

“Πόθεν οὖν ἡ τοσαύτη διαφωνία;”

Greek patristic authors discussing linguistic origin, diversity, change and kinship*

1. Introduction

Horried by the depravity of his time, the Greek orator and theologian John Chrysostom (ca. 349-407) did not cease to stress the ethical autonomy of man. He was convinced that he could contribute to counteracting evil by appealing to his audience’s moral awareness. It is within this context that he broaches the topic of linguistic diversity:

Πόθεν οὖν ἡ τοσαύτη διαφωνία; Ἀπὸ τῆς ῥαθυμίας τῶν λαβόντων τὸ δῶρον· ἅπερ ἀμφοτέρω τῷ εἰρήκαμεν, καὶ διὰ τῆς ὁμοφωνίας τὴν τοῦ Δεσπότου φιλανθρωπίαν δεικνύντες, καὶ διὰ τῆς διαφωνίας τὴν ἀγνωμοσύνην τῶν οἰκετῶν. Ὁ μὲν γὰρ καὶ προειδὼς, ὅτι ἀπολοῦμεν τὸ δῶρον, ὅμως ἔδωκεν· οἱ δὲ ἐμπιστευθέντες κακοὶ περὶ τὴν παρακαταθήκην ἐγένοντο. Εἷς μὲν οὖν ἀπολογίας οὗτος ὁ τρόπος, ὅτι οὐχ ὁ Θεὸς ἐξέβαλε τῆς δωρεᾶς, ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς ἀπώλεσαμεν τὰ δοθέντα [...]. (*De diabolo tentatore*, I, 2)

Where does this enormous phonic diversity come from? The cause is the rashness of the men who received the gift. We have named both elements: on the one hand, we showed the Lord’s philanthropy by means of the community of language, and on the other, the folly of the servants by means of linguistic diversity. For even though He anticipated that we would lose the gift, He nevertheless gave it, but the men to whom He entrusted it, handled the deposit perniciously. Thus, that’s just one way of defending, that God did not deprive us from the gift, but that we lost what was given.¹

[22] It is interesting to see that John here explains linguistic diversity in moral terms. Do other Greek patristic authors offer similar explanations or are there dissenting voices? Are they interested in the origin, change and kinship of language(s) and, if so, why? And how do they account for these phenomena?

1.1. Aims

The present paper aims to give an overview of ancient Greek patristic ideas on linguistic origin, diversity, change and kinship, which as yet have not received the attention they deserve (cf. sub 1.2.

* This article is based on my Master’s thesis submitted at the University of Leuven (June 2012). I thank Professor Pierre Swiggers (University of Leuven) and Doctor Toon Van Hal (University of Leuven) for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ This passage provided the title of this article. All the central passages in the works of the Greek patristic authors are quoted and translated for the reader’s benefit.

for a *status quaestionis*). Needless to say, Greek patristic authors (2nd–5th century) did not consider this subject matter a separate study object in its own right, as historical comparative grammar would do from the nineteenth century onwards (cf. e.g. Swiggers 2011). When these authors, who laid the foundations of Christian exegesis and doctrine in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, expressed their views on such themes, they, to a large extent, depended on the authority of the Bible. For two major reasons, however, this subject deserves a more extensive and independent treatment. Firstly, there does not exist an up-to-date survey of these questions that is based on an accurate study of primary sources. Secondly, Greek patristic conceptions of linguistic problems are not so homogeneous as is often put forward. I will discuss here ideas on linguistic origin, diversity, change and kinship, even though these are not the only linguistic subjects playing a role in Greek patristic writings. Hence, our main concern is not with the emergence of ancient grammar, which has received extensive attention in the study of ancient linguistic thought (cf. e.g. Swiggers-Wouters 2002).² For similar reasons, opinions belonging to the realm of the philosophy of language will be equally excluded from consideration.³ After taking a look at the state of the research, I shall comment briefly on the methodology I have followed.

1.2. State of the art

The *communis opinio* seems to be that ancient writers and scholars did not have any interest in linguistic diversity nor in languages other than Greek and Latin (see the survey in Van Hal 2009). Speakers of these two languages (which were dominant from both a cultural and a political point of view) did not feel the need to trouble themselves with the study of so-called ‘barbarous’ languages. In addition, the growth of the Roman Empire resulted in a (partial) linguistic genocide in the West. Speakers of languages such as Gaulish and [23] Etruscan felt obliged to switch to Latin, and their native languages thereby ceased to exist.⁴ This lack of interest in other languages seems to apply to ‘pagan’ authors; it is however quite different in the case of writings composed by Greek patristic authors. Borst (1957-1963: 227-257) still offers the most complete and accurate discussion of this question. He chiefly deals with the history of interpretation of the discrepancy between *Genesis*, 10 and *Genesis*, 11, 1-9 (cf. Van Hal 2010: 408). The study of Karfíková (2007: 279-305) is the only one that systematically considers the views on language origin of one Greek patristic author, viz. Gregory of Nyssa (335/340-ca. 395). Moss (2010: 129-137) dedicates a couple of pages to the identity of the ‘language of paradise’ according to Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428)⁵ and Theodoret of Cyrrhus

² It can be noted in passing that the majority of the Greek patristic authors did not concern themselves with grammaticography. Origen (ca. 185-253/254) was a grammar teacher (cf. Voss 1979; Vogt 1999), but he does not seem to have composed a grammatical treatise. Basil of Caesarea is erroneously told to have written a grammar (Ciccolella 2008: 221).

³ Cf. Douglass (2007 [= 2005]) for the Cappadocian exegetical school; Robertson (2008) for the Alexandrian exegetical school and DelCogliano (2010) for Basil of Caesarea.

⁴ Other languages, like Basque, have survived until the present day.

⁵ The ideas of Theodore of Mopsuestia are not taken into account in this article, because we only have indirect and unreliable testimonies of his views on the abovementioned linguistic themes (cf. *sub* 1.3.).

(393-ca. 466). He focuses on the ‘sociolinguistic’ reality of Theodoret’s environment and its influence on his linguistic viewpoints. Other Greek patristic authors are only treated in broader thematic discussions, viz. Rubin (1998: 317-322) on language origin and Thunberg (1974: 46-50) on language diversity, both of which do not go much beyond Borst’s remarks. Whereas Rubin (1998) offers a fine survey of Jewish, Christian and Islamic ideas on language origin in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, he examines only a couple of Greek patristic authors. In addition, his account suffers from a number of shortcomings, which will be discussed and corrected later on. For the other Greek patristic authors one has to fall back on accidental remarks in various publications. Apart from these considerations, the observations of Werner (1983: 583 & 594) and Van Hal (2010) also suggest that an up-to-date and accurate treatment of Greek patristic views on these linguistic themes is still a *desideratum*. The research project ‘Language origins, linguistic change, and language functionality in early Christian Latin authors’ conducted at the Centre of Historiography of Linguistics (CHL) of the University of Leuven is a first step toward a more systematic historical study of these topics (cf. Denecker *et al.* 2012). By exclusively taking into account Greek sources, the present paper is complementary to this large-scale project.

Borst’s (1957-1963: 227-257) account will serve as an indispensable point of departure for discussing the above-mentioned linguistic themes. But whereas he emphasizes, first and foremost, theological and dogmatic aspects of the ideas expressed by Greek patristic authors, thereby focusing on how the Babelic confusion of tongues was received by later authors, my main concern will be with the linguistic aspects of their views. The Greek patristic authors do not discuss these linguistic themes exclusively within the context of *Genesis*, 11; also other factors give way to reflections concerning linguistic origin, diversity, kinship [24] and change. Accordingly, the present article aims to complete Borst’s data rather than replace these. A thorough lecture of the primary texts constitutes the starting point for the data in the present article. The relation between the theological views of the authors and their views on linguistic origin, diversity, kinship and change will also receive attention. Furthermore, I will offer a succinct account of the sources that inspired the authors and of the way the Greek patristic debate on the above-mentioned linguistic themes went along.

1.3. Methodology

I will now briefly explain how I proceeded. The selection of Greek patristic authors in this corpus is mainly based on the authors discussed in Borst (1957-1963: 227-257). However, authors who fail to discuss the topics that are of interest here or whose writings did not survive are not dealt with.⁶

⁶ With respect to content, I came to the conclusion that (a) Theophilus of Antioch (*floruit* ca. 180); (b) Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373); (c) Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 313-386); (d) Nilus of Ancyra († ca. 430) treat the relevant biblical *loci* mainly from a theological point of view or do not pay much attention to these passages. (a) Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 160-after 240); (b) Eusebius of Emesa († ca. 359); (c) Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428); (d) Gennadius I of

However, when relevant, I will mention the (alleged) linguistic conceptions of these authors. In addition, I left aside some authors discussed in Borst's (1957-1963) chapter 'Kirchenväter', since they are nowadays no longer considered to be 'patristic authors'.⁷ According to the traditional periodization, the Greek patristic era starts in the course of the 2nd century A.D. and ends with the work of John of Damascus [25] († ca. 750; cf. Fürst 1999: 486-487). However, the last author to be discussed in this article is Theodoret of Cyrrhus, who is generally regarded as the last 'original' Greek patristic author. Accordingly, the Greek patristic authors mentioned in figure 1 are taken into account.

	Name of the patristic author	Year of birth	Year of death
I.	Justin Martyr	ca. 100	between 162 and 168
II.	Irenaeus of Lyons	140	ca. 200
III.	Clement of Alexandria	140 or 150	ca. 220
IV.	Origen	ca. 185	253/254
V.	Eusebius of Caesarea	before 264/265	ca. 339/340
VI.	Basil of Caesarea	ca. 329/330	378
VII.	Gregory of Nyssa	between 335 and 340	ca. 394
VIII.	Gregory of Nazianzus	ca. 326	ca. 390
IX.	Epiphanius of Salamis	between 310 and 320	403
X.	John Chrysostom	ca. 349	407
XI.	Cyril of Alexandria	2nd half of the 4th century	444
XII.	Theodoret of Cyrrhus	393	ca. 466

Figure 1

Traditionally, researchers distinguish three 'schools' in Greek patristic exegesis.⁸ Such a school is not to be regarded as an institutionalized body, but as a loose network of patristic authors residing in a certain city or region and making use of similar exegetical strategies. One discerns the 'Alexandrian' school (Clement, Origen, ...), the 'Antiochene' school (John Chrysostom, Theodoret, ...) and the 'Cappadocian' school (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus; cf. figure 2).

Constantinople († 471), on the other hand, are authors of whom little or no works have survived or of whom we only have a number of indirect testimonies.

⁷ It concerns (a) pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*floruit* ca. 500) and (b) Procopius of Gaza († ca. 538).

⁸ This paragraph is based on Bruns (1999: 546-549).

No specific school	Alexandrian school	Cappadocian school	Antiochene school
Justin Martyr	Clement of Alexandria	Basil of Caesarea	John Chrysostom
Irenaeus of Lyons	Origen	Gregory of Nyssa	Theodoret of Cyrillus
Eusebius of Caesarea	Cyril of Alexandria	Gregory of Nazianzus	
Epiphanius of Salamis			

Figure 2

The Alexandrian school is characterized by the allegorical exegesis which was common among its adherents, Origen being the prototype of the Alexandrian scholar in terms of time as well as exegesis. The Antiochene exegetes, on the other hand, tried to interpret the Bible in an exclusively literal way. The Cappadocian school is renowned for propagating the decrees of the 325 Nicene council, hence laying the foundations of the Eastern Orthodox Church. They connected Christian theology with pagan philosophy by adapting the philosophical terminology of, among others, Aristotle for theological ends (cf. e.g. Zachhuber 2010).

I have tried to analyze these authors' linguistic ideas on a systematic basis. The following questions served as the point of departure:

- (i) **Language origin:** what was the identity of the first language, and how does the author underpin this? How does he evaluate the protolanguage?
- (ii) **Linguistic diversity:** how does the author explain and evaluate this phenomenon? Does he believe that there is a fixed number of languages?
- (iii) **Linguistic change:** does the author notice linguistic change, on which data does he rely, and what processes underlie linguistic change?
- (iv) **Linguistic kinship:** how is linguistic kinship established (and possibly explained)?

[26] This analysis would have been impossible without making use of searchable digital databases containing the primary source material, the most important of which is the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG; www.tlg.uci.edu/).⁹

First, I will discuss the Greek patristic views on language origin; these are preceded by a succinct account of the reasons for their interest in language origin and diversity. Second, I will consider their ideas on linguistic diversity. In addition, their opinions concerning language change and linguistic kinship will be dealt with. Finally, I will offer a sketch of the historical, exegetical-theological and literary context in which these authors aired their views, along with some perspectives for further research.¹⁰

⁹ The titles the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* uses to refer to the writings of the Greek patristic authors, will also be used in this paper.

¹⁰ My Master's thesis also contained a terminological component: I examined the Greek words which the authors use to refer to individual languages and language in general as well as to discuss linguistic origin, diversity, kinship and change, by investigating them in terms of frequency and origin (do they stem from pagan and/or Judeo-Christian sources?). This component will not be elaborated upon in the present paper.

2. Why were Greek patristic authors interested in language(s) at all?

It may be worthwhile to examine why they were interested in language(s), language origin and linguistic diversity in the first place. Whereas pagan authors exclusively paid attention to the Greek and Latin language (cf. *sub* 1.), the rise of Christianity caused an interest in languages other than these two. There are three main factors why Christianity proved to be of vital importance for this evolution. Firstly, Christian missionaries had to overcome language barriers in order to disseminate the Gospel, thus coming into contact with other, often unknown languages. Secondly, the Old Testament is mainly composed in Hebrew. Because of this, Hebrew took an important place in the intellectual climate of the early Christian era in general and in the exegesis of the patristic authors in particular. Authors such as Origen and Epiphanius had a good command of this language, whereas Eusebius and Theodoret only knew a few words and phrases. Reading, interpreting and explaining the Old Testament resulted in a first intense encounter with the languages that are now known as the Semitic language family. Another important biblical language, *i.e.* Syriac, also received due attention from the Greek patristic authors. Thirdly, language occupies a prominent role in some biblical passages, such as

- *Genesis*, 10: the distribution of languages and nations in the time of Noah's offspring;
- *Genesis*, 11, 1-9: the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel;
- *Acts*, 2, 1-11: the Apostles speaking in tongues (cf. Trabant 2006: 15-24).

[27] These passages caused a number of exegetical problems that forced the authors to concern themselves with linguistic origin and diversity. It is important to note here that the Bible does not explicitly identify the original tongue with an existing language (cf. *sub* 3.1.; Albertz 1989).

As a result of the Bible's authority, Greek patristic views on language origin and diversity are chiefly based on Judeo-Christian sources, *i.e.* the Bible and other Jewish-dogmatic writings such as the *Liber Iubilaeorum* (Origen, Eusebius, Cyril), whether modified on the basis of empirical objections (Clement, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius) or not. For their treatment of language origin they also base themselves on their own insights within the framework of their exegetical activities, because the Bible itself does not offer unambiguous solutions to this issue. The ideas of pagan authors seem to have had barely any influence on the Greek patristic conceptions about these themes. Clement proves himself indebted to Plato's account of language origin and linguistic diversity, whereas Eusebius and Cyril both marginally cite the Greek historians Alexander Polyhistor (2nd/1st century B.C.) and Abydenus (2nd century A.D.) in their discussion of the Babelic confusion of tongues.

3. Language origin

3.1. The *lingua Adamica* and the Hebrew hypothesis

Without any doubt, Greek patristic writers were curious about the identity and status of the protolanguage.¹¹ Nevertheless, most of the authors do not explicitly identify the pre-Babelic language with the *lingua Adamica*, the language spoken by the first man in paradise (*Genesis*, 2), although this may be considered a tacit presupposition. The only patristic thinkers who make this identification explicit are Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom.¹²

That all human languages have a common descent is indisputable in the minds of almost all Greek patristic authors. This idea of monogenesis is based in particular on *Genesis*, 11, 1. But what was the original language? Most historiographers of linguistics assume that there was a consensus amongst the patristic authors to consider Hebrew the protolanguage (cf. e.g. Robins 1985: 166; Rubin 1998: 317; Van Hal 2010: 407-408; 429). However, this certainly does not apply to all Greek patristic authors. A small survey is in order here, so as to overcome the faulty generalizations found in contemporary scholarly sources. According to Eco (1995: 80), Gregory of Nyssa is the only exception in the long tradition from Origen to Augustine (354-430), in that he does not regard Hebrew as the primeval language. Lennon (2008: 29; 65 & 391) speaks [28] of a 'few exceptions' who did not adhere to the Hebrew dogma, yet he does not mention these authors by name. Almond (1999: 129) maintains that 'the early Greek fathers, Augustine, and Isidore of Seville believed that the language of Eden was Hebrew'. Poirier (2010: 18) also contends that the idea of Hebrew as the protolanguage was prevailing 'among the great majority of the church fathers', while he correctly excludes Gregory of Nyssa and Eusebius of Caesarea as adherents of this idea. Lastly, Borst (1957-1963: 238) wrongly suggests that Origen did not believe in the Hebrew hypothesis. In the following paragraphs, I will try to clear up a number of misconceptions about this question.

It is, to begin with, important to stress that the Bible does not posit Hebrew as the *lingua Adamica*, or at least not explicitly. Indeed, Albertz (1989) draws attention to the fact that the Jews initially held their language in rather low esteem, as they considered it a Canaanite dialect:

Τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἔσονται πέντε πόλεις ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λαλοῦσαι τῇ γλώσσῃ τῇ Χανανίτιδι καὶ ὀμνύουσαι τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου' [...]. (LXX, *Isaias*, 19, 18)

On that day there will be five cities in Egypt which speak the tongue of Canaan and swear by the name of the Lord: [...].

This attitude altered only gradually after the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century B.C., which caused a change in their state of mind. Being forced to protect themselves against the threats of

¹¹ Reflections concerning speech as a natural human capacity are not considered here. These remarks are often to be situated within the context of philosophy of language (cf. *sub* 1.1.).

¹² Cf. *Contra Eunomium*, II, 253 and *De prophetiarum obscuritate*, II, 3 respectively.

neighboring nations, they used their native language, viz. Hebrew, as an ideological instrument to maintain their Jewish identity. As a reaction against the Hellenistic preponderance, they claimed not only to possess a language of their own, but also to speak the language of God (Rubin 1998: 312 *et sqq.*). Symptomatic of this evolution is that the Hebrew phrase ‘nation and language’ became a hendiadys with the simple meaning of ‘nation’ (Rubin 1998: 314). The first testimony of the Hebrew hypothesis dates back to a Jewish apocryphal writing from the 2nd century B.C., the *Liber Iubilaeorum*. This book, originally written in Hebrew, has only survived in the form of Hebrew, Latin and Greek fragments (Rubin 1998: 309-310; Böttrich 1999). The argument that Sem and Heber have had the privilege to preserve the original tongue, already turns up here (Rubin 1998: 310 & 313). Moreover, the majority of the Greek patristic authors were familiar with this work (Böttrich 1999).

Despite all this, only one author, viz. Origen, indisputably refers to Hebrew as the protolanguage. He bases himself on Jewish sources, which are extensively discussed by Rubin (1998: 309-318). Origen also appears to be the first Christian author *tout court* of whom we can say with certainty that he believes in the Hebrew dogma, although even he initially remains cautious:

[...] et sic diuersarum gentium ipsi illi fortasse principes fuerint, qui et linguarum ac loquelaе uidebantur auctores, manserit autem lingua per Adam primitus data, ut [29] putamus Hebraea, in ea parte hominum, quae non pars alicuius angeli uel principis facta est, sed quae ‘Dei portio’ permansit.¹³

[...] and thus maybe those men themselves, who also appeared to be the founders of languages and speech, were the ancestors of the different nations, but the language that was passed down through Adam – according to us the Hebrew language – has remained with that group of men which had not become the share of an angel or an ancestor, but had remained ‘God’s portion’.¹⁴

Both Borst (1957-1963: 238) and Hall (2007: 116 n.97) wrongly believe that Origen in his *Contra Celsum* modifies his statement regarding the primeval nature of the Hebrew language. Borst’s conclusion rests on the following passage:

Καίτοι γε βαθύτερον ἐξετάζοντα τὰ πράγματα ἔστιν εἰπεῖν περὶ μὲν τῶν ἐξεληλυθότων ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου ὅτι παραδόξως ὁ πᾶς λεὼς οἶονεῖ θεοδώρητον διάλεκτον ἀθρόως ἀνείληφε τὴν καλουμένην Ἑβραϊάν· ὡς καὶ τῶν παρ’ αὐτοῖς τις εἶπε προφητῶν ὅτι «ἐν τῷ ἐξελθεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου γλῶσσαν, ἣν οὐκ ἔγνω, ἤκουσεν». (*Contra Celsum*, III, 7)

¹³ In *Numeros homiliae secundum translationem Rufini*, XI, 4. This quotation is taken from the LLT-A. *Library of Latin Texts* consultable at the URL <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/Default.aspx>. – Origen considers Hebrew, the language of God, to be a ‘natural’ language, viz. a language which is by nature (φύσει) and not by convention (θέσει) ‘correct’ (Poirier 2010: 28).

¹⁴ Cf. *Contra Celsum*, III, 6 and V, 31. He also stresses the divine origin of languages in *Contra Celsum*, V, 45: “Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχουσιν αἱ ἐν ἀνθρώποις διάλεκτοι, [...]”

And indeed, one can say, if one investigates the events surrounding the exodus out of the Egyptian land more thoroughly, that it is extraordinary that a whole people collectively adopted the so-called Hebrew language as a gift from God, when one of the prophets with them said: "When they left the land of Egypt, he heard a tongue he did not understand."

What Origen attempts to do here is to refute Celsus' viewpoint. The latter, indeed, had maintained that the Jews, who in his opinion were Egyptians by origin, had formed a separate nation in Egypt. After having left this country, they took an aversion to the Egyptian mother tongue and marvelously received the Hebrew language from the sky (cf. Rubin 1998: 314-315 & 318), which resulted in Celsus' conclusion that Hebrew is a relatively recent language (*Contra Celsum*, III, 6-7). Origen counters this theory by stating that the Jews already were a separate nation with an own language before their presence in Egypt; it was only due to a famine in the land of Canaan that they migrated to this country (*Genesis*, 42-50; cf. *Contra Celsum*, III, 6 for Origen's use of this 'historical' argument). Origen mentions the words of LXX, *Psalmi*, 80, 6¹⁵ in this respect. True, this passage offers support to Celsus' ideas, but Origen rejects [30] his theory by referring to what is plausible in reality. Hence, Origen does not revoke his previous statement that Hebrew is the protolanguage. As also noted by Moss (2010: 130 n.56), he only casts doubt on Celsus' theory (cf. *Contra Celsum*, III, 6 & 8). Moreover, the oldest names known can all be traced back to Hebrew, a language exclusively used by the Jews (cf. *Contra Celsum*, IV, 34-35). Thus, contrary to the views of Borst (1957-1963: 238) and Hall (2007: 116 n.97), Origen does not abandon the Hebrew hypothesis but only tries to refute Celsus' claims by proving that the ancient Hebrews are not to be identified with the ancient Egyptians.

Some scholars claim that Origen's older contemporary, Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 160-after 240), also regarded Hebrew as the protolanguage, even though evidence underpinning his adherence to this theory is lacking (see Borst 1957-1963: 234-235 for a succinct discussion of Africanus' alleged ideas). Borst (1957-1963: 233), Rubin (1998: 317) and Poirier (2010: 28) argue that the first Christian testimony of the Hebrew hypothesis has to be attributed to the *Recognitiones*. This is the first Christian novel, only passed down in a Latin and a Syriac translation and traditionally ascribed to Clement of Rome (*floruit* 2nd century A.D.; Kelley 2006: 15-16), which states:

Quinta decima generatione, primo omnium homines idolum statuantes adorauerunt, et usque ad illud tempus diuinitus humano generi data Hebraeorum lingua tenuit monarchiam.¹⁶

In the fifteenth generation, men set up an idol for the first time ever and worshipped it, and until that time, the language of the Hebrews that was given to mankind by divine providence, hold absolute sway.

¹⁵ Borst (1957-1963: 238) uses the Greek numeration, when he refers to this psalm (LXX, *Psalmi*, 80, 6). The bulk of the English Bible translations employ the Hebrew numeration (*Psalms*, 81, 5). In this article I will follow the Greek numeration of the *Septuagint* (LXX).

¹⁶ *Recognitiones secundum translationem quam fecit Rufinus*, I, 30, 5. This quotation is taken from the LLT-A. Library of Latin Texts consultable at the URL <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/Default.aspx>.

Borst, Rubin and Poirier erroneously date this work back to the first half of the 3rd century A.D. Contemporary scholars, however, seem to agree that the *Recognitiones* were redacted in Syria about the middle of the 4th century A.D. (Fusillo 2001: 512; Kelley 2006: 15-16). The *Grundschrift* of this writing probably dates back to the 3rd century A.D.; the *terminus post quem* is 220 A.D. (Hofmann 1999: 132; Kelley 2006: 11). If this text, which has not resurfaced until today, took the Hebrew hypothesis for granted, this testimony roughly coincides chronologically with the views of Origen. However, no certainty can be reached on this point; a definite answer to this question is hampered by the double redaction undergone by the *Recognitiones*.¹⁷ It is therefore [31] impossible to present firm conclusions on the content of the *Grundschrift*, c.q. the linguistic ideas it might contain, all the more since another pseudo-Clementine work, redacted from the same *Grundschrift* (i.e. the *Homiliae*), does not comment on the identity of the protolanguage.

John Chrysostom also seems to suggest Hebrew as the primeval tongue, since the descendants of Heber – but not those of Sem – are the only ones to have preserved the original language (*In Genesim homiliae*, XXX).¹⁸ Yet, he does not overtly state his belief in the Hebrew hypothesis. While acknowledging its old age (cf. *In Genesim homiliae*, XLVIII, 2) and finding that Hebrew is a living language in its decline (cf. *De prophetiarum obscuritate homiliae*, II, 3), he does not connect these findings directly with the status of *lingua Adamica*.¹⁹

The testimonies of Origen, the *Recognitiones* and John Chrysostom indicate that there was a certain tradition in Greek Christian circles to regard Hebrew as the original tongue, most likely fuelled by Jewish conceptions. Rubin (1998: 319) argues that the identification of Hebrew with the protolanguage is no surprise from a Christian point of view because of two reasons:

- (1) Christians regarded themselves as the heirs of the Jewish tradition which led them to adopt the Hebrew hypothesis.
- (2) Christianity, in its capacity as ecumenical religion, did not feel the need to identify itself in terms of language.

Whereas (1) accounts for the conceptions in the writings of Origen and John Chrysostom and in the *Recognitiones*, I cannot agree with Rubin's second reason, since it rather explains the fact that most of the authors refrain from identifying the protolanguage. One can conclude that the Hebrew hypothesis was anything but obvious. In fact, the following section will argue that some Greek patristic authors held different views on the original language.

¹⁷ Firstly, the compiler of the *Recognitiones* has introduced many an adaptation if compared with the *Grundschrift*. Secondly, Rufinus († after 410) has filtered out a number of heretical elements from the text and possibly made some alterations in his Latin translation of ca. 406 A.D. Moreover, some passages appear to be interpolations (Kelley 2006: 16-17).

¹⁸ Irenaeus is also familiar with the argument that Sem and Heber are the only children of Noah having preserved the protolanguage. This passage concerning *Genesis*, 10-11 has only been transmitted in an Armenian translation (Steenberg 2008: 209-210). According to Rubin (1998: 318), this latter argument was already 'evident' for patristic authors; yet, Irenaeus does not link it with the identification of Hebrew as the *lingua Adamica*.

¹⁹ The anonymous writer of the *Synopsis scripturae sacrae*, a text which has wrongly been ascribed to John Chrysostom in the past, does make the Hebrew hypothesis explicit (cf. *Synopsis Genesis*, the second part of the *Synopsis scripturae sacrae*).

3.2. Diverging views

While several authors in my corpus (Irenaeus, Clement, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Epiphanius and Cyril) do not comment on this question and do not identify the pre-Babelic protolanguage with an existing language, some explicit reactions against the Hebrew hypothesis were expressed by Gregory of Nyssa [32] and Theodoret, whose arguments are based on their interpretation of LXX, *Psalmi*, 80, 6 (cf. *sub* 3.1.; Rubin 1998: 315):

Μαρτύριον ἐν τῷ Ἰωσηφ ἔθετο αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἐξελθεῖν αὐτὸν ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου· γλῶσσαν, ἣν οὐκ ἔγνω, ἤκουσεν.

*He put a testimony in Joseph when he left the land of Egypt: he heard a tongue he did not understand.*²⁰

Gregory and Theodoret interpreted the ‘tongue he did not understand’ to be the Hebrew language: according to both authors, the text in the Bible is at odds with the Hebrew hypothesis. Origen had also considered this passage in his discussion with Celsus (cf. *sub* 3.1.). The very fact that three Greek patristic authors base their argument on precisely this verse most likely shows that Christians regularly made use of this psalm to counter Jewish claims of linguistic primacy (Rubin 1998: 314-315). Whereas Gregory of Nyssa does not posit an alternative protolanguage, Theodoret opts for Syriac, a language with which he was acquainted ever since childhood.²¹ Theodoret nevertheless regards Hebrew as the only possible alternative to be refuted: this is clear from the fact that he uses the comparative ‘ἀρχαιοτέρα’ (‘older’), when he discusses the identity of the protolanguage in the form of an ‘ἐρωταπόκρισις’ (‘question-and-answer-commentary’; Rubin 1998: 320):

Ποία γλῶσσα ἀρχαιοτέρα; Δηλοῖ τὰ ὀνόματα· Ἀδὰμ γὰρ καὶ Κάϊν καὶ Ἀβελ καὶ Νῶε, τῆς Σύρων ἴδια γλώττης· ἀδαμθὰ γὰρ τὴν ἐρυθρὰν γῆν ἔθος τοῖς Σύροις καλεῖν. Ἀδὰμ τοίνυν, ἣ ὁ γήϊνος ἢ ὁ χοϊκός ἐρμηνεύεται, καὶ Κάϊν κτήσις [sic], τοῦτο δὲ ὕμνων ὁ Ἀδὰμ εἶρηκεν· “ἐκτησάμην ἄνθρωπον διὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ.” καὶ Ἀβελ πένθος· πρῶτος γὰρ οὗτος ὤφθη νεκρός· καὶ πρῶτος τοῖς γεγεννηκόσι προὔξενησε πένθος· καὶ Νῶε ἀνάπαυσις. (*Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 56: quotation marks are mine)

Which tongue is older? The names make it clear: for ‘Adam’, ‘Cain’, ‘Abel’ and ‘Noah’ are typical of the tongue of the Syrians, since the Syrians usually call red earth ‘adamtha’. Further, ‘Adam’ is translated either as ‘man of earth’ or as ‘man of clay’, and ‘Cain’ as ‘property’. When Adam celebrated this in a hymn, he said: “I acquired a human being

²⁰ For Gregory of Nyssa, cf. *Contra Eunomium*, II, 257: “καὶ τις ἐστὶ τοῦ προφήτου λόγος τὸ τοιοῦτον πιστούμενος ἐν γὰρ τῷ ἐξελθεῖν αὐτόν, φησὶν, ἐξ Αἰγύπτου τότε γλῶσσαν ἣν οὐκ ἔγνω ἤκουσεν.” For Theodoret, cf. *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 57: “οἶμαι δὲ τοῦτο αἰνίττεσθαι καὶ τὸν μακάριον Δαβὶδ ἐν τῷ ὀγδοηκοστῷ ψαλμῷ· «γλῶσσαν ἣν οὐκ ἔγνω ἤκουσεν».”

²¹ Cf. Moss (2010). Moreover, Syriac belongs to the same language family as Hebrew and this kinship is recognized by Theodoret (and John Chrysostom; cf. *sub* 5.2.).

through God.” And Abel [is translated] as ‘sorrow’, for he was the first man to be seen dead and he was the first one to give his parents sorrow. And ‘Noah’ [is translated] as ‘rest’.

After establishing Syriac as the first and oldest language of the world on the basis of an etymological argument (the names in *Genesis*), Theodoret proceeds [33] to examine the origin of Hebrew by explicitly asking ‘whence the Hebrew language has originated’.²² This is where LXX, *Psalmi*, 80, 6 comes in. Relying on this biblical passage, Theodoret attempts to show that Hebrew is a rather recent language, if compared to Syriac. Hebrew nonetheless remains a holy language in Theodoret’s eyes (‘ἱερὰν [...] φωνήν’), since the greater part of the Bible is recorded in this language. He does not regard Hebrew as a ‘natural’ language (‘οὐ φυσικὴν’), but as an artificial language which has to be learnt by studying it (‘διδασκλήν’); the children of the Hebrews have to master the Hebrew alphabet first, the final goal being the reading of the Word of God. With this proposition, Theodoret confirms the disappearance of Hebrew, both as a mother tongue and in everyday speech.²³ Moss (2010: 136-137) argues that Theodoret is influenced by the linguistic situation of his time and by the undeniable similarity between Hebrew and Syriac.

In the subsequent paragraph, Theodoret refutes the argument that the Hebrew language is named after Heber, a descendant of Noah, who is said to be the only one to have preserved the first language after the confusion of tongues (Rubin 1998: 321). He, for his part, believes that the name ‘Hebrew’ stems from the period after Abraham and is in fact of Syriac origin. The term goes back to the Jewish crossing of the Euphrates, for (cf. Rubin 1998: 322):

[...] ἑβρα [...] τῇ Σύρων φωνῇ διάβασις ὀνομάζεται [...]. (*Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 57)

[...] ‘hebra’ [...] is the Syriac name for ‘crossing’ [...].

This name was subsequently Hellenized (‘ἑλληνισμένον’) with the result that the Greeks now speak of the ‘Hebrews’ (‘Ἑβραῖοι’; *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 58). In Theodoret’s view, this argument reinforces his Syriac hypothesis. Having concluded this topic, he continues with his commentary on *Genesis*, after stating that this discussion *de facto* does not have any importance for the content and interpretation of the Bible (cf. Rubin 1998: 322):

Ἀλλὰ περὶ τούτου ζυγομαχεῖν περιττόν· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς εὐσεβείας λυμαίνεται, κἂν τε τοῦτο, κἂν τε ἐκεῖνο δεξώμεθα. (*Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 58)

²² Cf. *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 57: “Ἡ οὖν ἑβραία πόθεν ἦρξατο;”

²³ Cf. *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* (ed. Fernández Marcos – Sáenz-Badillos 1979), p. 57; Rubin (1998: 322); Hilhorst (2007: 782) and Moss (2010: 135). A similar train of thought can be found in the first part of Dante Alighieri’s (1265-1321) *De vulgari eloquentia*, where he discusses the position of Latin in relation to the Romance vernaculars (cf. Trabant 2006: 57-58).

But it does not make sense to skirmish about this issue, as it does not cause any harm to the word of piety, whether we take this or that view.

Theodoret does not make his motives to posit Syriac as the protolanguage explicit, but his affinity with the Antiochene Syriac speaking community seems [34] to match with his ideas in this respect. It is, however, not clear how his Syriac hypothesis can be compatible with his negative evaluation of the protolanguage (cf. *sub* 3.3.).

Theodoret does not seem to have been the first author to have advanced this thesis: Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) probably had similar ideas, albeit on other grounds than Theodoret, which are discussed by Moss (2010: 129-135). Yet, Theodore is not included in this survey, because most of his writings have not been passed down through the ages; his conceptions are only known through indirect testimonies dating back to the 8th century (cf. *sub* 1.2. and 1.3.). Furthermore, he interpreted biblical passages concerning linguistic phenomena chiefly in a moral and allegorical way.²⁴

Eusebius (ed. Aucher 1818: 113), in turn, holds it impossible to identify the protolanguage; for lack of documentation, the Church historian refrains from making definite statements about the earliest history of the world, which is written down in the so-called ‘historical books’ of the Bible. Cyril is silent upon the identity of the protolanguage too, although he argues that all languages are bestowed by God (*Contra Iulianum imperatorem* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXVI, col. 857). He excludes Greek and ‘other’ unspecified languages as candidates for the status of original tongue.

Finally, Clement occupies a peculiar place in this survey, as he seems to assume that linguistic diversity has existed ever since the dissipation of Adam’s descendants; mankind is almost immediately burdened with linguistic plurality. Clement speaks of ‘the first generic languages which are barbarous’:

*Αἱ δὲ πρῶται καὶ γενικαὶ διάλεκτοι βάρβαροι μὲν, φύσει δὲ τὰ ὀνόματα ἔχουσιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰς εὐχὰς ὁμολογοῦσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι δυνατωτέρας εἶναι τὰς βαρβάρῳ φωνῇ λεγομένας. Καὶ Πλάτων δὲ ἐν Κρατύλῳ τὸ πῦρ ἐρμηνεύσαι βουλόμενος βαρβαρικόν φησιν εἶναι τὸ ὄνομα. Μαρτυρεῖ γοῦν τοὺς Φρύγας οὕτω καλοῦντας «μικρόν τι παρακλίνοντας». (*Stromata*, I, 21, 143, 6-7: italics are mine)*

The first generic languages are barbarous and have their names by nature, since surely people agree that prayers are more powerful if they are pronounced in a barbarous tongue. And Plato says in his Cratylus, when he wants to translate πῦρ, that the word is barbarous. In any case, he testifies to the fact that the Phrygians call it that way, “although they slightly deviate from it”.

²⁴ In Borst’s (1957-1963: 250-251) view, Theodore regarded Hebrew as the primeval language, but Moss (2010: 129-135 n.67) rightly points out that this is a misconception on Borst’s part.

Here, Clement is partially indebted to a suggestion made by Plato (428/427 B.C.-348-347 B.C.) in his *Cratylus* (425e).²⁵ Clement believes that language was in origin not Greek, but barbarous. Hence, the barbarians, not the Greeks, can [35] claim to possess the real truth.²⁶ The identity of the barbarians is beyond dispute; Clement refers to the Christians, since he counts himself among the ‘barbarians’ (‘παρ’ ἡμῖν [...] τοῖς βαρβάροις’). This is not to say that Clement has thereby indicated a particular language as the *lingua Adamica*. Borst (1957-1963: 232), however, draws the hasty and incorrect conclusion that Clement is the founder of ‘the thesis of the Hebrew protolanguage’, albeit ‘in an obfuscated form’. As made clear above, Clement speaks of the ‘first languages’ in the plural without identifying them. Furthermore, Clement suggests on the basis of the mythological chronology of the Greeks that the Hebrew language is older than the Greek dialects. All the same, Borst’s (1957-1963: 232) assertion that Clement adhered to the Hebrew hypothesis, does not seem tenable.²⁷ He does not assign a special (or ‘holy’) status to the Hebrew language but states that it is a language with an own ‘ethnic’ character, like all other languages (cf. *Stromata*, VI, 15, 129, 2: ‘καθάπερ καὶ ἐκάστη τῶν λοιπῶν’).

We can conclude that the authors fall back on biblical passages both to suggest the Hebrew primacy (e.g. *Genesis*, 10) and to refute it (LXX, *Psalms*, 80, 6). We also found that the often heard claims that all patristic authors adhered to the Hebrew hypothesis certainly do not apply to the Greek patristic authors. The authors were far from unanimous with regard to this problem. Origen is the only author who indisputably refers to Hebrew as the pre-Babelic tongue. John Chrysostom also suggests Hebrew as the protolanguage, while Theodoret opts for Syriac. Most authors, however, refrain from identifying the original language with an existing one, because, as the representatives of an ecumenical religion, they do not have an interest in propagating a particular language as the original tongue (cf. *sub* 3.1.; Rubin 1998: 319-320).²⁸ The position of Theodoret may serve as an example of this explanation, since he concludes his discussion by stating that the identity of the primeval language is of no importance for the interpretation of the Bible.

3.3. Evaluating the protolanguage

Remarkably enough, some of the authors link the protolanguage with a lack of morality and do therefore not hold the initial unilingual condition in high esteem. Origen relates the moral decay before the confusion of tongues to the migration from the East in those days (cf. *Contra Celsum*, V, 30 where he refers to LXX, *Genesis*, 11, 2; Amsler 1989: 94). Only those tribes that did not [36] migrate preserved the original language and remained free from the moral decay, while the others

²⁵ The following question is asked there: “ἢ ἐκεῖνος, ὅτι παρὰ βαρβάρων τινῶν αὐτὰ παρελήφαμεν, εἰσὶ δὲ ἡμῶν ἀρχαιότεροι βάρβαροι;” However, no definite answer is offered.

²⁶ Cf. *Stromata*, I, 16, 75, 2 and VI, 17, 151, 2.

²⁷ Cf. *Stromata*, VI, 15, 130, 3: “Εἰ δὲ ἀπὸ Ἑλλήνων τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ κατ’ ἐπίκλησιν Δευκαλίωνος τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς συνέβη κεκληῖσθαι διαλέκτους, ἐκ τῶν χρόνων, ὧν φθάναντες παρεστήσαμεν, ῥάδιον συνιδεῖν ὅσαις γενεαῖς τῆς Ἑβραίων φωνῆς αἱ παρ’ Ἑλλήσι μεταγενέστεραι διάλεκτοι ὑπάρχουσι.”

²⁸ Another possible explanation is that the writings in which they expressed their views on the protolanguage have been lost to the ages.

underwent the linguistic confusion at the tower of Babel (cf. Rubin 1998: 318). Seen from this perspective, Origen's adherence to the Hebrew hypothesis is compatible with his negative evaluation of the initial unilingual situation. This is not to say that the Hebrew language itself is to be considered nefarious, only mankind's immoral and impious use of this language is to be reproved. Gregory of Nazianzus, for his part, speaks of the original language as a 'treacherous tongue' (cf. *Orationes*, XLI, 16; 'γλῶσσαν δολίαν' with reference to LXX, *Psalmi*, 51, 6):

[...] ἡνίκα τὸν πύργον ᾠκοδόμουν οἱ κακῶς καὶ ἀθέως ὁμοφωνοῦντες [...]. (*Orationes*, XLI, 16; italics are mine)

[...] when men who perniciously and godlessly sounded in unison, built the tower [...].

John Chrysostom also argues that men have abused the original unilingual situation, hence regarding linguistic diversity as a beneficial precautionary measure by divine providence (cf. *De diabolo tentatore*, I, 2). The negative attitude towards the original language and unilingual situation goes hand in hand with the positive evaluation of linguistic diversity in the ideas of Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom and Theodoret (cf. *infra*). The phenomenon of linguistic diversity will be discussed in the following section.

4. Linguistic diversity

The Greek patristic authors came into touch with quite a number of languages: the eastern part of the Roman Empire was characterized by a high degree of linguistic diversity. Within this diversity, there were hierarchical relations between the different languages, the Greek κοινή being at the top of the pyramid. Furthermore, their exegetical activities and their polemics with pagans and heretics forced the Greek patristic authors to discuss linguistic diversity. Their exegesis mainly concerned theological questions, although, occasionally, the authors felt compelled to pay attention to linguistic diversity and to offer an explanation of this phenomenon. We should see this directly in connection with the myth of the tower of Babel in *Genesis*, 11, where linguistic diversity is explained and contrasted with the original unilingual situation. These different important factors have led the Greek patristic authors to deal with the question of linguistic diversity more intensively than their pagan predecessors.

4.1. The tower of Babel: tradition and dissenting voices

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them [37] thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men

builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Genesis, 11, 1-9 in the King James Version edited by Carroll – Prickett (2008: 11))

Most authors rely on this story in *Genesis*, 11, 1-9 to account for linguistic diversity, given, of course, the highly authoritative position of the Bible. The bulk of the authors interpret this pericope literally, but Origen, amongst others, opts for an allegorical reading. Besides, Origen (cf. *Contra Celsum*, IV, 21) and Cyril (cf. *Contra Iulianum imperatorem* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXVI, col. 708; Rokeah 1982: 124) felt the need to defend themselves against the pagan allegation that Jews and Christians based the story of Babel on the Homeric tale of the Aloadae (*Odyssea*, λ). Strangely enough, Gregory of Nazianzus refers to the tower of Chalane and not to the tower of Babel (cf. *Orationes*, XXI, 22); both cities were founded by Nimrod (cf. *Genesis*, 10, 10), the confusion of tongues, however, happened at Babel, not at Chalane.

Two dissenting voices in this respect are those of Clement and Gregory of Nyssa, since they both reject a divine origin of linguistic diversity and offer a physical-rational explanation instead. For reasons unknown to me, Clement keeps silent about the confusion of tongues in his writings and he propagates a natural explanation of linguistic diversity. Clement believes that every animal species has its own 'dialect' (*Stromata*, I, 21, 143, 2-4), while referring to Plato. Forbes (1995: 115) claims that Plato has not advanced such a thesis; Clement, however, appears to offer a sensible interpretation of Plato's *Politicus*, 269a-274e.²⁹

In his polemic with Eunomius, Gregory of Nyssa explicitly opposes the story of the tower of Babel as the cause of linguistic diversity by offering rational arguments based on empirical data (cf. *Contra Eunomium*, II, 246-261; Milbank 2002 [= 1997]: 85; Pinto 2003: 132). According to Gregory, linguistic diversity arose by means of a gradual language change. He associates this with the [38] division of nations in *Genesis*, 10 and with geographical and ethnical evolutions. This division depended on small linguistic differences that already existed beforehand ('κατὰ <τὴν> τῆς φωνῆς κοινωνίαν'). Through the dissipation and the resulting isolation of nations, every nation acquired an own dialect by adapting itself ('μεθρημόσθησαν') to a certain manner of speech ('χαρακτῆρα ῥημάτων καὶ

²⁹ There, Plato considers the original unilingual situation to be inexpedient, because the communication took place 'on a fairly low level', i.e. not on a philosophical, but on a trivial level (Gera 2003: 22-23). Thus, he seems to suggest that linguistic diversity is salutary, because it constitutes a necessary condition for rationality (cf. sub 4.2. for the evaluation of linguistic diversity by the Greek patristic authors).

φωνῆς').³⁰ Gregory contends that the primeval language was not suddenly divided in a plurality of tongues at the tower of Babel but was only temporarily confused due to this event.

A similar rational thesis was advanced by the first century pagan historian Diodorus Siculus, who is countered by Eusebius in his *Praeparatio euangelica*. The former claims that language gradually came into being and diversified out of necessity,³¹ an evolution which he described in the following steps:

Τῆς φωνῆς δ' ἀσήμου καὶ συγκεχυμένης ὑπαρχούσης, ἐκ τοῦ κατ' ὀλίγον διαρθροῦν τὰς λέξεις καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τιθέντας σύμβολα περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ὑποκειμένων γνώριμον σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι τὴν περὶ πάντων ἑρμηνείαν. Τοιούτων δὲ συστημάτων γινομένων καθ' ἅπασαν τὴν οἰκουμένην οὐχ ὁμόφωνον πάντας ἔχειν τὴν διάλεκτον, ἐκάστων ὡς ἔτυχεν συνταξάντων τὰς λέξεις· διὸ καὶ παντοίους τε ὑπάρξαι χαρακτῆρας διαλέκτων καὶ τὰ πρῶτα γενόμενα συστήματα τῶν πάντων ἐθνῶν ἀρχέγονα γενέσθαι. (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, I, 8, 3-4, as cited in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio euangelica*, I, 7)

When their speech was obscure and confused as a result of the fact that they gradually pronounced the words and when they established signs amongst each other for each of the subjects, they made the meaning of all things intelligible for themselves. However, when such communities were formed all over the world, everyone did not have a language with the same sounds, since everyone ordered their words randomly. Because of this, there are language types of all sorts and the communities which were constituted first, became the primogenitors of all nations.

According to Diodorus, the invention of fire was an important pivoting point in the history of language; from that moment onwards, the advantages of language became clear. He describes the origin of language as something natural and human, as a gradual process that brings improvement and depends on external events. Eusebius, however, cannot agree with Diodorus' theory, because – in Eusebius' eyes – God is responsible for the creation of the world and the origin of mankind and language (cf. *Praeparatio euangelica*, I, 7). Apparently, Rubin (1998: 320) overlooks the very fact that Eusebius cites and refutes [39] Diodorus in this passage. He fails to see that he is expounding Diodorus' views and not those of Eusebius, as he makes the following statement:

Eusebius says that in the beginning people assembled in groups which spoke different languages; their language was at first confused and indistinct, and only gradually did these different languages take on the form of an ordered and intelligible means of communication.

³⁰ Men's perception of reality and men's knowledge was one and the same, but only the form ('τύπος') of their words differed (*Contra Eunomium*, II, 253); Gregory asserts that language is characterized by diversity, whereas mental processes are the same for all men.

³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) proposed a similar 'social' explanation of the origin of language (cf. Robins 1985: 150).

The discrepancy between *Genesis*, 10 (the division of nations) and *Genesis*, 11 (the confusion of tongues as the cause of the division of nations) receives much less attention from the Greek patristic authors. They often do not offer a solution to this problem if they discuss it at all. Origen aims to solve the discrepancy by opting for an allegorical interpretation of both biblical passages. Eusebius (ed. Aucher 1818: 139), for his part, puts forward that after the Deluge (*Genesis*, 10) only the nations were divided, whereas linguistic plurality came about only after the confusion of tongues in *Genesis*, 11. Epiphanius offers a similar explanation in his *Ancoratus* and his *Panarion*. Furthermore, Eusebius believes that, from a rational point of view, one cannot say anything with certainty about these events, because there is no documentation on hand. Most other authors, however, follow the dogma of the Bible in this matter without clearing out the ambiguity it gives rise to.

Some authors, under the influence of *Genesis*, 10, offer an exact number as far as the amount of languages (and nations) in the world is concerned. Irenaeus' exegesis of the Gospel according to St Luke, in which the number of languages is related to the 72 generations from Adam till Christ, can be considered the first – albeit indirect – testimony of the formula of the '72 languages of the world' in the Greek patristic corpus (*Adversus haereses*, III, 22, 3; cf. Borst 1957-1963: 230). Clement, Epiphanius and Theodoret also speak of the '72 languages of the world', although none of them does this unambiguously. They all appear to have empirical objections to this fixed number. Firstly, Clement expounds that new languages arise by the mingling of the original 72 'generic languages', after refuting the view of Ephorus (400-330 B.C.) and other pagan writers that there are 75 languages (*Stromata*, I, 21, 142, 1-2; cf. Scott 2000: 95-96; Izmirlieva 2008: 86):

Αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι αἱ πολλαὶ ἐπὶ κοινωνίᾳ διαλέκτων δύο ἢ τριῶν ἢ καὶ πλειόνων γίνονται. (*Stromata*, I, 21, 142, 2-3)

The many other languages arise through the community of two or three or even more languages.

In his *Panarion* (ed. Holl 1915-1933, II, p. 78), Epiphanius also adopts the number 72 which he found in Irenaeus' (and Clement's?) writings, even though his actual enumeration in the table of nations in his *Ancoratus*, which was written before the *Panarion* and was based on the data of Hippolytus of Rome (early 3th century [40] A.D.), consists of more than 130 nations and languages (cf. Borst 1957-1963: 247). Furthermore, Epiphanius admits that the table is liable to change (*Ancoratus*, 113, 7). Theodoret also mentions the '72 languages' in his *Compendiosa ratio* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXXIV, col. 24. Yet, in his commentary on *Ezechiel*, he makes reference to 'countless different languages' (*Interpretatio in Ezechielem* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXXI, col. 844). The biblical dogmatics seems to force these authors to comply with the number that is offered in *Genesis*, 10, even though empirical observations drive them to abandon this biblical number.

4.2. The speaking in tongues at Pentecost and the assessment of linguistic diversity

The authors of my corpus do not consider the then current linguistic diversity to be an impediment; the diversity of languages is transcended by the unifying power of Christianity which began with the speaking in tongues at Pentecost. The ecumenical evangelic message that is disseminated by Christianity and the Greek patristic authors explains their unanimity regarding this question. They often relate this to the events at Pentecost, which most of them interpret as the biblical counterpart of the Babelic confusion of tongues (cf. Borst 1957-1963: 227-257 *passim*). Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom and Cyril make this connection explicit. This, however, does not prevent John from making a complaint that man is the only living creature, contrary to all other animal species, to have lost his original language and to have fallen victim to linguistic diversity (cf. sub 4.1. for Clement's similar statements in *Stromata*, I, 21, 143, 2-4):

Καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄλογα τὴν οἰκείαν φωνὴν ἔχει πάντα· βληχᾶται πρόβατα, μηκῶνται αἶγες, μυκᾶται ταῦρος, χρεμετίζει ἵππος, βρύχεται λέων, ὠρύεται λύκος, συρίζει δράκων· ἕκαστον τῶν ἀλόγων τὸν οἰκεῖον φθόγγον διετήρησεν, ἐγὼ δὲ μόνος τῆς οἰκείας ἀπεστέρημαι φωνῆς; Καὶ τὰ ἄγρια καὶ τὰ ἡμέρα, καὶ τὰ χειροῦ καὶ τὰ ἀτιθάσσευτα ζῶα ἔμεινεν ἕκαστον ἔχοντα τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς συγκληρωθεῖσαν αὐτοῖς φωνήν [...]. (*De prophetiarum obscuritate*, II, 3)

And all irrational creatures have their own speech: sheep baa, goats bleat, a bull bellows, a horse whinnies, a lion growls, a wolf howls, a snake hisses. Each of the irrational creatures has preserved its own speech, but I am the only one to be deprived of my own voice? The wild as well as the docile, the tamed as well as the untameable animals, each one kept his own voice which was allotted to him at the outset [...].

According to Theodoret, however, the speaking in tongues at Pentecost did not have a lasting but only an ephemeral effect.³² Finally, it is remarkable that [41] Gregory of Nyssa, although he rejects Babel as the cause of linguistic diversity, does acknowledge the unifying power of Pentecost (*Contra Eunomium*, II, 258); there does not seem to exist a compelling correlation between the recognition of the Babelic confusion of tongues as the cause of linguistic diversity on the one hand and the ecumenical and linguistically unifying effect of Pentecost on the other.

As noted above (cf. sub 3.3.), some authors, viz. Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, reject the Babelic abuse of the unilingual situation. It is therefore not surprising that they see linguistic diversity as a salutary fact that has ended the ruin catalyzed and encouraged by the original linguistic unity. These three authors, along with Clement and Theodoret, also

³² Cf. *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXXII, col. 320: “Τοῖς δὲ θείοις ἀποστόλοις ἡ χάρις τοῦ Πνεύματος τὴν τῶν γλωττῶν εἴδησιν ἔδεδώκει, ἐπειδὴ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀπάντων διδασκάλους ἀποφανθέντας ἔδει τὰς ἀπάντων εἰδέναι φωνὰς, ἵν' ἕκαστῳ διὰ τῆς οἰκείας φωνῆς τὸ εὐαγγελικὸν προσενέγκωσι κήρυγμα.”

emphasize the positive effect of linguistic diversity, even though it was God's purpose to punish men by means of the confusion of tongues. These findings are square to Trabant's (2006: 20 *et sqq.*) conclusions: he claims that patristic authors considered linguistic diversity a negative fact, a statement which goes for the Latin patristic authors (cf. Denecker *et al.* 2012: 434), but certainly does not apply to their Greek counterparts. The following words of John Chrysostom are exemplary of the evaluation of linguistic diversity:

Ὅρᾱς ὅτι καὶ τὸ ἀφελέσθαι τὴν ὁμοφωνίαν φιλανθρωπίας ἐγένετο πολλῆς; Ἐνέβαλε γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰς διαφωνίαν, ἵνα μὴ ἐκπέσωσιν εἰς πονηρίαν μείζονα. (*De diabolo tentatore*, I, 4)

*Do you see that even taking away the community of language was a sign of great philanthropy? For He inflicted them with linguistic diversity to avoid that they would slip into an even bigger knavery.*³³

4.3. *Lingua and mores*

The fact that Greek patristic authors link languages and linguistic situations to moral values is not completely new; pagan writers also make the connection between *lingua* and *mores*.³⁴ This has been brought to our attention by Van Hal (2009: 150-151), but further research concerning this question seems desirable. The Greek patristic authors do not only make this link within the context [42] of the confusion of tongues; *lingua* and *mores* are also used as parameters to characterize a people. Whereas this link had already been suggested in an early Greek Christian writing that is often wrongly ascribed to Justin Martyr, *i.e.* in the anonymous *Epistula ad Diognetum*, 5, 1-4, Clement appears to be the first Greek patristic author to see a connection between *lingua* and *mores*, while defining the Greek term 'διάλεκτος':

Ἔχει δ' οὖν καὶ ἄλλας τινὰς ιδιότητας ἢ Ἑβραίων διάλεκτος, καθάπερ καὶ ἐκάστη τῶν λοιπῶν, λόγον τινὰ ἐμπεριέχουσα ἐθνικὸν ἐμφαίνοντα χαρακτήρα. διάλεκτον γοῦν ὀρίζονται λέξιν ἐθνικῶ χαρακτῆρι συντελουμένην. (*Stromata*, VI, 15, 129, 2)

Thus, the 'dialect' of the Hebrews also has a number of other characteristics, like each of the remaining languages, entailing a way of speech that shows the ethnic character. In any case, one defines 'dialect' as a manner of speech that is realized through the ethnic character.

³³ Cf. *De prophetiarum obscuritate*, II, 3: "Ἀνάξιοι τῆς μιᾶς ταύτης φωνῆς ἐφάνημεν ἡμεῖς, οἱ ἀγνώμονες αἱεὶ περὶ τὸν εὐεργέτην. Τί λέγεις; φωνῆς ἀνάξιοι ἐφάνημεν;" See also *In Genesim homiliae*, XXX, 4.

³⁴ The evaluation and appreciation of individual languages by the Greek patristic authors will not be discussed here because of lack of space. One example of this evaluation can be found in the writings of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, where the Latin language is criticized for being 'narrow' and 'poor' (cf. Basil, *Epistulae*, 214, 4: 'τὸ στενὸν τῆς αὐτῶν γλώττης'; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, XXI, 35: 'διὰ στενότητα τῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς γλώττης, καὶ ὀνομάτων πενίαν').

In a passage that has only survived in the Latin translation of Rufinus, Origen lists a number of parameters by which one people distinguishes itself from another. Interestingly enough, Rufinus uses precisely the Latin terms *lingua* and *mores*, thus suggesting that this collocation was not uncommon:

Vnaquaeque gens, uerbi causa Aegyptiorum aut Syrorum aut Moabitarum, pro eo quod *propriis terminis et lingua et habitu et moribus atque institutis* discernitur gens illa uel illa appellatur, et neque Syri Aegyptii aliquando dicuntur, neque Moabitae Idumaei appellantur aut Arabes Scythae.³⁵

Each people, e.g. the Egyptians, the Syrians or the Moabites, is named this or that people in relation with their own borders, their language, their way of life, their customs and their institutions, and the Syrians are never called Egyptians, nor are the Moabites named Idumaeans nor the Arabs Scyths.

Other authors making this connection explicit are Gregory of Nyssa³⁶ and Theodoret³⁷. [43]

5. Language change and linguistic kinship

One further component of this article concerns the Greek patristic views on language change and linguistic kinship. These are partially connected with their views on language origin, linguistic diversity and their belief in the tower of Babel while explaining linguistic diversity, since some authors discuss their views on this subjects within the context of the Babelic confusion of tongues.

5.1. Language change

Only a small number of authors make their awareness of the fact that languages change explicit. They generally characterize linguistic change in terms of geographical events, as was also current among ancient pagan authors (cf. Auroux 1990: 224-225; Van Hal 2010: 35-36 with further references). They appear to exclusively opt for language-external factors. Clement, for example, states that the 72 original ‘generic languages’ can give rise to more different languages by means of a ‘community’ (κοινωνία) of two or more languages (cf. *sub* 4.1. for the citation of this passage). Thus, he suggests that new languages come into being by some kind of intermingling of several different languages. Origen, for his part, appears to suggest that a difference in script implies a

³⁵ In *Epistulam Pauli ad Romanos explanationum libri secundum translationem Rufini*, VIII, 5; italics are mine. With slight adaptations, this quotation is taken from the LLT-A. Library of Latin Texts consultable at the URL <http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/Default.aspx>.

³⁶ In his *De mortuis non esse dolendum* (ed. Jaeger – Langerbeck 1992 [= 1967], p. 43; italics are mine), we read: “[...] ὥσπερ τινῶν ἀλλογλώσσων τε καὶ ἀπεξενωμένων τοῖς ἡθεσιν ἀνθρώπων [...]”. In his *Epistulae*, 19, 18, Gregory says: “ἀμαθεῖς δὲ ἄλλως ὄντες καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν πλέον ἢ βάρβαροι δασεῖς τε τὴν φωνὴν καὶ θηριώδεις τὴν διαίταν, κατὰ τὰ δολερὰ τῶν θηρίων τὴν πρὸς τὸ κακὸν εὐμηχανίαν οὕτως ἐξήσκηται, [...]”. (Italics are mine)

³⁷ Cf. *Interpretatio in Ezechielem* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXXI, col. 844: ““Πορευθέντες γάρ”, φησὶ, “μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη”, οἱ μυρίας εἶχον καὶ διαφοροὺς γλώττας, ἦθη δὲ ποικίλα, καὶ νόμους ἐναντίους· ἄλλ’ ὅμως οἱ τὰ πολλὰ ἔθνη, καὶ τὰς διαφορὰς γλώττας, καὶ τοὺς ποικίλους τρόπους, καὶ τοὺς παντοδαποὺς ἐγχειρισθέντες νόμους, τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον μετέβαλον [...]”. (Italics are mine)

difference in language, when trying to refute Celsus' view that Hebrew is not the original language.³⁸ Also Theodoret seems to indicate that languages can be altered by a certain form of contact, when using the term 'μιξοβάρβαρος' ('half barbarian, half Greek') to refer to the language of an individual.³⁹ Finally, Gregory of Nyssa sees a correlation between language change on the one hand and geographic and ethnic differentiation on the other, which he describes as a natural process (cf. *sub* 4.1.):

ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ θεϊαν βούλησιν ἔδει πᾶσαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατοικισθῆναι τὴν γῆν, τότε διασπασθέντες κατὰ <τὴν> τῆς φωνῆς κοινωνίαν ἄλλος ἄλλαχῇ διεσπάρησαν καὶ πρὸς ἄλλον καὶ ἄλλον χαρακτῆρα ῥημάτων καὶ φωνῆς μεθρημόσθησαν συνδετικήν τινα τῆς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμονοίας τὴν ὁμοφωνίαν λαχόντες, πρὸς μὲν τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων οὐ διαφωνοῦντες γνώσιν, πρὸς δὲ τὸν τῶν ὀνομάτων τύπον διαφερόμενοι. (*Contra Eunomium*, II, 253)

But once by divine purpose the whole earth had to be occupied by human beings, they were pulled apart and disseminated this way and that in accordance with a [44] community of their language, and became adapted to this or that manner of speech and language, taking the common language as making a bond of common mind with each other; they were not at variance in their knowledge of realities, but they differed in the framing of words. (With slight adaptation, this translation is adopted from Hall 2007: 115.)

5.2. Linguistic kinship

The number of remarks on linguistic kinship is also scarce.⁴⁰ When forced to explain why the Bible says that the Canaanite language was spoken in Egypt, Cyril seems to suggest that linguistic kinship is connected with geographical proximity of two nations with a different language (*Commentarius in Isaiam prophetam* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXX, col. 468). Two authors, viz. John Chrysostom and Theodoret, notice the kinship between Hebrew and Syriac. John mentions the kinship in passing, when trying to account for the Italian contempt of Hebrew and Syriac:

Οὐ γὰρ οὕτω τοὺς τὴν βάρβαρον, οὔτε τὴν Ἑλλάδα, οὔτε ἄλλην τινὰ ἔχοντας γλώτταν διασύρουσιν, ὥς τὴν Σύρων· αὕτη δὲ πολλὴν ἔχει τὴν κοινωνίαν πρὸς ταύτην. (*In epistulam ii ad Timotheum homiliae*, IV, 3)

³⁸ Cf. *Contra Celsum*, III, 6: “Ἑβραίων γὰρ καὶ διάλεκτος πάτριος πρὸ τῆς εἰς Αἴγυπτον αὐτῶν καθόδου ἦν, καὶ Ἑβραϊκὰ γράμματα ἕτερα παρὰ τὰ Αἰγυπτίων ἦν, οἷς Μωϋσῆς χρησάμενος ἔγραψε τὰς παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις πεπιστευμένας εἶναι ἱερὰς πέντε βίβλους.” This idea of linguistic mixture was also common among ancient Greek dialect theorists (cf. Hainsworth 1967: 69).

³⁹ Cf. *Historia religiosa*, 8, 2: “Τῇ δὲ μιζοβαρβάρῳ κεχρημένος γλώττῃ τὰς τῆς διανοίας ὠδῖνας προέφερεν [sic], ἐκ τῆς τοῦ θείου Πνεύματος χάριτος τὰ τοιαῦτα δεχόμενος νάματα.” See also Rochette (2003: 192 with further references) for the use of this term.

⁴⁰ I will not elaborate upon their equally scant comments on the Greek dialect situation. See, for example, Epiphanius' statement about the priority of the Ionic dialect within this language family. He does, however, not rely on linguistic data for this conception but on the authority of the Bible: “[...] ὥς Ἰωυ[v]άν μὲν τὴν Ἑλληνίδα ἔσχεν, ἐξ οὐπερ καὶ Ἰωνες κέκληνται, οἱ τὴν παλαιὰν γλῶσσαν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἔχοντες, [...]” (*Panarion* (ed. Holl 1915-1933), II, p. 78: italics are mine)

For they do not mock the speakers of the barbarous, the Greek or any other language so much as the language of the Syrians, and it has a great communality with the Hebrew language.

Theodoret explains a Hebrew term on the basis of his knowledge of Syriac.⁴¹ Within this context, he indicates that Syriac testifies to the meaning of the Hebrew word in question; he puts forward that Syriac is a ‘neighbor’ of Hebrew from a geographical as well as a linguistic point of view. Theodoret thus assumes that there exists a certain kinship between these two languages, without specifying, however, the nature of this kinship:

Τὸ φελμουνὶ τὸν τινὰ σημαίνει τῇ Ἑλλάδι φωνῇ· μαρτυρεῖ δὲ τούτοις καὶ ἡ Σύρων φωνὴ γειτνιαζουσα τῇ Ἑβραΐᾳ. (*Interpretatio in Daniele* (ed. Migne 1857-1866), LXXXI, col. 1448)

‘Felmuni’ means ‘one’ in Greek. The language of the Syrians, which borders on the Hebrew language, offers a testimony of this.

[45] John and Theodoret offer an early testimony of the kinship between Hebrew and Syriac, which they consider to be obvious, since they only mention it in passing and do not feel the need to furnish proof of the similarities between the two languages.⁴² The Greek patristic statements concerning these phenomena are rather scant and mostly scattered over their writings, for the authors discuss language change and linguistic kinship only to a small extent and in rather vague terms.

6. Conclusions and outlook

First, I will offer a short summary of the Greek patristic views on linguistic origin, diversity, change and kinship. Next, the nature of the literary works in which they aired their views is considered. In this concluding section, I will also deal with the authors’ motivations to discuss the above-mentioned linguistic themes: in what frame of reference do they place their exposition? Other factors that stimulated their linguistic consciousness will also be taken into account. In addition, the possible relation between the authors’ adherence to a certain exegetical school and their linguistic ideas will be paid attention to. Lastly, I will discuss the nature of the Greek patristic debate on the above-mentioned linguistic themes.

Language origin and linguistic diversity are discussed by nearly all authors belonging to the corpus. This is most likely accounted for by the fact that the Bible touches directly on these themes, albeit without offering a clear-cut answer to these questions and thus leaving room for divergent

⁴¹ Theodoret’s linguistic competence has been the subject of debate in recent years: cf. *inter alios* Millar (2007: 105-125) and Lehmann (2008: 187-216).

⁴² The Latin patristic author Isidore of Seville (560-636), for example, also attests to this kinship in his *Etymologiae*, IX, 1, 9: “Sirus et Caldeus uicinus hebreo est in sermone consonans in plerisque et litterarum sono.”

interpretations. Only a few authors allude to language change and linguistic kinship, topics with which the Bible is not directly concerned.

First, the Greek patristic adherence to the Hebrew dogma has been an object of discussion and speculation. I have tried to clear out this question by showing that there is only one indisputable adherent of this theory among the Greek patristic authors, viz. Origen, whereas the majority of the other authors do not identify the protolanguage with an existing tongue. Gregory of Nyssa, for his part, overtly rejects the Hebrew hypothesis, while Theodoret proposes Syriac, another Semitic language, as the primeval tongue. In this respect, it has also become clear that the authors use biblical passages to establish as well as to attack the Hebrew hypothesis. In addition, I have drawn attention to the unclear origin of the Christian adoption of the Hebrew hypothesis in the writings of Africanus (?) and Origen and in the *Recognitiones*. Second, the events at the tower of Babel (*Genesis*, 11) are almost unanimously regarded as the [46] primary cause of linguistic diversity, Clement and Gregory of Nyssa being the only dissenting voices; for they propagate nature as the moving force behind this phenomenon. Third, the authors often place their linguistic ideas in a moral frame of reference. Some of them evaluate the post-Babelic linguistic diversity positively, a stance entailing a negative attitude toward the original unilingual situation. They also make the link between language and morality (*lingua* and *mores*), which was already current among ancient pagan authors. Fourth, the authors show – comparatively speaking – little interest in the discrepancy between *Genesis*, 10 (the division of nations and tongues) and *Genesis*, 11 (the confusion of tongues). It is also remarkable to see that some of the authors follow the biblical doctrine blindly with respect to linguistic numerology, even though they have empirical objections to the numbers offered by the Bible.

When we take a look at the source material, we can say that the authors did not tackle language-related problems in a systematic way. Many of these issues are discussed only in passing or briefly, and they are always subordinated to theological purposes. Theodoret even questions the importance and relevance of determining language origin to the Christian doctrine, after suggesting that not Hebrew, but Syriac is the protolanguage (cf. *sub* 3.2.). These factors explain why the Greek patristic authors frequently expressed their views about the above-mentioned linguistic themes in exegetical works. They fall back on Bible commentaries (Origen, Cyril and Theodoret), homilies (Basil and John Chrysostom) and ἐρωταποκρίσεις ('question-and-answer-commentaries'; Theodoret; cf. Papadoyannakis 2006). Basil also relies on the genre of the theological treatise. My analysis, however, shows that a relatively large number of their views on these themes can be found in writings of another kind. Their discussions are often provoked by theories of pagan and heretical adversaries that do not tally with the theology and views of the Greek patristic authors. This category consists of antiheretical (Irenaeus and Epiphanius) and polemical writings (Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and Cyril). They also write their ideas down in apologetic works (Justin, Eusebius and Theodoret), in orations (Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom), in letters

(Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Theodoret) and in historiographical writings (Eusebius and Theodoret). Two works take a special place in this survey. In his *Stromata*, Clement deals with a patchwork of subjects (cf. the Latin title *Miscellanea*) among which are language origin and diversity. The metrological treatise of Epiphanius (*De mensuris et ponderibus*) has a concise remark on the relationship between Hebrew and Greek. As opposed to all the other above-mentioned theological writings, this is the only secular work in which Greek patristic views on language are expounded; cf. figure 3 for a survey of the nature of the writings in which the authors aired their linguistic views. [47]

Genres	Authors
<i>exegetical writings</i>	
<i>Bible commentaries</i>	<i>Origen – Cyril – Theodoret</i>
<i>homilies</i>	<i>Basil – John Chrysostom</i>
<i>ἐρωταποκρίσεις</i>	<i>Theodoret</i>
<i>theological treatises</i>	<i>Basil</i>
<i>antiheretical writings</i>	<i>Irenaeus – Epiphanius</i>
<i>polemical writings</i>	<i>Origen – Basil – Gregory of Nyssa – John Chrysostom – Cyril</i>
<i>apologetic writings</i>	<i>Justin – Eusebius – Theodoret</i>
<i>orations</i>	<i>Gregory of Nazianzus – John Chrysostom</i>
<i>letters</i>	<i>Origen – Basil – Gregory of Nyssa – Theodoret</i>
<i>historiographical writings</i>	<i>Eusebius – Theodoret</i>
<i>other writings</i>	
<i>Stromata/Miscellanea</i>	<i>Clement</i>
<i>metrological treatises</i>	<i>Epiphanius</i>
<i>(the only secular writing)</i>	

Figure 3

I said in the introduction that Greek patristic authors are usually classified into different exegetical schools (cf. *sub* 1.3.). It is interesting to investigate whether the adherents of these schools also share the same views on language(s) and linguistic problems. Yet, it seems that there does not exist a compelling correlation between the theological model the authors adhere to on the one hand and their linguistic views on the other. We see that with respect to the language-related questions that are analyzed in the present paper authors belonging to the same exegetical schools expressed different views. So, for instance, the traditional Babelic explanation of linguistic diversity offered by

Gregory of Nazianzus is at odds with the natural explication of his contemporary Gregory of Nyssa, although they subscribe to similar theological conceptions (see also Borst 1957-1963: 246 for the views of these Cappadocian authors). Also within the Antiochene school ideas about language origin tend to differ. Whereas John Chrysostom seems to propagate Hebrew as the protolanguage, Theodoret argues that Syriac is the primeval language. The Alexandrian exegesis also exhibits different views on language origin; Origen openly adheres to the Hebrew dogma, but Cyril does not express his opinion on this question. These findings indicate that the linguistic ideas of an author do not depend directly on the theological model adhered to by the author. However, dogmatics forced some authors to adapt their views to the conceptions of their predecessors. The most striking example of such a coercion is the use of numerology in the work of Epiphanius (cf. *sub* 4.1.).

[48] As far as linguistic problems are concerned, the Greek patristic authors do not enter into a direct argument with each other. Their discussions are unilateral in that the authors strike out at contemporary, non-patristic authors (but not at each other). It is remarkable that, when paying considerable attention to language origin and linguistic diversity, the Greek patristic authors always react to the views of other pagan or heretical authors. They explicitly name their antagonists, except for Theodoret, who counters the *communis opinio* that Hebrew is the protolanguage by taking the edge off the widespread argument that Hebrew has exclusively passed on to the offspring of Heber. Yet, it seems too radical to state that there was ‘a lively discussion’ (Rubin 1998: 309) about the protolanguage between ancient authors of the Christian era, since most of them do not identify the primeval language. Moreover, only Origen and Gregory of Nyssa directly attack their opponents in this respect. While Origen enters into a discussion with the Platonist Celsus (2nd half of the 2nd century A.D.) on language origin and linguistic diversity, Eunomius’ († ca. 394) ideas are criticized by the three Cappadocian patristic authors, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus of whom Gregory of Nyssa pays most attention to Eunomius’ linguistic theses. Eusebius dismisses Diodorus Siculus’ (1st century B.C.) rational explanation of linguistic diversity, while Cyril counters Julian the Apostate (331/332-363), who had ridiculed the account of the tower of Babel.

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This paper aimed to offer a succinct, systematic overview of the Greek patristic ideas on language origin, linguistic diversity, language change and linguistic kinship. My research has brought to light some new findings, while also revealing a number of misconceptions frequently found in the contemporary scholarly literature. Needless to say, several avenues for further research remain open. For example, an in-depth analysis of the linguistic terminology used by Greek Christian authors remains desirable. Also their appreciation of individual languages deserves more attention

than it has hitherto received. In addition, a more extensive treatment of the reception of the authors' ideas would be useful to account for certain linguistic views in e.g. Humanist Europe.

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