, that “its pseudonymity is more or less taken for granted by all serious students”² and that this is the “consensus view of NT scholars.”³ Similarly, Richard Bauckham writes, “The Petrine authorship of 2 Peter has long been disputed, but only since the beginning of this century [Bauckham is referring to the

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity*, vol. 3 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 100.

² Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 729.

³ Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, 100.

twentieth century] has the pseudepigraphical character of the work come to be almost universally recognized.”⁴

For many sincere Bible readers, however, the face-value claim in 2 Peter 1:1 that the letter was written by “Symeon Peter (Συμεὼν Πέτρος), a slave/servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” is sufficient to establish Petrine authorship.⁵ For them, this claim is further strengthened by those passages in the letter which appear to be personal reminiscences or autobiographical material associated with what is known elsewhere in the New Testament of the apostle Peter, especially in the Gospels. Such material includes particularly what purports to be the first-person eye-witness account of the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18; cf. Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-7; Luke 9:29-35), and also the author’s sense that his death is near, as revealed to him by the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:13-14; cf. John 21:18-19). Such a hermeneutic might well be described in terms of the popular adage, “The Bible says it; I believe it; that settles it.” For these readers, it would be easier to live with anonymity rather than pseudonymity, since pseudonymity apparently requires the dismissal of face-value claims of inspired Scripture.

Neither of the above approaches is satisfactory, however, when it comes to determining the authenticity of 2 Peter. Despite the enormous value of much of Dunn’s work and his encyclopaedic knowledge, at this point he appears to take little account of “serious students” who have mounted a persuasive case for the authenticity of 2 Peter.⁶ On the other hand, it is credulous to accept the authenticity of 2 Peter without having grappled seriously with the major questions of genre,⁷ intertextuality with Jude, identification of the opponents in 2 Peter,

⁴ Richard Bauckham, “2 Peter: An Account of Research,” quoted in Gene L. Green, *Jude & 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 139.

⁵ Συμεὼν represents the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name שמעון, appearing in the New Testament as a reference to the apostle, Simon Peter, only here and in Acts 15:14. Several English versions (for example, AV, NASB, NIV, NLT) avoid what they presumably view as potential confusion by rendering the name “Simon Peter”; others (including NRSV and ESV) offer the translation “Simeon Peter.”

⁶ Defenders of the authenticity of 2 Peter include such “serious students” as E. M. B. (Michael) Green, “2 Peter Reconsidered,” The Tyndale New Testament Lecture, 1960, accessed 23 March 2016, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/2peter_green.pdf, and Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter and the General Epistle of Jude*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 13-39; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 811-842; Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21-26; Michael J. Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.4 (1999), 645-671; Daniel B. Wallace, “Second Peter: Introduction, Argument, and Outline,” accessed 23 March 2016, <https://bible.org/seriespage/second-peter-introduction-argument-and-outline>; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 255-276; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2008), 139-150.

⁷ Particularly the argument of Richard Bauckham that, as far as genre is concerned, 2 Peter may be classified both as a letter and as a “farewell speech” or “testament.” Such a “testament” was a well-known literary device commonly used in Jewish literature of the intertestamental period. A pseudonymous author would seek to perpetuate the essence of an Old Testament hero’s exemplary life or message by distilling it into such a “testament.” But no deceit was intended by writing under the name of the Old Testament hero, for the “testament” genre was both widely known and well accepted as a legitimate literary device. See Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 50 (Waco: Word Books, 1989), especially 131-135; 194-203. “Second Peter bears so many marks of the testament genre (especially the conventional testamentary language in 1:12-15) that readers familiar with the genre must have expected it to be fictional, like other examples they knew. If they knew that it came from the Petrine circle in Rome . . . , then they might trust its author to have made a good job of reporting the essence of Peter’s teaching, but they would not expect Peter to have written it. At any rate the presumption would be that he had not” (Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 134). See also Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBL Dissertation Series, Number 104 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), who interprets 2 Peter in terms of Greek rhetoric.

the implications for the dating of the letter arising from the author's knowledge of a collection of Paul's letters (2 Pet. 3:15-16), the portrait in the letter of a situation which some (following Ernst Käsemann)⁸ have placed well into the second century, the paucity of attestation of 2 Peter in the Christian literature of the second and early third centuries, stylistic and theological diversity between the two New Testament letters bearing Peter's name, the possible influence of an amanuensis or amanuenses (whereas 1 Peter 5:12 adds the detail that that letter was written διὰ Σιλουανοῦ⁹ and the following verse mentions that the author had Mark with him, there is no specific mention of an amanuensis in 2 Peter), and whether an uneducated Galilean fisherman was capable of writing the kind of Greek we find in 2 Peter (or in 1 Peter, for that matter, *mutatis mutandis*).

In this paper I want to join the discussion about the authenticity of 2 Peter at the level of the final issue mentioned in the previous paragraph: a consideration of whether Simon Peter the apostle *could* have written the kind of Greek found in 2 Peter. I do so, echoing the caveat of Michael Green in his "2 Peter Reconsidered":

The aim of this paper is to reconsider the problem [of the authenticity of 2 Peter], not because the writer has the presumption to dogmatize over a question which has puzzled the ablest heads in the Church for a thousand years, but because the arguments commonly adduced to support the current view of 2 Peter as an undoubted pseudepigraph do not appear to be as securely based as might be expected from the confidence reposed in them.¹⁰

Frankness demands, however, the recognition that some of the arguments used in support of the authenticity of 2 Peter are equally tentative. But this need not result in complete agnosticism. In his critique of an article by M. J. Gilmore, who maintains that the evidence for both sides of the case is ambiguous, Thomas Schreiner rightly points out that "historical work involves plausibility, not absolute proof. It is true that many of the arguments adduced on both sides are not compelling. Still, some arguments are more plausible than others, and it is the task of the historian to indicate such."¹¹ So what evidence can be adduced to make it at

⁸ In a 1952 lecture, published in Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague, SBT 41 (London: SCM Press, 1964), 169-195, Käsemann (in)famously argued that 2 Peter was "an apologia for primitive Christian eschatology" (this also served as the title of the lecture) and "a document expressing an early Catholic viewpoint" (169). On both counts – as an explanation of "the delay of the *parousia*," and as a portrait of what he called "early Catholicism" (*früh Katholismus*) – Käsemann dated 2 Peter well into the second century and relegated the letter to the status of "the most dubious writing in the canon" (169).

⁹ Carsten P. Thiede engagingly dedicates his book *Simon Peter: From Galilee to Rome* (London, Paternoster Press, 1986) "To Franziska, my wife, who told me that all I needed was a good Silvanus" (unnumbered page 5). Readers of this article will doubtless decide whether I also need a good Silvanus! It has been pointed out, however, that the expression διὰ Σιλουανοῦ may refer to the bearer of the letter rather than to its inscriber. See, for example, Peter H Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 128, following the argument of E. Randolph Richards in his 1999 paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, "Theological Bias in Interpreting *dia Silvanou ... egrapsa* in 1 Peter 5:12?" and later published as "Silvanus Was Not Peter's Secretary: Theological Bias in Interpreting *dia Silvanou ... egrapsa* in 1 Peter 5:12," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:3 (2000), 417-432.

¹⁰ Green, "2 Peter Reconsidered," 5.

¹¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 260, n. 27. The article Schreiner critiques is M. J. Gilmore, "Reflections on the Authorship of 2 Peter," *Evangelical Quarterly* 73 (2001), 291-309.

least plausible that the apostle Peter was the author of 2 Peter? Plausible responses to other objections raised against the authenticity of 2 Peter may be found in the literature cited in footnote 6 above;¹² this article focuses specifically on the allegation that an uneducated Galilean fisherman was not capable of writing the kind of Greek we find in 2 Peter, and thus that an unknown pseudepigrapher must be responsible for its composition.

Fill-in Light from Elsewhere in the New Testament

In the popular understanding, Peter's education and cultural standing are summed up in Acts 4:13 by the somewhat disparaging view of the Sanhedrin that he (and John) were "unschooled, ordinary men"¹³ (ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσιν καὶ ἰδιῶται). But debate surrounds the interpretation of this verse.

On the one hand, there are those such as Sean Adams who judge that ἀγράμματος means "uneducated," and ἰδιώτης denotes "a layperson" by way of contrast with the guild of professional scribes.¹⁴ In this understanding, the key conclusion to be drawn is that

A contest of mediating authoritative interpretations is clearly in view in Acts 4:13, and Peter is presented by Luke as challenging the hegemony of the Jewish leadership. That Peter is unlettered undermines (in their view) both his claim to this position [as a text-broker for the community] and his ability to interpret the scriptural text authoritatively, which results in their agitation.¹⁵

Concerned as he is with "The Tradition of Peter's Literacy" (the title of his article), Adams argues that since Peter is represented in Acts 4:13 as unlettered, but in 1 Peter and other extracanonical "Petrine" literature as "a preacher, miracle worker, and debater" who "reportedly handles, reads, and writes texts," who "regularly cites texts" and whose "interpretations and expositions are depicted as authoritative," he "can hardly be understood to be illiterate, and so the tradition and the depiction of his literacy are adopted into the subsequent body of literature on the figure of Peter."¹⁶ (It is not clear from Adams' taxonomy where he regards 2 Peter as fitting). Adams concludes that

¹² A noteworthy contribution from an unexpected quarter that explicitly places the date of 2 Peter within the apostle Peter's own lifetime (and indeed the entire New Testament before 70 C.E.) is John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 169-199. Robinson also expresses concern about the popular understanding of the ubiquity of pseudonymity in New Testament studies: "There is indeed an appetite for pseudonymity that grows by what it feeds on" (186). Although this was written in 1976, the situation is not very different today.

¹³ Unless otherwise specified, all English New Testament quotations are from the NIV (2011 version).

¹⁴ Sean A. Adams, "The Tradition of Peter's Literacy," in Helen K. Bond and Larry W. Hurtado (eds), *Peter in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 131-134. Adams is following with approval the conclusions reached by Thomas J. Kraus, "'Uneducated,' 'Ignorant,' or even 'Illiterate'? Aspects and Background for an Understanding of ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΙ (and ΙΔΙΩΤΑΙ) in Acts 4.13," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 434-439.

¹⁵ Adams, "Tradition of Peter's Literacy," 133.

¹⁶ Adams, "Tradition of Peter's Literacy," 145.

The initial basis or impetus of this depiction of [Peter] is 1 Peter. Accordingly, whether or not Peter was the actual author of 1 Peter, it is his accepted authorship of the letter that subsequently provided authoritative support for Peter's literacy. This perspective was assumed in later traditions, which depicted Peter as literate and competent both to handle and to interpret Scripture authoritatively.¹⁷

This seems almost to be suggesting that if a literate Peter did not exist, it would have been (and was!) necessary to invent him. Furthermore, this scenario depends on a particular understanding of the Sanhedrin's judgement about Peter and John in Acts 4:13.

But on the other hand, Ralph Martin cautions that the designation ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι ... καὶ ἰδιῶται probably "means no more than that [Peter and John] were ignorant of the finer points of the rabbinical interpretation of the Torah."¹⁸ In such a view, it was not their "illiteracy" that was primarily in focus; rather, it was the fact that they "had been with Jesus" (ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν) and hence had absorbed from him a way of interpreting Torah that was radically different from that of the rabbinic tradition.¹⁹ In all four Gospels (notably, for example, in John 5:31-47), the escalating tension between the rabbis' traditional interpretation of Moses and the "novel" interpretation proposed by Jesus is a key development in the narrative. Thus Acts 4:13 is more correctly viewed as an extension of that conflict rather than as a definitive comment about Peter's (il)literacy. In any case, conclusions about Peter's ability to communicate in Greek cannot be drawn from the context of a Sanhedrin hearing which presumably would have been conducted in Hebrew.

A potentially more productive line of enquiry may be provided by the incident recorded in John 12:20-22. The background context to the incident is sketched in John 11:55-56: "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus...." (John 11:55-56). Among these travellers to Jerusalem were some Greeks: Ἦσαν δὲ Ἑλληνές τινες ἐκ τῶν ἀναβαινόντων ἵνα προσκυνήσωσιν ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ (John 12:20). Whether these were ethnic Greeks (less likely) or Greek speakers from one of the provinces of the former Greek Empire (more likely) is a point of debate,²⁰ but it makes no difference to the present argument. These

¹⁷ Adams, "Tradition of Peter's Literacy," 145.

¹⁸ Ralph P. Martin, "Peter," *ISBE* 3:803; quoted in Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 19.

¹⁹ Such an interpretation would concur with the idea of an ἰδιώτης as "a person who is relatively unskilled or inexperienced in some activity or field of knowledge, *layperson, amateur*," or "one who is not knowledgeable about some particular group's experience, *one not in the know, outsider*" (BDAG 468). There is no inference that an ἰδιώτης is inferior in intelligence or achievement in other fields. Bradley S. Billings makes a similar point about the use of ἰδιώτης in 1 Corinthians, in "The *apistoi* and *idiotēs* [*sic*] in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25: The Ancient Context and Missiological Meaning," *The Expository Times* 127/6 (2016), 277-285, here understanding ἰδιώτης as one who is an "outsider" as far as Christian worship is concerned.

²⁰ See, for example, Stanley E. Porter, "Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.2 (1993), 227: "The use of Ἑλληνές here almost certainly refers to Greek-speaking gentiles ..., whether or not they came from Greece (as they almost assuredly did not), and does not mean Greek-speaking Jews These people would probably have been gentiles from one of the Greek-speaking areas, quite possibly of northern Palestine in the area of Galilee or the Decapolis."

Greeks approached Philip for an audience with Jesus: οὗτοι οὖν προσήλθον Φιλίππῳ τῷ ἀπὸ Βηθσαϊδᾶ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἠρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες, κύριε, θέλομεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἰδεῖν. ἔρχεται ὁ Φίλιππος καὶ λέγει τῷ Ἀνδρέα, ἔρχεται Ἀνδρέας καὶ Φίλιππος καὶ λέγουσιν τῷ Ἰησοῦ (John 12:21-22). The significant point is that Philip is identified as Φιλίππῳ τῷ ἀπὸ Βηθσαϊδᾶ τῆς Γαλιλαίας (“Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee”). At this juncture in the narrative, it is difficult to account for the inclusion of what initially seems to be an irrelevant scrap of biographical information about Philip’s home town being Bethsaida in Galilee *unless* it accounts for the reason why these Greeks approached Philip specifically: namely, that the Greeks were aware that someone from Bethsaida in Galilee would be able to converse with them in Greek, their mother tongue (or had perhaps even overheard Philip speaking Greek). The impression may have been strengthened by the fact that Φίλιππος is a Greek name (as are, for that matter, Ἀνδρέας and Πέτρος), although probably not too much weight should be laid on this since it was not uncommon (then as now) for parents to give their children names sourced from a dominant, even if foreign, social group.

In John 1:44 (in the context of the calling of the first disciples) it is specified that Peter, too, originally came from Bethsaida: ἦν δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος ἀπὸ Βηθσαϊδᾶ, ἐκ τῆς πόλεως Ἀνδρέου καὶ Πέτρου. In Mark’s Gospel, after the calling of the first disciples (Mark 1:16-20) the action moves rapidly in typical Markan fashion to the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21), and then “immediately” to the house of Simon and Andrew, also in Capernaum: Καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς ἐξεληθόντες ἦλθον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν Σίμωνος καὶ Ἀνδρέου μετὰ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωάννου (Mark 1:29). Elements of the narrative are clearly telescoped or omitted to serve Mark’s purpose, but it seems that in the early stages of his ministry Jesus had established a base of sorts in Capernaum and used the house of the brothers Peter and Andrew for this purpose.²¹ This would seem to indicate either that they had moved to Capernaum from Bethsaida or had purchased an additional house in Capernaum.²² Either possibility may suggest that Peter and Andrew had some means, probably accruing from their fishing business. The detail in Mark 1:19-20 that the family of James and John, similarly called by Jesus and presumably close associates of Peter and Andrew, were sufficiently well-off to own

²¹ See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 107.

²² It must be acknowledged, however, that the detailed essays by Sharon Lea Mattila, “Capernaum, Village of Nahum, from Hellenistic to Byzantine Times,” and Rami Arav and Carl E. Savage, “Bethsaida,” in David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange (eds), *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, volume 2, *The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 217-257 and 258-279 respectively, find comparatively little archaeological evidence of Hellenistic influence in either Bethsaida or Capernaum. Arav and Savage, “Bethsaida,” write that “when confronted with the archaeological reality, those who desire to find a romanticized Bethsaida in which Jesus and his disciples walked amid Greco-Roman institutions enshrined in monumental architecture complete with columns and capitals will be disappointed” (259). Fair enough, but such a conclusion has only limited bearing on the issue of the use of Greek in these towns. The archaeology of other towns in Galilee such as Tiberias and (especially) Sepphoris tells a different story.

a boat (πλοῖον) and to employ “hired men” (μισθοῦτοι) indicates that they were middle class at least.

This line of thought suggests that the first disciples, Peter included, were not quite so bucolic as they are often presumed to be.²³ But is it plausible on this basis to suggest that Simon Peter, with his roots, upbringing, and early career centring around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, was capable of writing Greek sufficiently well to be the author of 2 Peter – indeed, of the two New Testament letters that bear his name?

Peter and the Languages of Galilee in the First Century C.E.

Providing a plausible answer to the question at the end of the previous section requires, in turn, attention to a number of subsidiary questions such as the following: What was the extent of the penetration of Hellenism into Galilee, especially into towns like Bethsaida and Capernaum, where Peter lived? What influence did this Hellenistic climate have on the languages spoken in Galilee? What was the degree of literacy in Galilee? The following discussion seeks to address these issues.

Most post-Reformation scholarship (at least until the end of the nineteenth century) was “based on the common assumption that Hebrew had ceased to exist as a living language since the days of the Babylonian exile.”²⁴ In its place, Aramaic came to be regarded as the *lingua franca* of the returnees from the exile up to and including New Testament times and (to quote from Arnold Meyer’s 1896 work *Jesu Muttersprache. Das galiläische Aramäisch in seiner Bedeutung für die Erklärung der Reden Jesu*), “the knowledge of Hebrew among the common people, unless they were learned scribes ... was limited to the memorization of a few phrases, prayers and psalms. The rest of his private, public and religious communication would have been in Aramaic.”²⁵ These claims of an “exclusive Aramaic model” were given their definitive expression by Gustav Dalman in a number of works in the early decades of the twentieth century.²⁶ Under the influence of such luminaries as Oscar Cullmann and Joachim Jeremias, this “exclusive Aramaic model” continued to hold sway in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Jeremias, for example, posited “The Aramaic Basis of the

²³ Although Arav and Savage, “Bethsaida,” 258, n.2 refer to Bethsaida as “rustic” when compared with Caesarea and Samaria.

²⁴ Guido Baltes, “The Origins of the ‘Exclusive Aramaic Hypothesis’ in the Nineteenth Century: Methodological Fallacies and Subtle Motives,” in Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley (eds.), *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 12.

²⁵ Quoted in Baltes, “Exclusive Aramaic Hypothesis,” 15.

²⁶ Baltes, “Exclusive Aramaic Hypothesis,” 14-20.

Logia of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels.”²⁷ He argued that “the mother tongue of Jesus was a Galilean version of western Aramaic,”²⁸ and concluded therefore that “the sayings of Jesus are to be set against an Aramaic background” and that “this linguistic evidence takes us back into the realm of Aramaic oral tradition.”²⁹

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, however, the question of the influence of Hellenism on life in Galilee began to receive wider attention, particularly in terms of the extent of the adoption (or non-adoption) of the Greek language by the general populace. The broad history of the conquests of Alexander the Great and the expansion of the Greek Empire and its influence (including the ongoing Hellenistic influence on Palestine under the Hellenistic successor states to Alexander’s empire, the Ptolemies and the Seleucids) is well known and does not require rehearsal here.³⁰ But the extent of Greek language usage in Palestine is disputed. Representative of those scholars who doubt the widespread use of Greek in first-century Galilee is Mark Chancey. He notes that proponents of the view that Greek was widely used in Galilee cite several arguments in support of this view: “centuries of exposure to Hellenism; the growing urbanization of the area from Antipas onwards; the rabbis’ use of Greek; the occurrence of Greek names; and, most importantly, epigraphic evidence.”³¹ But for Chancey, the argument as it is often advanced appears circular: “we know Galilee was Hellenized because Greek was spoken there; we know Greek was often spoken because Galilee was extensively Hellenized.”³² He concludes that “While few, if any, scholars would argue that Greek was spoken nowhere in Galilee, a thorough investigation reveals that there is little reason to believe that it was widespread” and that “the quantity of our evidence has at times been exaggerated and its interpretation over-simplified.”³³ Marc Turnage concurs: “The virtual absence of literary and epigraphic materials from Galilee during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods complicates the construction of the linguistic ethos of Galilean society.”³⁴

²⁷ Section heading in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, ET John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1971), 3

²⁸ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 4 (emphasis in the original).

²⁹ Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 8.

³⁰ For a helpful, though now a little dated, survey of the impact of Hellenism on Galilee, see Seán Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 B.C.E to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Wilmington, Michael Glazier/Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1980). Chapter 2, “Galilee, the Rise of Hellenism and the Jewish Response,” and Chapter 4, “The Cities and the Hellenistic Ethos of Galilee,” are particularly pertinent for the purposes of this paper. A novel approach (literally!), though based on careful scholarship, to the tensions between those who sought to live faithfully to their ancestral values as Jews and those who sought to adapt to the realities of living in a Greek-dominated society is found in David A. DeSilva, *Day of Atonement: A Novel of the Maccabean Revolt* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015).

³¹ Mark A Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 134 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 122.

³² Chancey, *Galilee of Jesus*, 122.

³³ Chancey, *Galilee of Jesus*, 124.

³⁴ Marc Turnage, “The Linguistic Ethos of the Galilee in the First Century C.E.,” in Buth and Notley (eds.), *Language Environment*, 111.

On the other hand, however, Willem Smelik argues that “Even before Aramaic was used widely in Jewish writing, Greek made great headway into the Middle East following Alexander the Great’s conquests and the establishment of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires” and (citing Martin Hengel’s *Judentum und Hellenismus*³⁵) can go as far as describing the Jewish use of Greek as “impressive in terms of literary production and epigraphy.”³⁶ Similarly, Andrew Pitts is of the opinion that “As a result of the research of scholars like Hengel, Lieberman and a number of others, it is now generally accepted that Jerusalem and much of rabbinic Judaism was extremely affected by Hellenism, as Jerusalem was under direct Hellenistic rule for three centuries.”³⁷

Although referring specifically to Judaea and not to Galilee (although the same reasoning with respect to the latter would also seem to apply), Wise sums up the current *status quaestionis* as follows: “Most scholars today would agree that Judaeans in the first century C.E. and the first third of the second century were a trilingual society, using Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.”³⁸ But he immediately goes on to offer this caveat: “Beneath the surface of this apparently straightforward statement, however, lie disputed nuances and contested details, substantial questioning and fractious uncertainty. Moreover, in the last generation or two, opinions have shifted notably.”³⁹ Furthermore, the scholarly debate on a variety of socio-cultural elements in the life of first-century Galilee appears to have ossified into the defence of polar opposite viewpoints, such as those suggested by David Fiensy in what he calls “the quest for the historical Galilee” (or, more precisely in the context of his particular interests, “the quest for the economy of Galilee”):

- 1) Some look at Galilee through the lenses of cultural anthropology and macro-sociology; others look at Galilee through the lenses of archaeology and reject the use of social theories.
- 2) Some maintain that the relations between rural villages and the cities were hostile; others propose that the relationship was one of economic reciprocity and goodwill.
- 3) Some suggest that Galilee was typical of other agrarian societies – with poor peasants who lived in the rural areas, and exploitative wealthy

³⁵ ET, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974). See also especially Martin Hengel, “The Evidence of Hellenistic Civilisation in Jewish Palestine down to the Maccabean Period,” Chapter 12 of *Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1980), 110-126.

³⁶ Willem Smelik, “The Languages of Roman Palestine,” in Catherine Hezser (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 128.

³⁷ Andrew W. Pitts, “Unity and Diversity in Pauline Eschatology,” in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, Pauline Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 79. The mention of Lieberman refers to his monograph: S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century B.C.E. – IV Century C.E.*, 2nd edition (New York: Feldheim, 1965).

³⁸ Michael Owen Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 7.

³⁹ Wise, *Language and Literacy*, 7.

people who lived mostly in the cities; others respond that life was pretty good for everyone in Galilee and that it was an egalitarian society.⁴⁰

Similarly, Brian J. Wright has shown that “There was undoubtedly a spectrum of literacy, and the simple categories of ‘literate’ or ‘illiterate,’ as well as the false dichotomy between ‘oral vs. written,’ no longer suffice in academic circles.”⁴¹ Wright cautions against the methodology used by established works in the field (such as those by William V. Harris⁴² and Catherine Hezser⁴³) which, in Wright’s estimation, yield estimates of literacy levels which are significantly lower than the reality.

One of the recent shifts of opinion referred to in the quote from Wise above relates to the extent to which Greek was known, and used, in Palestine during the time of Jesus. Generally speaking, recent research indicates the plausibility of a higher degree of Hellenistic influence, a higher degree of literacy, and a higher proportion of Greek usage than has previously been supposed.

Part of the impetus for a review of this question seems to have come from Joseph Fitzmyer in a 1970 article, “The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A.D.”:

If asked what was the language commonly spoken in Palestine in the time of Jesus of Nazareth, most people with some acquaintance of that era would almost spontaneously answer Aramaic. To my way of thinking, the defense of this thesis must reckon with the growing mass of evidence that both Hebrew and Greek were being used as well.⁴⁴

Shortly thereafter, the magisterial works of Martin Hengel described in great detail this “growing mass of evidence” which illustrated the surprising extent to which Hellenism, including the Greek language, impacted Second Temple Judaism: *Judentum und Hellenismus, Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2 Jh.s. v. Chr.* (second revised and enlarged edition, 1973; ET *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1974), and *Juden, Griechen und Barbaren, Aspekte der Hellenisierung des Judentums in vorchristlicher Zeit* (1976; ET *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians*, 1980).⁴⁵

A narrower consideration of the question also began to place the focus on the language spoken by Jesus and his disciples. So, for example, in 1989 Stanley E. Porter catalogued a list of scholars who “have argued strongly for the predominant role of Greek in 1st-cent.

⁴⁰ David A. Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy* (Eugene: Cascade Books: 2014), 1-2.

⁴¹ Brian J. Wright, “Ancient Literacy in New Testament Research: Incorporating a Few More Lines of Enquiry,” *Trinity Journal* 36NS (2015), 161.

⁴² William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴³ Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Ancient Palestine*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

⁴⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A.D.,” quoted in G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?* xxv.

⁴⁵ See above, footnote 35, for full bibliographical information.

Palestine and, hence, in the ministry of Jesus.”⁴⁶ In 1993, acknowledging that at that stage he was going “against the general scholarly consensus”, Porter published an article arguing “that Jesus not only had sufficient linguistic competence to converse with others in Greek but also even to teach in Greek during his ministry.”⁴⁷ The reasons Porter advanced for this viewpoint included “the role of Greek as the lingua franca of the Graeco-Roman world; the geographic and epigraphic/literary evidence for Greek in Lower Galilee and Palestine; and Jesus’ use of Greek according to the New Testament.”⁴⁸ The latter includes Jesus’ trial before Pilate, his journey to Tyre (Mark 7:25-30); the request of the Greeks in John 12:20-28 (referred to earlier in this paper), and Jesus’ meeting in Capernaum with the centurion Matt. 8:5-13/Luke 7:2-10).

Most telling of all, perhaps, is the discussion at Caesarea-Philippi (Matt. 16:13-20), and particularly the material in verse 18, *καὶ ἐγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*. If the conversation took place in Greek, it presupposes that the disciples also knew Greek. But *did* it take place in Greek? Of course, those who hold to the “exclusive Aramaic model” find such a notion impossible. For example, Cullman writes that

in the Greek, and so in the gospel text as we have it, the word play here plainly intended is not contained at all. . . . In Greek Simon’s title reads *Petros*, with the masculine ending. We have seen that the [Aramaic] name *Kepha* was reproduced in Greek by *Petros*. But Jesus says that he will build his church upon this *Petra*. The words that should correspond do not really correspond here. In the Aramaic, however, we have both times the same word *Kepha*: “You are *Kepha* and upon this *Kepha* I will build my church.” Thus here the name and the thing are exactly identical. Therefore we must assume that the saying was originally coined in Aramaic.⁴⁹

But the approach advocated by Cullmann, far from heightening the impact of the wordplay by positing an Aramaic original, actually *obliterates* it by making a one-to-one identity between the hypothetical double use of “Kepha.” The rejoinder of Robert Gundry is apposite:

Matthew’s composition of vv. 17-19 in Greek also means that we ought to *overlook* the Aramaic counterpart to Πέτρος – viz., כֶּפֶן – in our interpretation of the passage. Simon was called “Cephas,” to be sure, and this Aramaic form of his nickname would provide a wordplay untarnished by the Greek distinction between Πέτρος (masculine) and πέτρα (feminine). Nevertheless, the two Greek words provide a wordplay that is good enough to *obviate the need for an Aramaic substratum*. They share the same

⁴⁶ Stanley E. Porter, in a chapter division entitled “The Languages of Palestine and the Nature of NT Greek,” in *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 113.

⁴⁷ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 199.

⁴⁸ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 199.

⁴⁹ Oscar Cullman, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London, SCM Press, 1953), 185 (emphases in the original). Similarly, in his article Πέτρος, Κηφᾶς in TDNT, Cullman asserts that “The pun can be fully appreciated only in Aram., which has the same word *kepha* both times, not πέτρος . . . πέτρα as in Gk.” In Gerhard Kittel (ed), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume VI, ΠΕ-Ρ, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 106.

stem. No longer shackled by the need to suppose an Aramaic substratum, we can see that Πέτρος is not the πέτρα on which Jesus will build his church.⁵⁰

Hence it is difficult to imagine this conversation *not* being conducted in Greek, since only in Greek is the force of the important play on the words Πέτρος and πέτρα retained.

Further tacit witness to the multilingual environment of Peter (and the other Galilean disciples) may be provided in John 1:42b, where all four of the names by which he is known in the New Testament are given (Simon, “Bar-Jona” [translated into Greek as ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου – the textual variants Ἰωάννου, Ἰωάνου, Ἰωνά, Ἰωαννᾶ, Ἰωανᾶ, and even the Old Latin and Vulgate “Bariona,” reflect the difficulty of rendering “son of John” into the target language], Cephas, and Peter: Σὺ εἶ Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου, σὺ κληθήσῃ Κηφᾶς, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται Πέτρος). Paul refers to him mostly as Κηφᾶς, the Greek translation of his Aramaic name כְּפָיָה (1 Cor. 1:12, 3:22, 9:5, 15:5; Gal. 1:18, 2:9, 11, 14) and twice as Πέτρος (Gal.2:7-8).

Porter concludes that

the evidence regarding what is known about the use of Greek in ancient Palestine, including the cosmopolitan Hellenistic character of lower Galilee, the epigraphic and literary evidence, including coins, papyri, literary writers, inscriptions and funerary texts, but most of all several significant contexts in the Gospels, all points in one direction: whereas it is not always known how much and on which occasions Jesus spoke Greek, it is virtually certain that he used Greek at various times in his itinerant ministry.... This says nothing about the overall literary competence of Jesus, nor do we know the frequency with which he used the languages at his disposal. But this conclusion at least opens up the possibility of further exploration of this topic, since it must be recognized that this conclusion has a solid foundation and cannot be ruled out on the basis of presupposition alone.⁵¹

In 2000, Porter contributed a chapter entitled “The Functional Distribution of Koine Greek in First Century Palestine” to a larger work on Diglossia.⁵² Here, Porter argues that

The Greek evidence, including the composition of religious texts in Greek in Palestine (1 Esdras, 2 Maccabees, as well as the importance of the LXX), points away from Hebrew’s preservation as a prestige religious language – except in perhaps certain restricted religious linguistic contexts. Greek was, I believe the evidence shows, the prestige language of Palestine in the first century. Although it was perhaps not the

⁵⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 333-334 (emphases added). So too John Nolland: “the wordplay, particularly when based on a name given by Jesus, lacks meaning unless the name points toward the identity of ‘this rock.’ The change of words encourages the linking of αὕτη (‘this’) not to the immediately preceding Πέτρος (‘Peter’), but back via v. 17 to the confession of v. 16. This confession will, however, be ‘this rock’ precisely as Peter’s confession since this is what gives substance to the wordplay.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 669.

⁵¹ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 235; also quoted in Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?* xxiv.

⁵² “Diglossia” is a linguistic term which refers to a situation where two different languages, or two forms or “registers” of the same language, are used by the same speakers in different situations. A contemporary example would be German-speaking Switzerland, where “Schwiizertütsch” is the colloquial vernacular, but “Hoch Deutsch” is used in more “official” settings.

first language for many Palestinian Jews, the evidence for its widespread vernacular use is also undeniable.⁵³

A recent monograph-length treatment of the subject is the 2015 work by G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine*.⁵⁴ The subtitle of his book reflects his thesis “that within the region of Galilee in Roman Palestine in the first century CE, Greek became the *dominant* language spoken among Jews and Gentiles.”⁵⁵ In addition to a detailed consideration of many of the factors pointing towards the widespread use of the Greek language in first-century Palestine, Gleaves also has a chapter on “The Linguistic Proficiency in Greek of Some of the Primary Disciples of Jesus”⁵⁶ – including Peter. Gleaves concludes:

Since the apostles were from Galilee, the Hellenistic culture in which they lived prepared them socially to be messengers to both Gentiles and Jews. The apostles were bilingual. The ability to speak Greek was not just a necessity but a natural form of communication. They appear to have been comfortable in both Hellenistic and Jewish settings as they ministered throughout Palestine, the Decapolis, and Syria.⁵⁷

In a recent article, Scott D. Charlesworth reaches similar conclusions. He begins by arguing (*contra* the view represented by Chancey and Turnage, *inter alia* – see above) that “measuring the use of Greek by calculating the number of inscriptions [in first, second and third century Galilee] is flawed methodology” because “the inscriptional evidence is patchy and unrepresentative (as the very few inscriptions in Aramaic/Hebrew demonstrate).”⁵⁸ As an alternative methodology, Charlesworth urges that

Scholars must first understand the various kinds of ancient bilingualism, then look for indications of these, including (written) Greek literacy. Literary and other evidence, especially factors that might encourage bilingualism, such as the influence of the administrative cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias and the surrounding Hellenistic cities, the state of the Galilean economy, and rural-urban dynamics, can then help to fill in the gaps.⁵⁹

⁵³ Stanley E. Porter, “The Functional Distribution of Koine Greek in First-Century Palestine,” in Stanley E. Porter (ed), *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 193 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000), 58.

⁵⁴ G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

⁵⁵ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?* xxiv. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁶ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?* 80-131.

⁵⁷ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek?* 129-130.

⁵⁸ Scott D. Charlesworth, author’s abstract of “The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-examined,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38.3 (2016); accessed 11 March 2016 <http://jnt.sagepub.com/content/38/3/356.abstract?etoc>. The print copy of the article was not yet available at the time of writing.

⁵⁹ Charlesworth, “Use of Greek.”

Charlesworth concludes that “On the basis of all of the extant evidence, knowledge of Greek was probably quite common, with most people picking it up by force of circumstance rather than through formal instruction.”⁶⁰

The cumulative evidence presented above suggests that the knowledge and use of Greek in early first-century Galilee was extensive, certainly much more so than was generally thought prior to the last quarter or so of the twentieth century. A number of ancillary factors strengthen the picture even further. The growth of Hellenistic Judaism, bolstered by the return of Greek-speaking Jews from the *Diaspora*, is one such factor. According to W. T. Wilson, “we know of some thirty Greek cities in Palestine during this time [the first century C.E.], some (like Gadara) centers of Hellenistic intellectual life, others (like Caesarea Maritima) with substantial Jewish communities.”⁶¹ Wilson further points out that “even in Jerusalem and its environs Hengel concludes that ‘we have to assume an independent Jewish Hellenistic culture,’ consisting of Jewish families who spoke Greek as their primary language representing approximately 10 to 20% of the total population.”⁶² The dispute in the early Jerusalem church between the “Hellenistic Jews” and the “Hebraic Jews” (Acts 6:1) is further evidence of the penetration of Hellenism (including the Greek language) into the Jewish and Christian heartland. In this context, the role of the Septuagint as the Bible of Greek-speaking Jews and Christians cannot be underestimated, and it is noteworthy that the entire New Testament was written in Greek (although the theory of a possible Aramaic original for Matthew’s Gospel continues to receive isolated support).⁶³ At the risk of possible anachronism, by the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135 C.E.), the use of Greek had penetrated to the most traditionalist and patriotic corners of Judaism:

It is remarkable that even among the documents connected with the Bar Kokhba revolt, which emphasized Hebrew as an identity symbol, some of the letters were written in Greek. In one letter requesting that preparations be made for celebrating Succoth, it is said, “This is written in Greek since [no one] was found to write it in Hebrew” (5/6Hev 52). It appears that the writer wanted the letter to be composed in Hebrew, but since this was not possible, he turned to Greek, perhaps because Greek was the language normally used for practical correspondence.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Charlesworth, “Use of Greek.”

⁶¹ W. T. Wilson, “Hellenistic Judaism,” in Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 479.

⁶² Wilson, “Hellenistic Judaism,” 479.

⁶³ See, for example, the discussion in D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 142ff.

⁶⁴ M. Graves, “Languages of Palestine,” in Joel B. Green *et al* (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 487.

Conclusion

The argument offered above suggests that the Greek language had made significant inroads into the life and culture of Galilee by the first century C.E. and that an increasing number of scholarly voices are raised in support of the theory that Jesus and his disciples had knowledge of and some degree of competency in Greek as a means of communication.

What we know about Peter's activities after the Day of Pentecost may reinforce such a conclusion. His prominent role in the earlier chapters of Acts includes some of the first communication of the gospel beyond the boundaries of ethnic Judaism, including (with John) the follow-up mission to newly converted Samaritans (Acts 8:14ff.), and especially the encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:18). After his miraculous deliverance from prison, Peter "left for another [unspecified] place" (Acts 12:17). Apart from his appearance at the Jerusalem Council and his defence of the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-11), we know very little about Peter's activities. The clash between Paul and Peter (Cephas) at Antioch is preceded by the comment that Peter "used to eat with the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:11) before the arrival of Jews from Jerusalem, perhaps indicating that Peter was able to converse with these Gentiles in the *lingua franca*, Greek. Paul's visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:6-10) confirmed a division of labour in which, Paul says, "they [James, Cephas, and John, "pillars" of the Jerusalem church] recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had to the circumcised.... They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised" (Gal 2:7, 9). But this division of labour seems to have been somewhat porous. The fact that Peter appears to have had some degree of influence in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22) may suggest that he had ministered in Corinth at some stage; if the authenticity of 1 Peter is recognised, it follows that he may also have had significant ministry in the heavily Hellenised provinces of "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1), and that he was ministering in Rome when that letter was written, understanding the reference to "Babylon" (1 Pet. 5:13) as a probable cipher for Rome. If 2 Peter is "my second letter to you" (the first being 1 Peter), the implication is that the addressees of the two letters are the same. Persistent early Christian tradition bears witness to Peter's ministry in Rome until his death there in the late 60s. Competency in Greek would be almost mandatory for the extended ministry of Peter in parts of the Roman empire far beyond the boundaries of Judaism.

In his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, James Dunn invites readers to picture the following scenario:

Peter ... became the focal point of unity in the great Church. For *Peter* was *probably in fact and in effect the bridge-man* (pontifex maximus!) *who did more than any to hold together the diversity of first-century Christianity*. James (brother of Jesus) and Paul, the two other most prominent leading figures in first-century Christianity, were too much identified with their respective ‘brands’ of Christianity, at least in the eyes of Christians at the opposite end of this particular spectrum. But Peter, as shown particularly by the Antioch episode in Galatians 2, had both a care to hold firm to his Jewish heritage which Paul lacked, and an openness to the demands of developing Christianity which James lacked. [None of the other disciples fitted this profile]. So it is Peter who becomes the focal point of unity for the whole church – Peter who was probably the most prominent among Jesus’ disciples, Peter who according to early traditions was the first witness of the risen Jesus, Peter who was the leading figure in the earliest days of the new sect in Jerusalem, but Peter who also was concerned for mission, and who as Christianity broadened its outreach and character broadened with it, at the cost to be sure of losing his leading role in Jerusalem, but with the result that he became the most hopeful symbol of unity for that growing Christianity which more and more came to think of itself as the Church Catholic.⁶⁵

It is scarcely possible to imagine that a Peter of such exceptional qualities, dedication, and significance in earliest Christianity would not have used every means at his disposal, including the cultivation of his abilities to communicate in Greek (and even to utilise the principles of Greek rhetoric and to mimic the “Asian” style of Greek in the interests of his readers), to fulfil his apostolic mission. Having lived for extended periods of time in contexts where fluent bi- and even multi-lingualism is the order of the day, often among those who might be disparagingly referred to as the “lower” classes, the argument that an “uneducated” Peter *could* not have written the New Testament letters ascribed to him appears increasingly shaky to me. While the argument presented in this paper may not and indeed cannot result in “certainty” about Peter’s ability to write the kind of Greek found in 2 Peter (with or without the assistance of an amanuensis or amanuenses), it is at the very least plausible.

⁶⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, third edition (London: SCM Press, 2006), 430-431; emphasis in the original.