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## Gzella's "A Cultural History of Aramaic" (Book Review)

Gary R. Averill  
*Spiritual Life Bible College*

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## **A Cultural History of Aramaic,**

by Holger Gzella. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015. 466 pp. \$210.00.

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*Reviewed by Gary R. Averill, Librarian, Spiritual Life Bible College, Minneapolis, MN*

This book is part of a collection called: *Handbook of Oriental Studies: Ancient Near East Online, Biblical Studies, Ancient Near East and Early Christianity E-Books Online, Collection 2015, volume 111*. Brill sells it on its web site as an eBook but Amazon sells it as a printed version, the price is the same, \$210.00. You also can buy particular chapters. Due to how comprehensive this book is, the ebook does give the reader the ability to do word searches but some key words have a lot of entries. This book does not concentrate on the Aramaic that the Jews and the Christians used in the first century. Still, there are many sections talking about the Aramaic that was used by the Jews and Christians. This book follows the mutations of this language throughout the area it was spoken from the time Aramaic begun until the beginning of Islam. It is very comprehensive, it covers all the key researchers, information about all the different theories and how they are looked upon by those in the field, the manuscripts found complete and incomplete. The author goes into great detail how the language changed due to influence from other languages and the needs of those who spoke the language. It also goes into the sounds and the basic changes linguistically in the written form over time (as he states numerous times it is hard to tell the history of the oral form). To thoroughly understand this book it does help if the reader has a background in linguistic terminology and the history of the area which Aramaic was spoken. It is geared to the graduate student and particularly the scholar but even a novice can glean some basic information from this book. This is due to how the book is set up. Each chapter is broken down to numbered sections. Each section covers one aspect of Aramaic during the time period the author is writing about. Each section builds upon the last. Anything that will take away from the flow of book, the author puts that information in the notes. There are pages where half the page is notes. There are over 1200 notes in this book. There are over 30 pages in the bibliography. I highly recommend this book for those who are just learning about the history of Aramaic to the seasoned researcher. It has to be one of the most up to date overviews of what is now known about Aramaic from its conception until the time of Islam.