Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 107 (1) Regular Issue (2026)


# Jesus' Non-Greek Sayings as Semitic Expressions: A Linguistic and Theological Study of *Eli, Eli / Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*

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**https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.3**

**Abstract**

One of the most poignant moments in the Passion narratives is Jesus' cry from the Cross, preserved in transliterated Semitic phrases within the Greek New Testament. These utterances provide a rare and direct glimpse into Jesus' linguistic and cultural context, linking the historical Jesus to the Semitic milieu of first-century Judea. This paper examines the theological and linguistic significance of Jesus' use of a non-Greek, Semitic language at the climactic moment of his suffering. It argues that these expressions function both as a declaration of lament and as an intentional evocation of Jewish Scripture, particularly highlighting Jesus' identification with the suffering righteous. Additionally, this study contributes to scholarly discussions on the multilingual environment of first-century Palestine, the retention of Semitic words in the Greek Gospels, and the Christological dimensions embedded in Jesus' final words.

**Keywords:** Semitic languages, Aramaic, Hebrew, Jesus' sayings, crucifixion, Psalm 22, historical Jesus, New Testament linguistics, lament, Christology

## Introduction

Among the many Semitic (non-Greek) words embedded in the Greek New Testament, Jesus' cry from the Cross, recorded in Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34), stands out as the longest preserved phrase. These utterances—transliterated as *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* in Matthew and *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* in Mark—offer a rare glimpse into the linguistic and cultural context of first-century Judea. While the Gospels are predominantly written in Greek, these

Aramaic expressions suggest that Jesus spoke in a Semitic language, reflecting the multilingual environment of the time.

The transliteration differences between "Eli" and "Eloi" have been subjects of scholarly discussion. Some scholars propose that these variations may result from differences in pronunciation or transliteration practices between Hebrew and Aramaic. For instance, the Hebrew "Eli" (אֵלִי) and the Aramaic "Eloi" (ܐܠܗܝ) both mean "My God," yet their phonetic differences could be attributed to regional linguistic variations or the translational choices of the Gospel writers. Furthermore, the phrase "lama sabachthani" (לָמָה שְׁבַקְתָּנִי) is a direct quotation from Psalm 22:1, underscoring the theological and literary connections between Jesus' words and the Hebrew Scriptures. This intertextual reference highlights the depth of Jesus' identification with the suffering righteous depicted in the Psalms. An additional example appears in **Psalm 69**, where the psalmist laments being overwhelmed by reproach and unjust hostility: “I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched.” This psalm also reflects the experience of the righteous sufferer, a theme Jesus embodies in His passion.

The inclusion of these Semitic expressions in the Greek texts raises important questions about the linguistic landscape of first-century Palestine. The prevalence of Aramaic among Jews in Judea, as well as the influence of Hebrew and Greek, suggests a complex multilingual society where code-switching and transliteration were common. Scholars such as Scott B. Noegel have explored the nuances of language use in ancient texts, providing insights into how wordplay and transliteration practices can inform our understanding of biblical narratives.Scholars such as Scott B. Noegel have explored the nuances of language use in ancient texts, providing insights into how wordplay and transliteration practices can inform our understanding of biblical narratives, which is important because such linguistic features often carry theological, cultural, and literary significance that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The examination of Jesus' cry from the cross offers valuable insights into the linguistic and cultural milieu of first-century Judea. By analyzing the transliteration variations and intertextual references, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the theological significance embedded in these Semitic expressions. This utterance of Jesus, recorded in the final moments of His life on the Cross at the ninth hour (Jewish time, approximately 3:00 p.m.), is remarkable not only for its expression of profound human suffering, as the incarnate *Immanuel* (Matthew 1:23, “God with us”) experiences apparent abandonment, but also as compelling evidence that Jesus spoke in His native Semitic tongue. The cry—*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*—raises important linguistic and theological questions. It suggests a deliberate use of a Semitic language at a pivotal theological moment, linking Jesus’ suffering to the fulfillment of Scripture while simultaneously emphasizing His identification with the righteous sufferer of Psalm 22.

From a linguistic perspective, this utterance presents a complex problem: was Jesus speaking Hebrew, Aramaic, or a combination of the two? The Gospel accounts do not specify the exact language, and the phrase does not correspond verbatim with the Hebrew Tanakh text, which reads *Eli, Eli, lama azavtani* (Psalm 22:1–2). This variation points to transliteration choices, phonetic adaptation for a Greek-reading audience, or the coexistence of Hebrew and Aramaic forms in first-century Judea. Despite extensive scholarship on Jesus’ multilingual environment, few studies have systematically analyzed these translational and phonological discrepancies in relation to theological and Christological implications, revealing a notable research gap in understanding how Jesus’ mother tongue conveys both human suffering and divine fulfillment (Fitzmyer, 2008; Bargil, 2019; Brooke, 2012). Addressing this gap can shed light not only on the historical-linguistic context of Jesus’ utterance but also on its theological significance. The preservation of Semitic expressions in the Greek Gospels may serve multiple purposes: signaling the authenticity of Jesus’ speech, evoking Scriptural resonance, and conveying the

profound depth of His suffering in a culturally and linguistically intelligible way (Borg, 2011; Malbon, 2015).

Several scholars argue that, particularly in Mark, Jesus' cry on the Cross was spoken in Aramaic, His native tongue. Sabda and other commentators affirm that these words were not originally in Greek but in Syriac (Aramaic), reflecting the language of daily life in first-century Judea (Sabda, 2025). This raises important questions for textual criticism, historical linguistics, and Christology, including: (1) Did Jesus utter these words multiple times during the crucifixion? (2) Why does Matthew's record of "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" differ from Mark's "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" (and even variant forms such as "Eil(i)") (Bargil, 2019)? (3) Are these words fundamentally Hebrew, Aramaic, or a hybrid reflecting the linguistic fluidity of the period ? (Fitzmyer, 2008; Brooke, 2012).

Exploring these questions illuminates the intersection of language, theology, and scriptural fulfillment, demonstrating that even transliterated Semitic utterances carry rich theological and Christological meaning within the Gospel narratives.

## Methods

The word study method, or word analysis approach, examines the significance of Jesus' utterances by consulting multiple textual witnesses, including the Hebrew Tanakh, the Septuagint (LXX), Targumic (Aramaic) translations, (Aramaic translation or paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible), the Syriac New Testament, Josephus' historical accounts, and relevant Second Temple and rabbinic literature (Suria & Ming, 2025). This approach allows scholars to uncover both the philological layers of the text and the theological, literary, and rhetorical functions of Jesus' cry from the cross. As Silva (2020) emphasizes, rigorous word studies require attention to semantic range and textual context to avoid etymological fallacies. Similarly, Vanhoozer (2014) and Barr (2006) argue that word analysis must integrate historical, literary, and theological dimensions, situating lexical meaning within the communicative purposes of the author. Building on these methodological insights, this study combines synchronic analysis (the immediate textual and literary context) with diachronic analysis (historical and linguistic development) to explore how Jesus' Semitic words functioned within first-century Judean culture, their reception in the Greek Gospel tradition, and their enduring theological significance. This research proposes a biblical hermeneutic method, which emphasizes grammatical, cultural context, and historical studies (Runtung, Oddeng, 2025; Moru, Budiarti, 2024; Chung, 2024)

## Result and Discussion

From the Greek and Syriac textual traditions, three primary renderings of Jesus' cry emerge: **Eli–Eli, Eloi–Eloi, and Eil(i)–Eil(i)**. This study argues that Jesus likely uttered the phrase only once, but the variations recorded by Matthew and Mark reflect different transliterations and textual transmission practices. Matthew renders the first two words as *Eli, Eli* (Matt. 27:46), while Mark records *Eloi, Eloi* (Mark 15:34), and both Gospels include the form *Eil(i), Eil(i)*.

Supporting evidence comes from the observation that witnesses at the crucifixion perceived the same phonetic utterance, preserved consistently across multiple Greek manuscript traditions (BYZ, STE, TIS, WHO), and similarly in the Syriac Peshitta (ܐܠܗܝ ܐܠܗܝ...). For example, Matthew 27:47 (*VHli, an fwnē…*) and Mark 15:35 (*VHli, an fwnē…*) appear to suggest that bystanders heard a sound resembling the name of the prophet Elijah, reinforcing the hypothesis that these diverse textual forms all reflect a single Semitic utterance. Table 1 summarizes the variations across manuscript traditions.

**Table 1. Variants of Jesus' Cry: Eli, Eli (Eloi, Eloi), Eil(i), Eil(i) Lama Sabachthani**

| Manuscript | Matthew 27:46 | Mark 15:34 |
|---|---|---|
| BYZ | Hli hli lama sabacqani | Elwi elwi lama sabacqani |
| BGT | Hli hli lema sabacqani | Elwi elwi lema sabacqani |
| STE | Hli hli lama. sabacqani | Elwi elwi lamma/ sabacqani |
| TIS | Hlei hlei lema sabacqanei | VElwi> VElwi> lema sabacqani |
| WHO | Elwi elwi lema sabacqani | Elwi elwi lama sabacqani |
| Peshitta | Yntqbv anml Lya Lya Eil, Eil, lamna shabaqtani | Yntqbv anml Yhla Yhla Elahi, Elahi, lamna shabaqtani |

These observations suggest that the different Greek and Syriac renderings are transliteration variants of a single Semitic utterance. Thus, question (1)—whether Jesus repeated the words multiple times—is addressed: the textual evidence indicates a single utterance preserved in multiple linguistic forms. This conclusion provides a foundation for further inquiry into the linguistic identity of the phrase and the theological implications of its Semitic character.

**Comparative Analysis of Jesus' Cry in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac Traditions**

The Peshitta-Syriac (Suryani) preserves Jesus' words at the crucifixion as:

ܐܝܠܝ ܐܝܠܝ ܠܡܐ ܫܒܩܬܢܝ
*ʔēl ʔēl ləmā šəvaqtān*

and

ܐܠܗܝ ܐܠܗܝ ܠܡܢܐ ܫܒܩܬܢܝ
*ʾalāh ʾalāh ləmānā šəvaqtān*

Here, *ʾalāh/*ܐܠܗ refers to "God" in Syriac, with emphatic forms used in certain manuscripts. In Matthew 27:47 and Mark 15:35, the term *Eliah (*ܐܠܝܐ*)* appears, reflecting a vocal resemblance to the prophet Elijah.

Comparative examination with the Septuagint (LXX) and Hebrew Tanakh shows analogous constructions:

- **1 Samuel 1:11:** *Adōnai Kurie Elwai sabawq… / Adonai Kurie Elo(h)ai Sabaoth*
- **Judges 5:5:** *kuriou Elwi tou/to Sina*
- **Habakkuk 1:11:** *Ah*l{a … ë´löhô*
- **Numbers 22:18; Daniel 9:4:** *yh'êl{a/ ´élöhäy - elohai*
- **Psalm 22:1 (Tanakh-Hebrew):** *´ëlî ´ëlî lämâ `ázabTäºnî*
- **Targum-Aramaic:** *eli elahi eli elahi metul ma sabaqtani*

The Greek New Testament presents multiple transliterations of the same utterance: **Ēli (hli) – Ēlei (hlei) – Elōi (elwi) – Eil (**ܐܝܠ**)**. Table 1 provides a word-by-word comparison across Greek manuscripts, Hebrew Tanakh, Targum, and Peshitta to facilitate philological and theological analysis.

Several observations emerge from this comparative study:

1. The first letter of *Eli* varies: eta (h) in most Matthew manuscripts, epsilon (e) in Mark, reflecting minor phonetic discrepancies.
2. WHO manuscripts record *Eloi, Eloi* in both Matthew and Mark, whereas TIS records *Elei*, suggesting textual variation or accentual differences.
3. These discrepancies likely indicate distinct accents (lalia) among Jesus' followers or Gospel writers, consistent with contextual evidence such as Matthew 26:73, where Peter's Galilean accent is noted.

The study underscores that while the Targum (second century CE) is too late to represent Jesus' exact words, the Peshitta provides an earlier Aramaic textual witness to the likely spoken vernacular. This supports the argument that Jesus' utterances reflect his **native** Semitic language, whether Aramaic or a Hebraic-Aramaic mix, while accounting for transliteration practices in the Greek Gospels.

**Linguistic Uncertainty in Jesus' Utterance and the Implications for Aramaic as a Vernacular**

An important consideration in analyzing Jesus' cry on the cross is the high degree of uncertainty regarding the phonetic realization of the theophoric element *El*. In Syriac **(**Table 1B), the independent (absolute) form is written ܐܝܠ (*alap-yod-lamad, eil*), whereas in the compound (construct) state it appears as ܐܠ (*alap-lamad, el*) (Brock, 2011; Healey, 2008). Some references (e.g., Sabda, 2023) incorrectly record the form omitting the yod, which removes the "i" sound and alters the vocalization. Furthermore, discrepancies exist between manuscripts: for instance, *Eli-Eli* appears as ܐܝܠܝ ܐܝܠܝ (*eili-eili*) in some sources but as ܐܝܠ ܐܝܠ (*eil-eil*) in others (Brock, 2011). These variations reflect linguistic uncertainty and challenge claims that Aramaic was necessarily the spoken vernacular of all Jews in first-century Palestine (Buth, 2014).

In the case of the theophoric element *El* in the title *EmmanuĒl* (Matthew 1:23), both the LXX and Greek NT manuscripts consistently record it with the two-letter eta-lambda (*Emmanouhl*), whereas the Peshitta-Syriac renders it with the three-letter ܥܡܡܢܐܝܠ (*ImanuEil*) (Brock, 2011). This aligns with Jesus' utterance *Eil, Eil* at the cross, suggesting that contemporary hearers' perception of *Eli(a)* may have misrepresented the actual phonetic sound.

A careful examination of Matthew's version shows that the first three words—*Eli, Eli, lama*—correspond directly to Hebrew vocabulary as found in Psalm 22:1–2 (Tanakh-Hebrew). The fourth word, *sabachtani*, has no exact match in the Hebrew Tanakh, which records *azavtani* with equivalent meaning. In Mark's version, only *lama* is clearly Hebrew; the words *Eloi, Eloi* have no direct Hebrew parallel (France, 2007; Nolland, 2005; May, 2025). Despite this, some scholars—including Herlianto (2022)—have labeled these words as Aramaic without rigorously testing the claim.

The Targum (Aramaic) of Psalm 22:1 reads: *"Eli Elahi, Eli Elahi metul ma shabaqthani"* [yntqbv hm lwjm yhla yla yhla yla], which differs significantly from both Matthew and Mark. The Targum preserves *shabaqthani* but substitutes *Eli Elahi* for *Eli, Eli* and *metul ma* for *lama*. Although semantically similar, the forms are linguistically distinct, highlighting that *Eli, Eli* is not standard Aramaic vocabulary (Kutsko, 2000). Similarly, the Peshitta-Syriac translates *lama* as *lamna*, again differing from the Greek. Only *shabaqtani* aligns precisely, demonstrating that the Syriac version reflects a translation of the Greek NT rather than a direct record of Jesus' spoken words. These textual and linguistic variations underscore the need for cautious hermeneutics in evaluating Jesus' language at the cross. While Aramaic elements are present, neither the Targum nor the Peshitta offers an exact replication of Jesus' utterance, complicating

assertions about the everyday spoken language of first-century Jews and the phonetic reality of the phrase “Eli, Eli” (Brock, 2011; Buth, 2014; Kutsko, 2000).

**The Term *El* in Hebrew and Aramaic Contexts**

With confirmation from the crucifixion narratives that Jesus’ cry was addressed to *Theos* (God) and supported by the testimony of witnesses (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34), it is evident that Jesus’ utterance was directed to *El*. The next question concerns whether *El* is properly a Hebrew, Aramaic, or cross-linguistic term.

The term *El* occurs hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, and its usage in the Targums (Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible) reveals notable variation and contextual nuance (Buth, 2014; Kutsko, 2000; Brock, 2011). Examples include:

1. **´El `Elyôn (“El the Most High”)** – Genesis 14:18–19, 20, 22; sometimes appearing as *Elaha* in Psalms (Psalm 78:35).
2. **´El Šadday (“El Almighty”)** – Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Exodus 6:3. The designation ´El Rō´î sometimes appears as *Elaha* (Genesis 16:13).
3. **´El Qannä´ (“El the Jealous One”)** – Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; Joshua 24:19. Variations include *El Elaha* (Deuteronomy 6:15) and *Elah/Alah* (Nahum 1:2).
4. **´El Hayyây (“El of my life”)** – Psalm 42:8 [9].
5. **Special designations of place or covenantal significance** – *El Bethel* (Genesis 35:7); *Elaha Bethel* (Genesis 31:13); *El Elohim YHWH* sometimes reduced to *El* alone (Joshua 22:22).

In addition, some passages translate *El* as *Elah/Alah* (Genesis 21:33; Numbers 16:22; 27:16; Isaiah 12:2; 42:5; Malachi 2:10), and frequently the term appears with the definite article or as *Elaha*, corresponding to *Elohim*.

These patterns suggest that the general Aramaic term for God is *Elah*, whereas *El* functions as a special, emphatic designation (Brock, 2011; Buth, 2014). This distinction becomes particularly important when expressing possession: *Eli* (“my El”) conveys an intimate or personal address. In contrast, the typical Aramaic formula for possession uses *Elahi* (“my God”), reflecting the broader linguistic norm (Fitzmyer, 2008; Muraoka, 2003).

A closer look at *Eli* in the Hebrew Bible and Targum reveals the following:

- **Three occurrences** retain *Eli* but include an explanatory expansion to *Elahi*, e.g., Psalm 22:2 (*Eli Elahi, Eli Elahi*) and Psalm 22:11.
- **Five occurrences** appear solely as *Elahi* (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 89:27; 102:25; 118:28; 140:7).
- **Two occurrences** appear in the non-possessive form *Elaha* (Psalm 18:3; 68:25).
- **Two occurrences** do not preserve the term (*Psalm 63:2; Isaiah 44:17*).

This distribution supports the interpretation that *El* in Jesus’ cry is not merely a generic term for God but functions as a special emphatic address, reflecting both Hebrew and Aramaic linguistic sensibilities (Buth, 2014; Fitzmyer, 2008).

**Analysis of the Term *Eloi* / *Elōi* in Mark 15:34 and Its Hebrew Origins**

Table 2 presents a comparative study of the term *Eli* (“my El”) in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures and its rendering in the Targum (Aramaic).

| OT-Hebrew Scripture | Targum (Aramaic) |
|---|---|
| Eli, Eli (Psalm 22:2) | Eli Elahi, Eli Elahi |
| Eli (Psalm 22:11) | Eli with the re-explanation Elahi |
| Eli (Exodus 15:2; Psalms 89:27; 102:25; 118:28; 140:7) | Elahi |
| Eli (Psalm 18:3; 68:25) | Elaha (non-possessive) |
| Eli (Psalm 63:2; Isaiah 44:17) | None |

From these data, it is evident that the predominant term for deity in Aramaic is *Elah*, with the possessive form *Elahi* (Daniel 4:5; 6:23). This form occurs extensively in the Targums to render Hebrew *my Elohim*. Consequently, *Eli* can confidently be considered a Hebrew, rather than Aramaic, term (Brock, 2011; Fitzmyer, 2008).

The definite article "ha-" in Hebrew is also instructive: occurrences of *haEl* (e.g., Genesis 31:13; Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 18:30-33; Isaiah 42:5) are generally transcribed as *Elaha* in the Targums, suggesting that adding the suffix "a" is the standard Aramaic method to express "the God." Therefore, treating *El* as an Aramaic term is unsupported by linguistic evidence (Buth, 2014; Kutsko, 2000). In the Hebrew Bible, the term *Elohim* appears in the plural form but functions grammatically as singular when referring to the one true God. Its singular form, *Eloah*, appears approximately 50 times. To express the possessive "my" in Hebrew, the suffix *-i* is added, yielding *Elohai* (yh'êl{a/ hw"åhy; Numbers 22:18). The Septuagint (LXX) renders this as ***Elōai*** (e.g., 1 Samuel 1:11, Judges 5:5), though it follows the construct state of *Elohim* rather than the true possessive (Hamp, 2005; Muraoka, 2003).

Greek transliteration further clarifies the linguistic pathway: Greek lacks the /h/ sound in the middle or end of words, so ***Elōhi*** (Hebrew: my Eloah) would naturally be rendered as ***Elōi*** (Elwi) rather than *Elai* if transliterated from Aramaic. The Aramaic Peshitta of Mark 15:34 also translates *my God* as *Elahi*, not *Eloi*, supporting the conclusion that *Eloi* derives from Hebrew *Elōhi* rather than Aramaic *Elah* (Brock, 2011; Fitzmyer, 2008). Textual evidence further supports this hypothesis: witnesses under the cross reportedly heard Jesus calling *Eliyah*, aligning with Matthew 27:46. Mark's rendition as *Eloi* likely reflects a Greek scribal adjustment, with the omega vowel "ō" added for phonetic emphasis, whereas the Tischendorf manuscript uses "e" (*Elei*) in Matthew. This indicates both scribal interpretation and the challenge of accurately capturing Semitic speech in Greek letters (Hamp, 2005; Fitzmyer, 2008).

Thus, the analysis strongly suggests that *Eloi* (Mark 15:34) reflects Hebrew origin (***Elōhi***, my Eloah), not Aramaic, and that the exclamatory form in Greek preserves Jesus' original utterance in a manner intelligible to Greek-speaking readers.

**Analysis of the Terms *Lama – Lamma – Lema – Lima* and *Sabachtani* in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46**

***1. Lama / Lamma / Lema / Lima***

The Greek New Testament manuscripts for Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 display variations such as *lima, lama, lamma,* and *lema* (see Table 1), all generally conveying the meaning "why" or "what."

| Manuscript | BYZ | STE | TIS | WHO | GNT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Matthew | lima | lama | lema | lema | lema |
| Mark | lima | lamma | lema | lama | lema |

The Hebrew root for "what/why" is *hml* (lamed-mem-he), which appears approximately 179 times across Proto-Hebrew, Standard Biblical Hebrew, and later Hebrew texts. Vocalization variants include *lammah* (hM'l'ä, 137 times), *lamah* (hm'Ûl', 27 times), *lommah* (hM'l', 10 times), *lameh* (3 times), and *lemah* (2 times). The doubling of the *m* (dagesh) in *lammah* reflects Hebrew phonological development and regional accents (Friedman, 2010; Buth, 2014).

In Aramaic Targums, the root lam-mem-alef appears 132 times outside the Apocrypha, predominantly as *lemma* (98 times) or *lama* (11 times), with some instances unvocalized (23 times). The root lam-mem-he (hml) appears unvocalized 28 times, and sometimes the Aramaic *`al-mâ* mirrors the Hebrew (e.g., Jeremiah 8:14). In Psalm 22:2 and 49:6, the Targum renders the phrase with *metul-mah* ("because-what") rather than *lemma* (Brock, 2011; Fitzmyer, 2008).

The Peshitta (Syriac NT) uses *lamna* (anml-anml) for Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, occurring about 50 times with the same meaning. Greek transliteration conventions account for these variations: the lack of an /h/ sound at word ends results in *lamah* and *lama* both appearing as *λαμα* (lama), and *lemah* as *λεμα* (lema). Therefore, the usage in Matthew and Mark may reflect either Hebrew or Aramaic vocabulary, with a strong argument for Hebrew based on manuscript evidence and Church Fathers' testimony that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew (Hamp, 2005; Friedman, 2010).

### *2. Sabachtani / Shabaqthani*

The Greek *sabacqani* in Mark and Matthew corresponds to Hebrew *shabaqthani* (ynIT'q.b;v) in the HNT and Peshitta. The Greek letter *c* often represents Hebrew *k* (khaf) or *q* (qoph), as seen in examples like *Elkana* (hn"q'l.a) or *Bakcir* (yQIßBu) (Hamp, 2005).

The Hebrew root *shabaq* (qbv) meaning "to leave" appears in four OT passages (Daniel 2:44; 4:12, 20; Ezra 6:7) and as part of proper names (Genesis 25:2; 1 Chronicles 25:4). Its frequent occurrence in the Hebrew Tanakh (13 times) as *zab* (bz:[') confirms its Semitic provenance (Buth, 2014; Hamp, 2005).

By the time of Jesus, *shabaq* had been fully assimilated into Hebrew (Mishnaic/Hebrew) as evidenced by its use alongside Hebrew grammar in the Mishnah and Jerusalem Talmud (e.g., Yerushalmi Bava Metsia 2:8). The Mishnah employs distinctly Hebrew forms, including *he-* (definite article) and *shai* (that), which differ from Aramaic equivalents (*aleph*, *di*). Thus, while *shabaq* originated in Aramaic, by the first century CE it was integrated into spoken Hebrew (Fitzmyer, 2008; Brock, 2011). The suffix *-ta-ni* in *shabaqta-ni* conforms to Biblical Hebrew grammar: *-ta* indicates second-person singular ("you") and *-ni* marks the first-person object ("me"), rendering the full meaning "you have left me" (Hamp, 2005).

## Conclusion

The terms *lama, lamma, lema,* and *lima* are most plausibly of Hebrew origin, deriving from the Hebrew root *hml* and reflecting vocalization practices consistent with the Hebrew language of the first century. Similarly, the term *shabaqthani* represents a Hebrew assimilation of an originally Aramaic root, fully integrated into Mishnaic Hebrew by the time of Jesus, with grammatical structures and morphological patterns consistent with Biblical Hebrew. The Greek transliterations found in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 reflect phonetic adaptation rather than Aramaic influence, supporting a Hebrew linguistic context for Jesus' utterances on the cross. The Semitic phrase *"Eli, Eli / Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani"* emerges as a direct, emotional, and historically authentic cry. It illustrates how the Gospels preserve the Semitic character of Jesus' speech even within Greek narrative frameworks. Its careful preservation serves theological, linguistic, and devotional purposes, connecting the human experience of Jesus with the divine plan of redemptive suffering.

Analysis of the biblical data demonstrates that Jesus' words in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 are verifiably Hebrew, challenging the pro-Aramaic claim, which often relies on assumptions derived from concordances without rigorous textual examination. This textual and linguistic evidence underscores that the utterance reflects a genuine Hebrew expression, capturing both the immediacy of Jesus' anguish and the broader theological significance of the crucifixion narrative. A study such as this one has limitations since at times there is disagreement—linguists, theologians, and historians often interpret the same data differently. In addition Biblical Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew, plus familiarity with textual criticism, Second Temple Judaism, and New Testament theology is not always at the needed levels by the scholar investigating the theme. Most critically however, only two Gospel occurrences exist and there are in fact no external Aramaic manuscripts that preserve the phrases used directly. This means there is reliance on indirect evidence (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls, Targums, and other Semitic parallels) which can only approximate meaning.

***Acknowledgement***

*I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God Almighty, whose wisdom and guidance have sustained me throughout the process of writing this study. This research would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. My sincere thanks to STT Kadesi Yogyakarta for his theological insight, academic mentorship, and unwavering support. I am also indebted to the lecturers and staff of the theology department for providing a stimulating academic environment and valuable resources. Special appreciation is extended to my colleagues and fellow researchers in biblical linguistics and Semitic studies, whose constructive discussions enriched this work. I am also thankful for access to key resources, including the Hebrew Tanakh, the Septuagint (LXX), the Targumim, and the Syriac New Testament, which were instrumental in conducting this comparative linguistic and theological study. Finally, we dedicate this work to all students and scholars seeking to understand the words of Jesus in their original Semitic context, with the hope that this study may deepen their faith and appreciation of the Scriptures.*

**Conflict of Interest**
There is no conflict of interest to declare

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***Conflict of Interest Statement**: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*