

Christian Palestinian Aramaic Encoding

Unicode Technical Note

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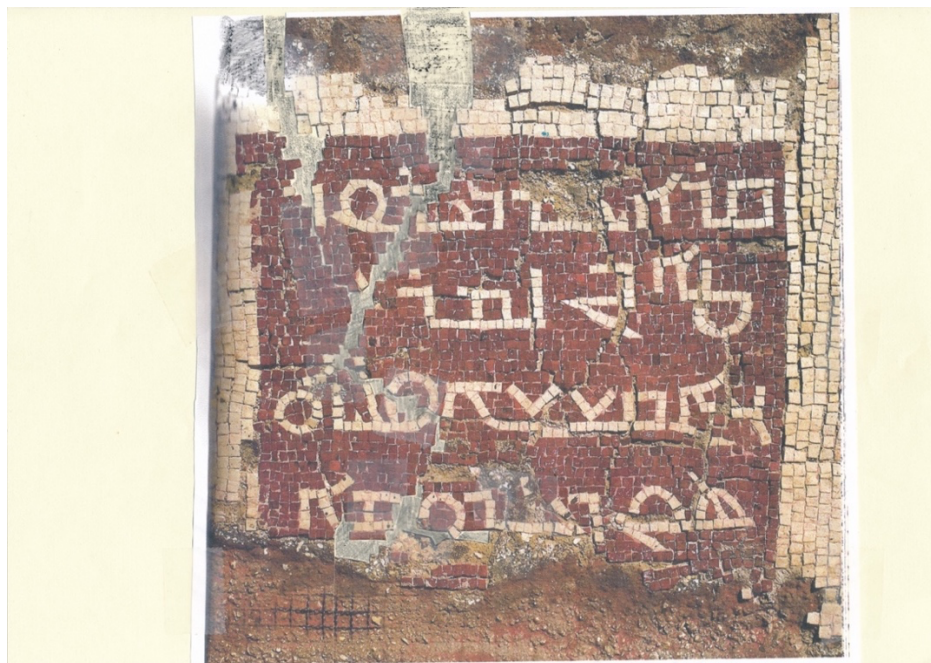
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I. Background

Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA), with its specific alphabet and writing, is no longer spoken today. But it is still considered to be a highly important linguistic ancestor. When the University of Bergen announced the start of the Erasmus+ Program *Surayt-Aramaic Online Project (2017-2020)*, it used this 6th century CE CPA inscription to illustrate the history of the living Surayt language:¹



A Christian Palestinian Aramaic inscription from the Gaeianos Church in 'Uyun Musa. Inside the museum on Mount Nebo, Jordan. © DR; author: Humbert; image restored by Couson & Desreumaux.

Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) is “the Palestinian Aramaic dialect of Judea and Sinai. This dialect was most prevalent between the fifth and eighth centuries, but it continued to serve as a liturgical language for the Christian Melkite community into the thirteenth century” (Müller-Kessler, 2016, 385). In its original form, it shares many characteristics with Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (JPA) and the classical period of Samaritan Aramaic (SA). During this period, the script has remained stable (Morgenstern, 2011, 628-629). It was used by Chalcedonian Christians, particularly in Roman and Byzantine Palestine and in Transjordanian Arabia. Earlier uses are attested, for example, in four passages by Eusebius in *Syriac Martyrs of Palestine* II.13² and *Church History* I.13.5, I.13.10 (ܠܘܟܝܢ ܠܥܠܡܐ) and I.13.20.³ In all instances, Syriac uses 'rmy', ܠܘܟܝܢ (Aramaic), to refer to an oral and written Christian language. Several CPA inscriptions have been found, particularly in Palestine and Jordan, which contain magical texts (Puech, 2001; Abudraham, 2017). In Edfou, southern Egypt, a wooden tablet with CPA underwritten text dating from around 600 was found (Rutschowskaya & Desreumaux, 1992; Desreumaux, 1996). It is currently in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and there is more CPA text to be deciphered on it. Several CPA texts and materials have not been edited, such as the CPA palimpsests at the Saint-Catherine Monastery (Egypt) or at the Cambridge Library (UK).

¹ See <https://www.uib.no/en/news/80246/saving-aramaic-language>; all hyperlinks have been last accessed on the 20.10.23.

² This passage mentions translations done from Greek to Aramaic by the church reader Procopius of Scythopolis who died in 303 CE (signaled by Telfer, 1955, 35, note 43; see the Syriac edition by W. Cureton, 1861, p. 3).

³ Syriac edition by W. Wright and N. McLean, 1898, p. 52, 53 and 56. These passages mention archives and letters written in ܠܘܟܝܢ (Aramaic) found and read by Eusebius in Edessa.

Thanks to the patient and impressive work of scholars from the nineteenth century to the present day, numerous CPA texts have been published: for example, volumes of the Hebrew Bible in CPA (tenth to thirteenth centuries), or the New Testament (NT) in CPA (fifth to the eighth centuries), published by Müller-Kessler & Sokoloff in 1997 and 1998, or the *Codex Sinaiticus Zosimi Rescriptus* (Desreumaux, 1997). This material is of invaluable historical importance, providing a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which ancient Christian communities spoke and wrote at the intersection of different languages and religious cultures. The study of the CPA is an interdisciplinary field, studied equally by scholars in Jewish and Christian studies, including developments in early Islamic studies (Pahlitzsch, 2019). CPA texts have also been found in the Cairo Genizah, including NT passages in this medieval Jewish library (see Sokoloff and Yahalom, 1979). Unfortunately, CPA texts are in danger of being lost to future generations of scholars, especially since there is a CPA font that is compatible with the highest publishing and Unicode standards. For example, the two NT volumes published in 1998 are out of print. Brill has expressed interest in a new online scholarly edition of the CPA NT volumes (CCPA IIA and CCPA IIB). The first step, however, is the creation of a CPA font compatible with Unicode guidelines. Alain J. Desreumaux is working on the edition of a new and important Sinai CPA palimpsest manuscript and two medieval Gospel lectionaries. Christa Müller-Kessler is working on a Cambridge Joshua manuscript. Laurent Capron is studying newly discovered manuscripts of the Fathers of the Desert. There is no doubt that the CPA dialect and its spread in late antiquity could be of interest to scholars in the fields of classical studies and multilingualism.

At present, scholars are making do as best they can with the lack of a CPA font that is compatible with the Unicode guidelines. The *Editio Critica Maior of the Gospel of Mark* (2021) has chosen to transcribe CPA words in Syriac – as scholars have done since the nineteenth century or later (Land, 1875; Lewis, 1897; Lewis & Gibson, 1899; Müller-Kessler, 2023). Emile Puech transcribed CPA in Hebrew letters (Puech, 2001), while Christa Müller-Kessler transliterated it in a 2014 article, as did Mark Geller in Clivaz’s SNSF MARK16 online project (2023)⁴, or Alain Desreumaux in a 2023 article. We would like to thank the public open repository Nakala of CNRS (Huma-Num, France), which alerted us to the absence of an ISO 639-3 code for CPA at the end of 2022. The [ISO 639-3 list](#) includes ten different types of Aramaic, but no Christian Palestinian Aramaic. The ISO 639-3 codes combining c/p/a are all already assigned, and we have reserved the code ‘axp’ for Christian Palestinian Aramaic.⁵

In 1998, CPA was briefly mentioned in the Unicode application file for Syriac [ISO/IEC 10646, L2/98-0508](#), by Paul Nelson, George Anton Kiraz, and Sargon Hasso, who considered CPA to be a “non-Syriac language that employs Syriac type styles” (5). Based on this file, we have prepared this Unicode Technical Note to present how to adapt the Unicode Syriac characters for CPA, with its own script and its own ISO 639-9 code. We propose a list of 40 CPA characters, including all necessary punctuation marks. After careful consideration, there is no need to create new Unicode characters for CPA, which can be based on the Syriac script and use some Unicode punctuation marks and symbols.

⁴ <https://mr-mark16.sib.swiss/manuscript/CSRPC>.

⁵ We have chosen ‘axp’ because the Greek letter χ , ancestor of ‘x’, is transcribed as *ch* in several modern languages, and is included in the word “Christian”. The code follows the French order of name of the CPA: “araméen christo-palestinien”. The new ISO 639-9 codes are scheduled to be confirmed and implemented in the current year of 2024.

II. Script Name (see Section I)

The most important user group of CPA is the scholarly community in all relevant fields. The name “Christian Palestinian Aramaic” (CPA) is well established in the scholarly community, as shown in Section I. French-speaking scholars use the name “araméen christo-palestinien” (see, for example, Capron 2020). As explained in Section I, CPA is close to “Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (JPA) and the classical period of Samaritan Aramaic (SA)” (Morgenstern, 2011, 628) and designated as ܐܪܡܝܝܬܐ (Aramaic) in the Syriac language itself (Syriac Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* II.1 and *Church History* I.13.5, I.13.10 and I.13.20). It has its own letters, words, and dictionary (Sokoloff, 2014).

III. Structure

- Like other Semitic languages, CPA is written from right to left.
- Aramaic letter names have been chosen in the character repertoire (Table 1).
- N°1-24: CPA has an alphabet of 23 letters.
 - CPA has one own letter, borrowed from Greek, Pi, which already exists in the Syriac Unicode script (U+0727).
 - We have added a medieval Daleth (n°4) to allow writing medieval texts.
 - As in Syriac the graphism of the final Kaph and final Nun changes at the end of a word (n° 12 and 15).
- N°25-34: CPA has several types of punctuation (Kokowzoff, 1906), including two types of overdots (U+0307 and U+0308) and eight punctuation marks (U+0701, U+0703, U+2056, U+205D, U+2E30, U+2055, U+0700, U+070D).
 - The CPA dot above a letter (n° 25) can have several meanings, including feminine, depending on the manuscript.
 - The various punctuation marks all indicate a stop and vary from time to time; we have included the medieval CPA stop (n° 30), CPA circle (n° 31) and CPA star (n° 32).
- N°35-40: Four critical edition marks and two characters to force or prevent ligatures are needed, all of which are already available. The system of ligatures can be based on that one of the Syriac script (see Table 2).

IV. Character Repertoire

We are currently working with [Forme.ch](https://forme.ch) to create a new CPA font that meets the best standards expected for digital scientific editing. New CPA letters, punctuation marks and symbols are being prepared by Alain J. Desreumaux and Tim Meylan in a project led by Claire Clivaz in collaboration with Jeremy Formaz ([Forme.ch](https://forme.ch)). The svg files are available on the open public repository Nakala: <https://doi.org/10.34847/nkl.05d0mfz9>. The repertoire below presents letters and examples using the CPA Genizah ML font under the [OFL license](https://ofl.org/). The CPA Genizah ML letters were drawn by Alain J. Desreumaux in the nineties and later vectorized by Alain Hurtig with the support of the laboratory *Orient & Méditerranée* (CNRS). The CPA Genizah ML OFL license includes Alain Hurtig, George Kiraz, Paul Nelson, and Michael Langlois. When the new CPA font is ready and available on GitHub, we will update this Unicode Technical Note accordingly.

Table 1. Character Repertoire

	Generic	Unicode	Function	Name in CPA font	Example ⁶
1	Ⲁ	U + 0710	ʾ	CPA ALAPH	Ⲁⲟⲙⲓⲟ
2	Ⲃ	U + 0712	B	CPA BETH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛ
3	Ⲅ	U + 0713	G	CPA GAMAL	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁ
4	Ⲇ	U + 0715	D (medieval)	CPA DALATH-M	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛ
5	Ⲉ	U + 0716	D	CPA DALATH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛ
6	Ⲋ	U + 0717	H	CPA HE	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁ
7	Ⲍ	U + 0718	W	CPA WAW	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
8	Ⲏ	U + 0719	Z	CPA ZAIN	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁ
9	Ⲑ	U + 071A	Ḥ	CPA HETH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
10	Ⲓ	U + 071B	Ṭ	CPA TETH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁ
11	Ⲕ	U + 071D	I	CPA YUDH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
12	Ⲗ Ⲙ	U + 071F	K K (final)	CPA KAPH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁ
13	Ⲛ	U + 0720	L	CPA LAMADH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
14	Ⲝ	U + 0721	M	CPA MIM	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
15	Ⲟ Ⲡ	U + 0722	N N (final)	CPA NUN	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
16	Ⲣ	U + 0723	S	CPA SEMKATH	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
17	Ⲥ	U + 0725	^c (guttural sound)	CPA AYIN	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
18	ⲧ	U + 0726	P or Ph	CPA PE	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
19	ⲩ	U + 0727	P	CPA PI	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
20	ⲫ	U + 0728	Ṣ	CPA SADHE	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
21	ⲭ	U + 0729	Q	CPA QOF	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ
22	ⲯ	U + 072A	R	CPA RESH.	Ⲁⲛⲟⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛⲁⲛ

⁶ Examples come from Capron 2010, <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02552366>.

23	ש	U + 072B	Š	CPA SHIN	
24	ט	U + 072C	T	CPA TAW	
25	◌̇	U + 0307	Dot over a letter (diverse meanings)	CPA SUPRALINEAR DOT	
26	◌̈	U + 0308	Doble dot over a letter (plural)	CPA SEYAME	
27	·	U + 0701	Punctuation, half stop	CPA SUPRALINEAR PERIOD	
28	:	U + 0703	Punctuation, half or final stop	CPA SUK PASUQ	
29	∴	U + 2056	Punctuation, half or final stop	CPA STOP	
30	∴	U + 205D	Punctuation, half or final stop (medieval)	CPA STOP-M	
31	◉	U + 2E30	Punctuation, half or final stop (medieval)	CPA CIRCLE	
32	✱	U + 2055	Punctuation, end of title, final stop (medieval)	CPA STAR	
33	❖	U + 0700	Punctuation, end of paragraph	CPA END OF PARAGRAPH	
34	‡	U + 070D	Punctuation, end of paragraph	CPA HARKLEAN ASTERISCUS	
35	⏏	U+ 200C	Block a positional form	CPA ZERO WIDTH NON- JOINER	
36	⏎	U+ 200D	Trigger a positional form	CPA ZERO WIDTH JOINER	
37	]	U + 005D	Editing conjecture (open)	CPA RIGHT SQUARE BRACKET	
38	[	U + 005B	Editing conjecture (close)	CPA LEFT SQUARE BRACKET	
39	⏏	U+ 2E23	Uncertain letter (open)	CPA TOP RIGHT HALF BRACKET	
40	⏏	U+ 2E22	Uncertain letter (close)	CPA TOP LEFT HALF BRACKET	

V. Properties

V.1 General Category and Other Properties: see existing descriptions.

V.2 Ligatures

A CPA font can use the ligature system of the Syriac Classical script. We join below a complete table with the ligatures needed.

Table 2. Ligatures

	isolée	finale	médiane	initiale
1	ܘ	ܘܐ	ܘܒܘܒ ܘܐ	ܘܒܘܐ
2	ܚ	ܚܘܐ	ܚܘܒܘܐ	ܚܘܐ
3	ܥ	ܥܘܐ	ܥܘܒܘܐ	ܥܘܐ
5	ܦ	ܦܘܐ	ܦܘܒܘܐ	ܦܘܐ
4	ܩ	ܩܘܐ	ܩܘܒܘܐ	ܩܘܐ
6	ܠ	ܠܘܐ	ܠܘܒܘܐ	ܠܘܐ
7	ܟ	ܟܘܐ	ܟܘܒܘܐ	ܟܘܐ
8	ܠ	ܠܘܐ	ܠܘܒܘܐ ܠ	ܠܘܐ

9	H	N	NT	NTNT	NTN
			⌘		
10	T	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
11	Y	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
12	K	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
13	L	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
14	M	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
15	N	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		
16	S	U	UT	UTUT	UTU
			⌘		

17	С	А	АП	ПАП	ПА
18	Ф	Ф	ФП	ПФП	ПФ
19	Р	Р	РП	ПРП	ПР
20	С	С	СП	ПСП	ПС
21	Р	Р	РП	ПРП	ПР
22	Р	і	іП	ПіП	Пі
23	С	У	УП	ПУП	ПУ
24	Т	Д	ДП	ПДП	ПД

V.3 Line Breaking Information

- Do the major languages using the script separate words using U+0020 SPACE or some other character? Using U+0020 SPACE.
- Can line breaks occur before a spacing character? Yes.
- If line breaks are usually only allowed as word boundaries, is there a special mode (“hyphenation”) that allows for line breaks within words at specific positions with the insertion of a marker that this mode was used? No.
- Can line breaks occur within numbers? Yes.
- No line breaks before half stop, full stop, or paragraph separator, or before closing parenthesis or brackets.

VI. Collation

The expected sorting order of the characters in the script, as shown in Table 1, in the numerical order, and in the list of general category properties.

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IX. Examples

Each proposed character has been illustrated in the table in Section IV, with a word taken from a 2020 article by Laurent Capron. We have combined the examples with the French translation of folio 1r^a in the “Life of Abraham of Qidun” (ms. 12746, Taylor-Schechter Collection, Capron 2010, 234).⁷

	fol. 1 r ^a
1. Et il semblait l’avoir transpercée et il se mit à crier d’une voix forte	<p>יְבִי [שׁ] מִלְּמִסָּה 1 מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי</p>
5. et dit : « Hâtez-vous, mes amis, hâtez-vous, entrez vite	<p>׃ מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי 5 מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי</p>
10. et étranglez-le ». Le bienheureux lui dit alors : « Toutes les nations m’ont encerclé,	<p>׃ מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי 10 מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי ׃ מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי</p>
15. et par le nom du Seigneur, je les ai pourchassées ».	<p>מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי 15 ׃ מִלְּמִסָּה יְבִי</p>

⁷ Alignment by Claire Clivaz.

As an example of an English CPA translation, we provide below ten lines of a CPA amulet edited and translated in a 2017 article by Ohad Abudraham (99):

1. [	in the n]ame of [the angel] <i>Shamshie</i> [I]	[בצו]ם [הא]ל [שמש]יה [א]ת [ה]א[ל]ה	] .1
2. [	and in the name of] the great angel ' <i>Eliel</i>	[ומצו]ם "א[ל]ה [ג]דו[ל]ת [ג]בו[ר]ת [ג]בו[ר]ת [ג]בו[ר]ת	] .2
3. [	] that the lions destroyed/lurked	[ש]ם [ה]ליו[נ]ים [ה]ש[ח]טו[ה]ם [ו]ל[ק]חוּ	] .3
4. [	] who sits on the waves [of]	[ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .4
5. [the sea	and in] the [name of the] ang[el] ' <i>Anael</i>	[ומצו]ם [ה]א[ל]ה [א]נא[ל] [א]ת [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .5
6. [	of the ea]rth and of the sea, who stan[ds]	[ע]ל [ה]א[ר]ץ [ו]הַיָּם [ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .6
7. [	of the ea]rth and of the [sea] from belo[w?]	[ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם [ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .7
8. [	this amulet (was prepared) for] the name of <i>Demetris</i>	[ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם [ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .8
9. [son of <i>Supara</i> , in order to save him]	from these nets of theirs	[ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם [ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .9
10. [	] and no one will hate h[im]	[ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם [ו]י[ש]ב [ע]ל [ג]לג[ו]ל [ה]יָם [ו]הַיָּם	] .10