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'Upon this Rock': Matthew 16.18 and the Aramaic Evidence

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Abstract

In the Greek text of Mt. 16.18 Peter's name is Πέτρος, while the 'rock' is πέτρα. Many have assumed an Aramaic substratum to the text whereby the same Aramaic term כיפא underlies both Greek words. An alternate view posits that while כיפא lies behind Πέτρος, a different Aramaic term was most likely rendered by πέτρα. This article examines the Aramaic and Syriac evidence afresh and at the same time proposes a methodology for studying such issues. It concludes that כיפא is a strong candidate for an original Aramaic background for πέτρα.

Keywords: Aramaic, Gospel of Matthew, Peter, Targum, Qumran, Syriac, Peshiṭta.

Matthew reports that when Jesus and his disciples were in Caesarea Phillipi, he asked them: 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' (Mt. 16.13).[1] When they responded that the people thought he might be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or simply one of the prophets, he narrowed the question: 'But who do you say that I am?' Matthew then records Peter's famous confession of faith: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the

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1. Translations will follow the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

living God'. Jesus then replied to Peter: 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.'

This statement has proven to be quite controversial in church history. It formed the basis for the later Roman Catholic belief that Peter was the first Pope and that his papal authority passed on to each subsequent Bishop of Rome.[2] Two major alternative explanations are that the 'rock' refers not to Peter but to his confession of faith (Chrysostom, Calvin, Zwingli) or to Jesus Christ himself (Origin, Augustine, Luther).[3] Another controversy about the passage concerns its genuineness (i.e. whether it is actually traceable to Jesus in substantially its present form), with a wide variety of opinions being expressed.[4]

2.   The earliest traces of the teaching that the passage refers to the Bishop of Rome or to other bishops as successors of Peter appear in the early third century (see Oscar Cullmann, *Peter, Disciple, Apostle, Martyr: A Historical and Theological Study* [trans. Floyd V. Filson; Library of History and Doctrine; London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1962], pp. 165-67). Some variety in Roman Catholic teaching on this passage was apparently replaced some time in the sixteenth century by a more unanimous view of Peter (and his successors) as the rock (see John F. Bigane, III, *Faith, Christ or Peter: Matthew 16.18 in Sixteenth Century Roman Catholic Exegesis* [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981]).

3.   See Cullmann, *Peter*, pp. 167-69; W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), II, p. 627.

4.   Cullmann thinks it is genuine but was originally a part of the complex of material dealing with the Last Supper (*Peter*, pp. 176-204). Cullmann offers a detailed discussion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship in regard to the genuineness of the passage (*Peter*, pp. 169-76), and this can be supplemented with Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, pp. 602-15). Ulrich Luz rejects the genuineness of the passage, taking Mk 8.27-30 as the source for Mt. 16.13-16, 20. Then v. 17 was created by Matthew as a transition to vv. 18-19, with v. 18 coming 'from a time when it became important to look back to the time of the apostles as the foundation-laying time for the church'. Finally, Matthew 'probably then created v. 19b, c as a doublet to 18.18' (*Matthew 8–20* [Hermeneia; trans. James E. Crouch; ed. Helmut Koester; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001] pp. 355-60). Luz seems representative of those who have argued that the author of Matthew composed the passage. Ben F. Meyer treats the issue in some depth, arguing both positively for the genuineness of the passage in its Matthean setting as well as rebutting some of the main arguments against its authenticity (*The Aims of Jesus* [London: SCM Press, 1979], pp. 185-97). Michael J. Wilkins calls Meyer's arguments 'quite convincing' (*The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term* Μαθητής [NovTSup, 59; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988], p. 186).

Aramaic Substratum

A key issue that relates to these controversies concerns a possible Aramaic background for this section of Matthew.[5] If an Aramaic substratum seems likely, then Matthew's Gospel here would make use of an earlier source (written or oral) that contained the pronouncement on Peter's name in its Aramaic form of כיפא (transcribed into Greek as Κηφᾶς).[6] While many think that Jesus coined this as a nickname, there is a possibility that it was attested already in the Elephantine Papyri (fifth century BCE). It appears in the form עקב בר כפא in a list of witnesses, and 'the best explanation is that it represents *Kephā*'.[7] Still, the name is so rare that Jesus most likely

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5. Stanley E. Porter lists Mt. 16.13-20 as one of several places in the Gospels that may record an occasion when Jesus instructed his disciples in Greek, listing several criteria for his conclusion (*The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* [JSNTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], pp. 159-61). While it is plausible that all of the disciples and Jesus knew some Greek, it seems unlikely that such an intimate discussion would have been conducted in a language that was not their main language. None of the theological concepts seem too difficult for discussion in Aramaic, although the criteria listed below could also be explained from a Greek perspective.

6. There is a reasonable consensus that Jesus spoke Aramaic as his mother tongue, so it is likely that much of his teaching to Jewish audiences was also in Aramaic. It also is likely that he had a thorough acquaintance with his Hebrew Bible, perhaps to the extent that his Aramaic teaching contained many Hebrew terms and expressions. R. Buth thinks that Jesus probably did most of his teaching in a Hebrew that was heavily influenced by Aramaic, based on rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls ('Aramaic Language', in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter [eds.], *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], pp. 89-90). Maurice Casey thinks of parts of the Synoptic Gospels as 'literal translations of written Aramaic sources': (1) 'the [Qumran] Scrolls provide part of the evidence that Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of Jesus' environment, the language which he would have had to use in teaching normal Jews, and the natural language for his first followers to use when they reported his life and teaching'; (2) at least some of the Synoptic Gospels must contain 'generally accurate accounts of what Jesus or his disciples, or both, said and did', and such passages were likely transmitted in Aramaic; (3) 'many details in such passages…are explicable only if they are part of translations of written Aramaic sources' ('An Aramaic Approach to the Synoptic Gospels', *Expository Times* 110.9 [1999], pp. 275-78 [276]).

7. For the document, see Emil G. Kraeling (ed.), *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953], number 8.10). Joseph A. Fitzmyer discusses it in detail and gives the conclusion quoted here ('Aramaic Kephaʾ and Peter's Name in the New Testament', in Ernest Best and R.McL. Wilson [eds.], *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1979], pp. 121-32 [127-30]).

gave it to Peter as a nickname.[8] Other terms or concepts in the passage
can also be given a proper Aramaic background. The term ἐκκλησίαν
('church') corresponds to 'the image of a building' that occurs often in
the Qumran Scrolls (1QS 8.5–9; 9.6; 11.8; 1QH 6.26; 7.9).[9] Schnacken-
berg notes that 1QH 6.24–26 refers to 'a solidly built city, founded on
rock, [that] protects from the power of chaos and the "gates of death"'.[10]
The 'gates of death' occurs also in the Hebrew Bible (Job 38.17; Pss.
9.14; 107.18; Isa. 38.10), and 'the gates of hell' occurs in other Jewish
literature with the same Greek terminology found in Mt. 16.18 (πύλαι
ᾅδου; Wis. 16.13; *3 Macc.* 5.51; *Pss. Sol.* 16.2). The reference appears to
be to death itself, which will not be able to overcome the community.[11]

Oscar Cullmann's study of Peter lists the following additional
evidences for an Aramaic substratum to the passage: (1) the designation
of Peter's father, Βαριωνᾶ (v. 17);[12] (2) the use of 'flesh and blood' for
men (v. 17); (3) the 'word pair "bind and loose"' (v. 19); (4) 'the strophic
rhythm—three strophes of three lines each—which is found similarly in
other sayings of Jesus' (Mt. 11.7-9, 25-30); and (5) 'the illustration of the
rock as foundation, to which there is an exact parallel in the rabbinical

8.   For the Greek name, Caragounis mentions Πέτρων ('rocky' or 'stony place') as a
pre-Christian name and Latin *Petro* used as a 'cognomen' attested from the first century
BCE. There is uncertainty about whether the latter name derives from 'rock' or from an
Etruscan root relating to sheep (*Peter and the Rock* [BZNW, 58; New York: Walter de
Gruyter, 1990], p. 19; Peter Lampe, 'Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen—Matt. XVI.18',
NTS 25 [1979] pp. 227-45 [228]). Caragounis argues further that 'since Πέτρος is
frequently attested in the early Christian centuries as a name for pagans, it ought reasona-
bly to be assumed that the name had a tradition among them, and that it was not adopted
by pagans because one of the Christian Apostles had borne it, or because other Christians
were doing so in imitation of him!' (p. 24).

9.   Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (trans. Robert R. Barr; Grand
Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 159.

10.   Schnackenburg, *Matthew*, p. 159.

11.   Cf. D.A. Carson, 'Matthew', in Frank E. Gaebelein (ed.), *Expositor's Bible Com-
mentary* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), VIII, pp. 1-599 (370).

12.   'Simon, (son of) John' in the Gospel of John (1.42; 21.15, 16, 17). Occasionally
'John' (Ιωαναν) and 'Jonah' (Ιωνα or Ιωανας) were confused in the LXX (2 Kgs 25.23;
1 Chr. 26.3; 1 Esd. 9.1, 23). Robert H. Gundry suggests that Matthew may have intro-
duced the designation to make 'Simon a spiritual son of Jonah, who was designated "the
prophet" in [Matt.] 12.39 (but not in Mark 8.12; Luke 11.29)' and to 'associate Simon
with "the sign of Jonah", which was mentioned not only in 12.39 but also in v 4 of the
present chapter (contrast Mark 8.12)' (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and
Theological Art* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 332).

literature, where Abraham is mentioned as the rock of the world'.[13] There may be Christian influence on the latter parallel,[14] but Davies and Allison develop a similar comparison between Simon's name change and Abram's new name (Gen. 17). Both Simon and Abram were associated with the birth of a new people of God and each had 'a name which symbolizes his crucial function'. Further support comes from Isa. 51.1-2 and John the Baptist's use of it according to Mt. 3.9. 'What we seem to have in Mt 16, 17-19 is the realization of John's dire prophecy. Here the new people of God is brought into being, hewed not from the rock Abraham but instead founded on the rock Peter.'[15] The view assumes that Jesus first gave Simon his nickname at this point, whereas it appears from Jn 1.42 that he was given the name (Cephas, the Aramaic form) when Jesus first called him.[16] Merrill Tenney explains the passage from John this way: 'Jesus accepted Simon as he was but promised that he should become Cephas… The development of Peter as recorded in this Gospel demonstrates the progress of that change.'[17] Then, at the critical moment when Peter spoke of the Lord's identity by divine revelation, the Lord revealed the full import of the name through the play on words.[18]

Since the Greek text of Mt. 16.18 contains two different Greek words, Πέτρος (Peter) and πέτρα ('rock'), the question immediately arises whether any underlying Aramaic would have one word or two to match the Greek. The Aramaic form of Peter's name certainly has to be כיפא, since the name Cephas was used as a frequent substitute for Peter. The Gospel of John clearly connects the name Cephas with the name that Jesus gave to Simon and further notes that the translation of Cephas is Πέτρος (Jn 1.42). Paul used the name in 1 Corinthians (1.12; 3.22; 9.5; 15.5) and in Galatians (1.18; 2.9, 11, 14).

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13. Cullmann, *Peter*, p. 193. Luz rejects 'translation Semitisms' for this passage, thinking instead of 'an originally Greek text with biblical coloring' (*Matthew 8–20*, p. 355).

14. Lampe, 'Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen', pp. 229-30; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, II, p. 624.

15. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, pp. 623-24.

16. Mark 3.16 simply narrates the fact that Jesus gave Simon the name Peter and need not imply that Peter received the name when Jesus first called him.

17. Merrill C. Tenney, 'The Gospel of John', in Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, IX, pp. 1-203 (40); cf. Hans Rheinfelder, 'Der Heiland sagt dem Apostel diese Bezeichnung und diesen Namen voraus' ('Philologische Erwägungen zu Matth 16, 18', *BZ* 24.2 [1938], pp. 139-63 [148]).

18. Cf. Carson, 'Matthew', p. 367; R.T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 254.

A more difficult question concerns the Aramaic term that would underlie πέτρα. Many assume that the same Aramaic word was used for both Greek terms, especially since there seems to be a play on words in the Greek text. The fact that Πέτρος does not quite match πέτρα would be due to the greater suitability of the masculine form for Peter's name. In this view πέτρα is thought to be a better match for כיפא, with Πέτρος chosen for the personal name. A different perspective views Πέτρος as the most usual sense of כיפא, while πέτρα emphasizes a finer nuance of a different Aramaic term that Jesus (or some Aramaic tradition) wished to highlight.

An answer to this question is two-pronged: exegetical and linguistic. The exegetical issue concerns the structure of the wordplay and how the term πέτρα fits with the overall context. The linguistic issue involves whether כיפא would be an appropriate match semantically for πέτρα. It is this semantic background that is the concern of the present study, although to some extent the two approaches cannot be separated so neatly. It seems reasonably clear from the passage that πέτρα here refers to some type of foundation stone or bedrock.[19] The metaphor of building on the πέτρα requires that sense. So, from a linguistic standpoint, it is necessary to determine whether כיפא can bear such a meaning in the era of Jesus.[20]

Chrys Caragounis concludes that while כיפא was an appropriate equivalent of πέτρος in the sense of 'stone', it might not have been viewed by native speakers of Aramaic as a good fit with πέτρα. 'While we know that כיפא underlies Πέτρος, we have no way of knowing which Aramaic word underlies πέτρα. The evidence of the Aramaic Targums shows that טנרא is as probable a candidate as כיפא.'[21] If different Aramaic terms were used, then the Aramaic substratum as well as the Greek would both point to an original distinction between the name 'Peter' and the term 'rock'.[22] Likewise Peter Lampe concluded from his

19. Cf. the BDAG, which gives the meanings 'rock, bedrock, or massive rock formation' for πέτρα.

20. There is always the possibility as well that כיפא could have been assigned such a meaning simply to fit with the wordplay. That is, while כיפא would not normally have been chosen to designate a massive rock that could serve as a foundation, the context would give it that sense anyway. Still, it would not do to have too much semantic dissonance here. For example, one would not expect a term such as 'pebble' to fit into a context where it would mean 'bedrock', although 'stone' might work for that.

21. Chrys C. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), p. 30.

22. According to O. Cullmann, 'in practice one cannot differentiate too strictly between πέτρα and πέτρος; they are often used interchangeably' ('πέτρα', in *TDNT*, VI,

study that an Aramaic speaker upon hearing the term כיפא would most naturally associate it with something like 'stone', 'ball', 'clump', 'lump', or the like.[23]

Some Methodological Issues

Before examining the evidence for an Aramaic term that would lie behind πέτρα in this passage it would be helpful to consider some methodological issues. The methodology that Caragounis follows can be reconstructed along the following lines:

1. Establish that the two Greek terms (Πέτρος and πέτρα) have 'no clear-cut distinction' between them in both classical and biblical Greek. (pp. 9-15)

2. Establish that both Greek terms could be used for personal names in the first and second centuries even apart from Christian influence. (pp. 17-25)

3. Establish that more than one Aramaic term (esp. טנרא in addition to כיפא) could have been appropriate as an underlying term for πέτρα, meaning that the Aramaic evidence by itself is not decisive. For this procedure Caragounis relies heavily on the evidence of the Targums. (pp. 26-30)

4. Establish that the evidence of the Syriac translations shows that the two Greek terms 'were understood to refer to two different entities'. (pp. 31-43)

5. Establish that examples of wordplay in the New Testament can be based often enough on 'ideas rather than sound' and that wordplay cannot be based on mere repetition (pp. 44-57)

6. Establish by the context of Mt. 16.13-20 that 'the confession of Peter is…concerned with the dignity and office of Jesus in the

p. 95). Caragounis supports Cullmann's conclusion in this (*Peter and the Rock*, pp. 9-16) and uses it to argue that the use of the two terms in Mt. 16.18 shows that they should be distinguished, especially in light of the Greek syntax (pp. 88-89). On the other hand, if the Greek terms can be interchanged, then they could have been derived from the same underlying Aramaic term.

23. Lampe, 'Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen', p. 238. Lampe's survey of various lexical works can be supplemented now with Michael Sokoloff's *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum, 2; Jerusalem: Bar Ilan University, 1990), which lists 'stone, rock' for כיף (although all the citations of 'rock' appear to be smaller rocks) and 'dome, vaulted chamber, soft round object' for כיפתה/כיפה.

    face of contradictions from almost all quarters and constitutes the threshold to the new emphasis of Matthew on the necessity of the Cross'. (pp. 69-81)

7.   Establish from the 'semantic structure of the pericope' that 'our text is concerned with the person of Jesus rather than the person of Peter, and that the interpretation of the crucial saying must be in harmony with this result'. (pp. 82-87)[24]

8.   Establish by exegesis of Mt. 16.18 that πέτρα refers not to Peter as the foundation for the church but to 'the significance of the name Πέτρος [that] triggers off a word-play on the πέτρα-like character of Peter's utterance, the content of which constitutes the foundation-ground for the building of the Church'. (pp. 88-110)

If there is no clear distinction between the two Greek terms, then it seems logical that the second term (πέτρα) could have been used for some purpose other than a semantic distinction. The author could have thought πέτρος more appropriate for a personal name than πέτρα or could have chosen a slight variant to avoid the repetition in the underlying Aramaic. The author could also have thought that using different terms was appropriate to represent two different terms in the Aramaic.

  Caragounis does not lay out any particular method for how he approached his study of the Aramaic terminology. Something more explicit is needed. Maurice Casey has tried to put forward a sound methodology for reconstructing a possible Aramaic substratum to a passage from the Gospels.[25] It is a given that one should start with any evidence available from the Dead Sea Scrolls, since these 'are from the right language, the right culture, and very near to the right date'.[26] After that, data from other dialects may be used 'with caution', starting from earlier documents and then moving to the Palestinian Talmud. The thought is to keep as close as possible to the date and dialects of Aramaic used in Palestine in the first century, although Casey points out elsewhere that 'Aramaic was a relatively stable language over a period of centuries'.[27]

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24.   For a contrary argument that the referent must be to Peter himself, see Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, pp. 189-94.

25.   See Casey's *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTSMS, 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and *An Aramaic Approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTSMS, 122; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

26.   Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*, p. 91.

27.   Maurice Casey, 'Aramaic Idiom and the Son of Man Problem: A Response to Owen and Shepherd', *JSNT* 25 (2002), pp. 3-32 (5).

Casey thinks some help can be obtained from the Syriac versions, but 'we should never begin with them, because they are translations *into* the wrong dialect. At a late stage they may alert us to the possibilities we had not thought of, because they are in the right language and derive from a significantly similar culture.'[28] K. Beyer ascribes more importance to the Syriac. According to him, the Old Syriac Gospels may have originated in western Syria or northern Palestine about 200 CE, and their Old Syriac language contains elements of another Aramaic dialect. Thus he thinks that the Old Syriac Gospels have a 'clear Western Aramaic influence and in addition…an excellent knowledge of the Aramaic name-forms of Palestine'.[29] As for Old Syriac itself, Beyer argues that it 'came directly from' a local dialect. Written Imperial Aramaic had been supplanted by Greek by the end of the fourth century CE in the area of Syria, so that 'Old Syriac, the official language of the kingdom of Osrhoene' must have developed from a spoken rather than a written dialect.[30] On the other hand, Daniel Boyarin thinks that Greek did not replace Aramaic as a spoken language in Syria. It did not do that in Palestine, so why should it have done so in Syria? '[I]t seems not unreasonable to assume a continuous area of Aramaic speech up until the Arab conquest.'[31]

Boyarin explains grammatical similarities between Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Syriac through diffusion due to contact:

> As is well known, Syriac shares isoglosses with the east; we hope to have shown the plausibility, at least, that it shares innovations with the west, as well. We submit then that the convergence model of Middle Aramaic dialectal history is likely to be more appropriate that [*sic*] the divergence model.[32]

While Syriac has often been considered an Eastern dialect, Boyarin and Edward M. Cook think more in terms of a dialect continuum for the Middle Aramaic period in which Syriac has a central position.[33] A

28. Casey, *An Aramaic Approach to Q*, p. 61.

29. Klaus Beyer, *The Aramaic Language: Its Distribution and Subdivisions* (trans. John F. Healey; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), p. 36 n. 46.

30. Beyer, *Aramaic Language*, p. 31.

31. Daniel Boyarin, 'An Inquiry into the Formation of the Middle Aramaic Dialects', in Yoël L. Arbeitman and Allan R. Bomhard (eds.), *Bono Homini Donum: Essays in Historical Linguistics in Memory of J. Alexander Kerns*, Part II (Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series IV, Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, 16; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981), pp. 613-49 (641).

32. Boyarin, 'Middle Aramaic Dialects', p. 644.

33. Boyarin, 'Middle Aramaic Dialects', diagram on p. 645; Edward M. Cook, 'A New Perspective on the Language of Onqelos and Jonathan', in D.R.G. Beattie and

western feature of Syriac would be the preformative *m-* for the infinitive of derived patterns, while an eastern feature is *n-* as the prefix for the third person masculine singular of the imperfect. Casey thinks as well of a central classification for Syriac based on isoglosses that it shares with both eastern and western Aramaic dialects.[34]

While Syriac is an important language to consider in reconstructing an Aramaic substratum for a New Testament pericope, it should be used with caution, as Casey advised. Even the Old Syriac of the Gospels is still not the same dialect that was used in Galilee of the first century.

Fitzmyer emphasizes the need to use early materials (no later than the second century) for purposes of establishing linguistic issues for first century Palestine. He notes, for example, that the large number of Greek borrowings in the Targums, in Syriac, and in 'inscriptions from Palestinian synagogues from the third to the sixth centuries' contrasts with Aramaic texts from Qumran where such borrowings are extremely rare.[35] Fitzmyer also adduces various Aramaic names, words, and places in the New Testament, along with Aramaisms and 'mistranslations' as linguistic evidence for thinking that 'Jesus' words were by and large uttered originally in Aramaic and for the Aramaic substratum of various parts of the New Testament'.[36]

The method followed here may be summarized by the following points:

1. Evidence from a dialect closest in time and geography to the Aramaic of first-century Palestine is considered to carry the most weight.
2. Caution is exercised when dealing with Aramaic translations. The techniques of the translator(s) need to be considered as well as the particular dialect of Aramaic.
3. The checking of evidence for passages where the term in question is used in a parallel way in the New Testament is advocated.

M.J. McNamara (eds.), *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context* (JSOTSup, 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 142-56 (147-48).

34.   Casey, 'Aramaic Idiom', p. 9.

35.   Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A.D.', in his *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1979), pp. 1-27 (42).

36.   Fitzmyer, 'Study of the Aramaic Background of the New Testament', in his *A Wandering Aramean*, pp. 10-15.

The Aramaic Term כיפא

Caragounis attempts to demonstrate that the semantic range of Aramaic כיפא is pretty much limited to a 'stone', making it unsuitable for a reference to Peter as the foundation for the church (Mt. 16.18).[37] Caragounis's study needs to be re-examined. First, he claims that Hebrew צור ('rock') 'is never translated by Aramaic כיפא'.[38] Instead, טנרא is the standard Targumic translation for צור. However, there is at least one exception in *Targum Prophets* to Isa. 8.14, which translates ולאבן נגף ולצור מכשול ('a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over') with ולאבן מחי ולכיף מתקל ('and to a stone of striking and to a rock of making fall').[39] Perhaps the parallelism of Hebrew אבן and צור forced the choice for the unusual term. Also, *Targum Neofiti I* has מן כיף שמיר טינרה ('from the stone of the flint of the rock') for Hebrew מצור חלמיש ('from the rock of the flint') at Deut. 8.15 and for מחלמיש צור ('from flint of a rock') at Deut. 32.13. Possibly the translator used כיף for צור and added טינרה as an additional gloss. *Targum Prophets* to Isa. 50.7 translated חלמיש with טינרה. It is also possible, though, that *Targum Neofiti I* intended the term טינרה to represent צור. Some confusion results from the normalization of the word order in the two passages from Deuteronomy. Hebrew צור occurs seven times in the book of Job (14.18; 18.4; 19.24; 22.24; 24.8; 28.10; 29.6), but unfortunately none of the passages are preserved in 11QtgJob or in 4QtgJob.[40]

Aside from these exceptions, it appears to be correct that Hebrew צור is not *normally* translated by Aramaic כיפא, but does this have to have the significance that Caragounis claims for it? 'That the Targumim abstain from using כיפא for צור indicates that כיפא could not cover semantically the meaning of צור'.[41] Perhaps the Targumists chose טינרה for צור because of a perceived closer etymological relationship. Also, they

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37. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, pp. 26-30.

38. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 29.

39. All instances of Hebrew צור determined by concordance study were compared with the Targums. For *Targum Onqelos* and *Targum of the Prophets* the edition by Alexander Sperber was used (*The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts* [4 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962]). For *Targum Neofiti I* the edition by Alejandro Díez Macho was consulted (*Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana* [6 vols.; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968]).

40. J.P.M. van der Ploeg and A.S. van der Woude (eds.), *Le Targum de Job de la grotte XI de Qumrân* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971).

41. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 29.

simply may have wanted to maintain separate words for Hebrew צור and
סלע, the latter term being regularly rendered with כיפא.

The evidence of the Targums has to be treated with some caution for
two reasons. First, the translators could have used the terms in a stereo-
typical way, even when the actual semantics of the case would have
corresponded better with a different term. The translators of the Peshitta,
for example, were more nuanced in their work, exhibiting a less stereo-
typical translation procedure. For סלע they often used *kiʾpāʾ* but also
šěqîpāʾ ('a steep rock, crag, precipice'; e.g. Judg. 1.36; 15.8) and *šûʿāʾ*
('rock, a rock'; e.g. Ps. 40.3; Amos 6.12; Obad. 3).[42] Hebrew צור is
rendered by *ṭarānāʾ* ('flint, hard stone, rock'; e.g. Exod. 17.6; 33.21, 22),
kiʾpāʾ (e.g. Judg. 6.21; 13.19), *šûʿāʾ* (e.g. 2 Sam. 21.10; Ps. 27.5), and
ṭûrāʾ ('a mountain'; e.g. Job 18.4; Isa. 10.26; 51.1).[43]

A second problem of the Targums is the issue of their date. Do they
really reflect the linguistic situation in the first century? I would refer here
again to Fitzmyer's comparison of the use of Greek terms in the Targums
vs. Qumran and other pre-Christian Aramaic as evidence for the lateness
of the Targums.[44] Lampe tries to get around this issue by citing examples
from earlier Aramaic inscriptions,[45] but surely the evidence is too restric-
tive for firm conclusions. If a clear reference to a 'rock' of the sort
implied in Mt. 16.18 did occur in the Aramaic inscriptions, what would it
look like? The *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* does not
list any form similar to טינרה; טור has only the meaning 'mountain' (e.g.
Ahiqar 62) and אבן signifies only 'stone' (the object or the material) or a
'weight'.

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42.   Definitions are according to J. Payne Smith (ed.), *A Compendious Syriac
Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

43.   Where possible the editions in the series *The Old Testament in Syriac According
to the Peshiṭta Version* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972–) were utilized; otherwise, the publication
by the United Bible Societies (1979) was consulted. According to a recent concordance on
the Pentateuch, *kiʾpāʾ* translates אבן 88 times, סלע eight times, and צור twice (*The Old
Testament in Syriac according to the Peshiṭta Version*. Part V. *Concordance*. I. *The
Pentateuch* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997]).

44.   Fitzmyer, 'Languages of Palestine', p. 42.

45.   Lampe ('Das Spiel mit dem Petrusnamen', p. 236), citing *DISO* for the meaning
'*Stein*' for *kp*. The more recent *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (ed. J.
Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling; HO, 21; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995 [based on Hoftijzer's
DISO] 1.529) also gives the meaning 'stone', but it notes as well a 'highly uncert. reading
and interpret.' of one reference for which it might mean 'rock or sea coast'.

   Caragounis also argues that since *Targum Proverbs* sometimes renders Hebrew אבן with כיפא, it indicates a tendency for כיפא to shift semantically toward 'stone' and away from the 'rock'.[46] I have not been able to find anywhere in the Jewish Targums outside of Proverbs where כיפא translates Hebrew אבן, and that also seems significant. The evidence from *Targum Proverbs*, in addition to being late, may not be entirely independent of the Syriac evidence adduced by Caragounis.[47] Philip S. Alexander notes that this Targum 'is almost totally literal, and avoids midrashic interpretation even when such interpretation might reasonably be expected',[48] as in 8.22-31. Also, 'none of the Rabbinic exegeses of Proverbs collected in Midrash Proverbs is reflected anywhere in *Tg. Prov.*'. Another peculiarity is that

> in 300 verses out of 915 *Tg. Prov.* is verbally identical to Peshitta Proverbs, and on a number of occasions it agrees with the Peshitta against the MT (e.g., 1.7; 4.26; 5.9; 7.22-23; 9.11; 12.19; 16.4, 25), though it should also be noted that there are instances where it agrees with MT *against the Peshitta* (Maybaum 1871.89 fn).[49]

Furthermore, the language is mixed, sometimes having clear 'Syriacisms'. For example, the third person masculine singular imperfect prefix is either *n-* as in Syriac or sometimes *y-* as in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic. According to Alexander, there are two possible explanations. Either the *Targum Proverbs* is a very late adaptation from the Peshitta, or it is based on an early eastern, non-Masoretic *Vorlage*. Its language, then, was somewhat 'unsystematically' made to conform to 'normal' Targumic Aramaic. Alexander concludes that 'until its textual tradition has been fully investigated and clarified there is no solid basis on which to decide between these competing theories'.[50]

   M.P. Weitzman takes a more definite stance that the *Targum Proverbs* is in fact dependent on the Peshitta, an influence that did not occur any earlier than the Middle Ages. Weitzman demonstrates that some Jewish scholars of the tenth century were interested in Aramaic versions of the

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   46.   Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, pp. 49-50.
   47.   Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, pp. 31-43.
   48.   Philip S. Alexander, 'Targum, Targumim', in *ABD*, VI, pp. 320-31 (326).
   49.   Cited by Alexander ('Targum, Targumim', VI, p. 326) from S. Maybaum, 'Über die Sprache des Targum zu den Sprüchen und dessen Verhäktnis zum Syrer', in *Archiv für wissenschaftliches Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 2, ed. A Merx, pp, 66–93, n. on p. 89.
   50.   Alexander, 'Targum, Targumim', VI, pp. 326-27.

Ketubim and were ready 'to view biblical translation as common ground with the Church'.[51] The evidence for viewing כיפא as a translation of אבן, then, is weak, especially since the Syriac, which normally renders either Hebrew אבן or Greek λίθος with *kiᵓpāᵓ*, may have influenced *Targum Proverbs*.

Of the two major manuscripts of the *Samaritan Targum*, one (A) regularly uses כיף for Hebrew אבן, while the other (J) uses the cognate אבן.[52] In some places both manuscripts use אבן. Of eleven occurrences of Hebrew אבן in Job, three have been preserved in 11QtgJob, which also uses אבן (38.6, 40; 41.24). It seems, then, that little weight can be given to Aramaic renderings of אבן with כיפא.

The fact that Aramaic כיפא does render Hebrew סלע regularly is of some significance for the present study. The issue of the late date of the Targums has been rendered moot for this particular correspondence by the *Targum Job* found at Qumran (11QtgJob). Both of the only instances of סלע in Job (39.1, 28) have been preserved in this scroll as כפא. These two references alone show that the rendering of סלע by כ(י)פא is at least as old as the first century BCE. The following passages where סלע becomes כיפא in the Targums need careful consideration:

1. Num. 24.21: 'And your nest is set in *the rock*' (*Targum Neofiti I*, בניקרא דכיפה, 'in the hollow of the rock'; *Targum Onkelos* resolves the figurative language; LXX,[53] ἐν πέτρᾳ).

2. Judg. 20.45: 'the *rock* of Rimmon' (LXX, τὴν πέτραν τοῦ Ρεμμων), 'an outcropping of rock or a cave in the vicinity of Gibeah'.[54]

3. Ezek. 26.4 (cf. v. 14): 'I will scrape its soil from it and make it a bare *rock*' (*Targum Prophets*, כיף גלי; LXX, λειοπετρίαν[55]). This has to refer to the rock upon which Tyre was founded.

4. Obad. 3: 'You that live in the clefts of the *rock*' (LXX, ἐν ταῖς ὀπαῖς τῶν πετρῶν). Here is a case where the LXX uses the plural of πέτρος for סלע.

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51. M.P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 109-10.

52. These comments are based on the edition by Abraham Tal (*The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch: A Critical Edition* [3 vols.; Texts and Studies in the Hebrew Language and Related Subjects, 4; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1980]).

53. Following the Göttingen edition for the LXX references.

54. Patrick M. Arnold, 'Rimmon', in *ABD*, V, pp. 773-74 (773).

55. Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus add πετρα.

5. Job 39.1: 'the *mountain* goats' (i.e. 'the goats of the *rock*', LXX, τραγελάφων πέτρας). This passage is preserved in 11QtgJob as יעלי כפא.[56]

6. Job 39.28: 'It lives on the *rock*, and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag [MT, על־שן־סלע]'. The LXX has a shorter text than the MT:[57] αὐλίζεται ἐπ᾽ ἐξοχῇ πέτρας καὶ ἀποκρύφῳ ('he lodges upon the prominence of a rock and a hidden place'). The Qumran scroll appears to support the MT, but unfortunately the text is broken: […]כפא ישכון ויקנן[ב]. The LXX must have omitted the first part of the verse, whereas 11QtgJob renders a text like the MT in that part.

These passages demonstrate how Aramaic כיפא could be used to represent a large rock or rocky area, with one passage (Ezek. 26.4) even having the implication of the underlying foundation of a city. In later times the Aramaic root סלע could not have been used as a cognate translation, because the term meant only a 'coin' or a 'round spot'.[58]

The Syriac Translations

When it comes to the data from the Syriac translations, the evidence is indirect, involving a translation from the Greek. The Syriac translators were confronted by the issue of the two Greek words Πέτρος and πέτρα, and whatever translation they gave was influenced by their interpretation of the Greek. Added to this is the fact that Syriac *kiʾpā* is feminine and is mostly used to translate λίθος in the New Testament. Also, Syriac is generally considered a later development in the Aramaic language.[59] Caragounis agrees with this assessment of the Syriac evidence but still

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56. Citations from 11QtgJob are from B. Jongeling, C.J. Labuschagne, and A.S. van der Woude (*Aramaic Texts from Qumran with Translations and Annotations* [SSS, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976]).

57. ἐπ᾽ ἐξοχῇ πέτρας καὶ ἀποκρύφῳ is placed between asterisk and metobelos, and the initial αὐλίζεται is the last word in v. 27, although it appears to correspond with MT וירתלן, which is the second verb in the verse. There appears to be some textual corruption, probably in the Greek.

58. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*.

59. Klaus Beyer classifies the language of the Peshitta as 'Middle Syriac' (fourth century on), a development from 'Old Syriac' (second century BCE to third century CE). The latter is attested only from some 'inscriptions (mostly burial, cultic and commemorative) of the 1st–3rd cent. A.D. (from 6 A.D.) and from a deed of sale of 243 A.D.' (*The Aramaic Language*, pp. 31, 43-44).

thinks that 'the Syriac may have something to tell us about the development of the Aramaic *kepha*'.[60] The following data for Mt. 16.18 are based on Caragounis:[61]

Version	Πέτρος (Peter)	πέτρα (rock)
Old Syriac (Curetonian)	*kʾpʾ*	*kʾpʾ*
(Christian) Palestinian	*pṭrws* (*Petros*)	*kypʾ*
Curetonian (Old Syriac)	*kʾpʾ*	*kʾpʾ*
Peshitta	*kʾpʾ*	*kʾpʾ*
Harclean	?*	*šûʿāʾ*

*Caragounis does not state how the Harclean (also known as Philoxenian) renders Πέτρος.

It would seem from the evidence of the Versions themselves that most of the Syriac tradition evidences the hypothesis that the underlying Aramaic of Mt. 16.18 used כיפא twice. The Christian Palestinian version is not really Syriac but 'the Aramaic dialect used in Palestine during the early Christian centuries'.[62] The script is Syriac and some evidence suggests the version did not originate until after the fourth century.[63] In any event it supports the reading *kypʾ* for the second Greek term.

The Harclean version was a revision or edition of the Philoxenian New Testament by Thomas of Harkel. The Philoxenian translation was by Polycarp, 'chorepiscopus in the diocese of Mabûg', who revised the Peshitta 'in accordance with Greek manuscripts'. Polycarp tried to make a 'more theologically accurate' version than the Peshitta.[64] 'The chief characteristic of the Harclean version is its slavish adaptation to the Greek, to the extent that even clarity is sacrificed.'[65] The Christian Palestinian and Harclean versions, therefore, give some fairly late evidence for Christian interpretation of the Matthew passage. Both followed the Greek in maintaining two separate terms for Πέτρος and πέτρα. That the Christian Palestinian version transliterated Peter's name from the Greek seems reasonable enough. The evidence of the Harclean is tainted by its tendency to adapt itself to the Greek. In other words, it evinces more translation technique than any underlying Aramaic term for πέτρα.

60. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 31.
61. Compiled from the discussion by Caragounis (*Peter and the Rock*, pp. 33-37).
62. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 76.
63. Metzger, *Early Versions*, p. 77.
64. Metzger, *Early Versions*, p. 65.
65. Metzger, *Early Versions*, p. 69.

Syriac *kiʾpāʾ* of the Peshitta normally translates λίθος, even when the Greek refers to the large capstone of a building (Mt. 21.42-44; Mark 12.10; Luke 20.17-18; 1 Pet. 2.6-7), to a stone large enough to make someone stumble over it (Rom. 9.33; 1 Pet. 2.8), or to the large stone that would be rolled in front of a tomb (Mt. 27.60).[66] Even Greek λίθος itself may not always imply simply a small stone. In Rom. 9.33, λίθος and πέτρα are parallel, and the Peshitta uses *kiʾpāʾ* for both terms. The passage appears to reflect terminology from Isa. 8.14 and 28.16, which have אבן and צור in the former verse and אבן and פנה in the latter.[67] The Peshitta glosses אבן in each of the Old Testament passages with *kiʾpāʾ* and צור with *ṭarānāʾ*. The Syriac correspondent to פנה in Isa. 28.16 appears to reflect an interpretive rendering.[68]

Greek πέτρα is rendered with *kiʾpāʾ* in Mt. 27.51, 60 (Peshitta only, the Old Syriac Gospels have *šûʿāʾ*); Rom 9.33; and 1 Cor. 10.4. The evidence of Mt. 27.51 cannot be dismissed by merely insisting that the plural (αἱ πέτραι) 'was misunderstood for individual stones'.[69] It is difficult to see how individual stones would be split apart by an earthquake. Possibly, though, some connection could have been made with the tombs that were opened (Mt. 27.52), in that a 'stone' (λίθον) was used to cover the entrance to the tomb (Mt. 27.60). In other words, the translator might have thought of these stone coverings as splitting and thus opening up the graves. Matthew 27.60 could also be taken as evidence that the translator (at least of the Peshitta) could see both λίθος and πέτρα as sometimes synonymous.[70] The evidence from the New Testament Peshitta should also be taken in conjunction with that of the Old Testament, where Syriac *kiʾpāʾ* can be used for Hebrew אבן, סלע, or even צור.[71]

66. Unless indicated otherwise, references to the Peshitta New Testament are to *The New Testament in Syriac* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1919). For the Gospels, the edition by P.E. Pusey and G.H. Gwilliam (*The Fourfold Holy Gospel in the Peshitta Syriac Version* [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003 (reprint of the 1901 edition)]) was consulted.

67. Isa. 8.14 also appears to be exceptional in that *Targum of the Prophets* has כיף as its equivalent for צור. Given the rarity of Syriac *kʾpʾ* for πέτρα in the New Testament, it is tempting to suspect some influence of the Targum on the Peshitta New Testament.

68. *bzwyʾ yqyrtʾ ryš ʾstʾ dštʾstʾ* ('at the honored corner, the top of the foundation wall').

69. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 34.

70. Since the parallel passage in Mk 15.46 has *šûʿāʾ*, Caragounis calls the use of *kiʾpāʾ* for πέτρα in the Peshitta 'quite obviously a miss' (*Peter and the Rock*, p. 34). The Old Syriac has *šwʿ* for both passages (F. Crawford Burkitt, *Evangelion da-mepharreshe* [2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904]).

71. See above.

Parallel Uses of Rock in the Gospels

The closest parallel to the use of 'rock' in Mt. 16.18 comes from Mt. 7.24, 25 and the parallel passage in Lk. 6.48. In both passages the Old Syriac Gospels and the Peshitta use *šûʿaʾ*. This is an important passage because Jesus spoke of the 'rock' as a foundation. Mark 4.5, paralleled by Mt. 13.5 and Lk. 8.6, is less similar but still speaks of hard ground that is 'stony' or full of rocks. Two Greek terms are used: πετρώδης (Mt. 13.5; Mk 4.5) and πέτρα (Lk. 8.6). The Old Syriac Gospels and the Peshitta consistently use *šûʿaʾ* for both Greek terms.

These data show that *šûʿaʾ* would be a normal term to translate πέτρα or πετρώδης, so why was *kiʾpāʾ* used in Mt. 16.18? One could appeal to translation technique and argue that the Syriac translators attempted to mimic the wordplay in the Greek. Caragounis thinks this is the most likely explanation,[72] and that does seem to be the case. However, that does not mean that *kiʾpāʾ* was necessarily a bad choice. The translators could have been aware of a tradition that Jesus had made a pun on Peter's name, but whether they were or not, *kiʾpāʾ* could have been chosen as a suitable synonym, as has been shown above.

Wordplay

Wordplay in the Old Testament typically involves two words of the same or similar roots that have a different meaning. For example, the Hebrew root קיץ is used both in the sense of 'summer fruit' and 'end' in Amos 8.2. The similarity in sound would be more significant for the wordplay than any strict linguistic etymology. Caragounis argues that the repetition of כיפא could not be a wordplay, because there has to be dissimilarity in order for wordplay to occur.[73] However, the wordplay would still involve two meanings in that one form refers to the name of a person while the other refers to a physical feature. Also, the wordplay here should be compared with other cases when a new name is given to someone in light of something that characterizes them. Thus Jacob was given the name 'Israel', because 'you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed' (Gen. 32.29), combining a form of the root שרה and אל. New Testament examples include Boanerges (Mk 3.17) and Barnabas (Acts 4.36), where someone else is said to have called them by that name.

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72. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 35.
73. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, pp. 44-57.

'Boanerges' is especially pertinent, since it illustrates another instance of Jesus assigning a nickname. The precise relationship between the Greek form and an underlying Aramaic is uncertain for these names.[74] It at least seems plausible that Jesus called Simon כיפא because of what he perceived would be significant role in a new community.

Conclusion

The essential question about Mt. 16.18 is whether a different referent is intended for Πέτρος and πέτρα. In one respect, even if Peter himself is the referent for πέτρα, there is still a distinction between the terms. Obviously Peter would have to be the referent not physically but figuratively, and that would appear to point to Peter's foundational function in the early church.[75]

Ultimately, the issue can be solved only by a detailed analysis of the passage, which is beyond the scope of the present study. What this paper has established is that it is possible that Aramaic כיפא could be behind both Greek terms. The Targums, including the *Targum of Job* from Qumran, show that כיפא could represent something like a foundation rock, and the earliest Syriac versions have a tradition that the proper rendering of πέτρα in Mt. 16.18 was *kiʾpāʾ*. It may be that the term כיפא 'gradually laid aside its original sense of "rock", assuming the sense of "stone", while the sense of "rock" was expressed by the term טנרא',[76] but at least for the first century it appears that the sense of 'rock' was still quite possible. Perhaps another Aramaic term would have been possible as well, but if so what would be the connection between the new name for Simon and the statement that Matthew says Jesus made at the time of Peter's confession? Perhaps the connection was more in the meaning than in the sound, but such a connection would not be as striking as the repetition of כיפא.

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74. For 'Boanerges' suggestions include בני רגש ('sons of tumult') or בני רגז ('sons of wrath'). Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 130-31. For 'Barnabas', F.F. Bruce suggests *Bar-nawḥā* or *Bar-něwāḥā* ('son of refreshment), *Bar-něbiyyā* ('son of the prophet'), or *Bar-Nebō* (*The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 130). In the latter case, the interpretation given in the text would be a popular etymology based on sound.

75. Cf. Wilkins (*Concept of Disciple*, pp. 187-89) for different views about the significance of Peter in relation to the foundational rock.

76. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock*, p. 116.