The Aramaic *maranatha* in 1 Cor 16:22. Translation Queries and Their Theological Implications

Marian VILD

Dieser Beitrag versucht die Übersetzungschwierigkeit des aramäischen Ausdrucks maranatha (I Cor 16.22), sowie die theologischen Folgerungen seiner verschiedenen Übersetzungsversuche zu betrachten. Die ältesten Handschriften geben diesen Ausdruck in dreifachen Form wieder, die drei verschiedene Übersetzungen ermögichen: „Unser Herr ist gekommen!", „Unser Herr kommt", oder „Komm, unser Herr!". Die wichtigsten Lösungen, die bisher vorgeschlagen wurden, sind hier dargestellt. Ohne für eine oder andere zu argumentieren, wird es hier hervorgehoben, dass die unübersetzte Variante (maranatha), die als solches wiedergegeben werden soll, bezeugt die Anpassungsfähigkeit des Ausdrucks, die zwei theologischen Auslegungen ermöglicht: sowohl eine zukunftige, als auch eine präsentische Escahtologie.

Schlüsselwörter: maranatha, 1 Korinter, Aramäisch, St. Paul, die Eschatologie.

/

0. Preliminary remarks

Scholars generally agree that the language spoken by Jesus was Aramaic. A language he supposedly learned from early infancy in the Nazareth of Galilee, Aramaic is also the language in which Jesus is assumed to have preached to the crowds, composed the Lord's Prayer, admonished the religious leaders of the time, etc.

Aramaic is a language that belongs to the Northwest subbranch of the Semitic family (which also includes, among others, Hebrew, Phoenician, Ugaritic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite[1]). It is assumed to have been spoken by the Aramean tribes as early as the second millennium BC, although the earliest known inscriptions date from the 8th-10th centuries BC[2]. The Arameans were good with trading. Their travels brought them as far as Assyria and Babylon, where their native language, Aramaic, slowly came to replace Akkadian, to the point where, by the 1st millenium BC, it had become

[1] Stephan A. Kaufman, „Languages - Aramaic", in David Noel Freedman et. alii (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 K-N, Doubleday: New York, 1992, p. 173.

[2] The oldest Aramaic manuscripts from this period were discovered in Syria and the south of Turkey, and are written in the dialects of Aramaic spoken in some of the independent Aramaic states such as Damascus, Hamath, or Arpad, which were later conquered by the Assyrians. Cf. M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period. A Study in Linguistic Variation*, Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta 68, Peeters Press: Leuven, 1995, p. 1.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

the *lingua franca* of the Near East[3]. When Cyrus took over Babylon, Aramaic became the official language of the vast Persian Empire[4]. The Hebrews seem to have come in contact with this language relatively early. At any rate, by the time of their return from the Babylonian exile following Cyrus' edict (537) all the Hebrews spoke Aramaic. Hebrew remained only the language of the Jewish worship: the sacred text manuscripts read and interpreted in synagogues were in Hebrew, as were also the prayers or the more important religious texts memorized by any practicing Jew.

Aramaic thus became the main language of the Jews, whereas, with few exceptions, Hebrew was no longer understood by anyone except for the teachers of the Law. There are many pieces of evidence to support this. For example, it is worth noting that some of the later texts attached to the Old Testament canon, as well as what is now called the intertestamental literature, including some fragments of the Dead Sea scrolls, were written in Aramaic[5]. As for the New Testament, apart from the Greek text that has been passed down to us, there is evidence that, in the Christian literature of the first centuries, there was a Gospel written by St Matthew in a Semitic language. Eusebius of Caesarea (+ 340) quotes for example, a writing of Papias, now lost, in which Papias was saying that: "Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could"[6]. Scholars generally understand this reference to 'the Hebrew language' as a reference to the Aramaic language that, at that time, had been spoken by the Jews for at least 5 centuries. Blessed Jerome would later note that this first Gospel was written in the Siro-Chaldaic dialect, that is, in Aramaic[7].

Internal evidence from the Gospels regarding the language spoken by Jesus could potentially be St John's mention that the inscription set by Pontius Pilate above the cross had been written in "Hebrew, Greek, and Latin" (καὶ ἦν γεγραμμένον Ἑβραϊστί, Ῥωμαϊστί, Ἑλληνιστί - Jn 19:20). It is not certain, however, that Ἑβραϊστί should be understood as Aramaic. Other more reliable clues are possibly certain fragments of the

[3] For the history and grammar of the Aramaic language, see Holger Gzella, Margaretha L. Folmer (ed.), *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistical Setting,* Harassowity: Wiesbaden 2008; Alger F. JOHNS, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Andrews University Press: Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1972; Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Otto Harassowity: Wiesbaden, 1961; 2006; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, „The Aramaic Language and the Study of the New Testament," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Mar., 1980), p. 5-21.

[4] M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period. A Study in Linguistic Variation*, p. 5-6.

[5] The Aramaic in which were written some parts of the Old Testament canon and the intertestamental literature, and which was spoken by Jesus and echoed in the New Testament is the Middle Aramaic (c. 200 BC - AD 250). For the other periods or stages in the evolution of the Aramaic language, or for more information on how the language changed throughout these stages, see Stephan A. Kaufman, "Languages – Aramaic" p. 173-178.

[6] Eusebius o Caesarea, *Istoria bisericească* [Church History], III, XXXIX, 16; PSB 13; p. 144.

[7] Saint Jerome, *Dialogus Adversus Pelagianos*, III, 2, In PL (Migne), 23.782.2; St. JEROME, *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, III, 2, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol 6, Philip Schaff (ed.), Albany: Oregon, 1996, p. 998.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

language used by Jesus, the Apostles, and their Jewish followers, attested in the Greek New Testament. Some examples are:

- *Rabbouni* – nickname given to Jesus; the equivalent of the Hebrew *Rabi* (Mk 10:51; Jn 20:16);
- *Abba* – Christ's address to God the Father in the Gethsemane garden prayer ("Abba, Father, all things are possible unto you; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what you will"- Mk 14:36); the Spirit whereby, praying, the Christian cries: *Abba !* - Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6;
- *Talitha koumi* – "Little girl, I say unto you, arise," from the episode of the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:41);
- *Ephphatha* – "Open!" – uttered upon the healing of the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech (Mk 7:34);
- *Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani?* – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34, quote from Ps 22:2).

Then the nicknames of the Apostles:

- *Boanerges* – "the sons of thunder" – about the sons of Zebedee (Mk 3:17);
- *Cephas* – the Aramaic name of the Apostle Peter - Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12; 3: 22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:9, 11, 14..

But also toponimical expression:

- *Gabbatha* – "the paved place" – where Pontius Pilate sat down at the trial of Jesus (καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐπὶ βήματος εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον λιθόστρωτον, Ἑβραϊστὶ δὲ Γαββαθα. - Jn 19:13);
- *Golgotha* – "the place of the skull" – where Jesus was crucified (Καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τόπον λεγόμενον Γολγοθᾶ, ὅ ἐστιν Κρανίου Τόπος λεγόμενος - Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Jn 19:17);
- *Hacheldamach* – "the field of blood" – where Judas Iscariot hanged himself (ι τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν Ἀκελδαμάχ, τοῦτ'ἔστιν χωρίον αἵματος. – Acts 1:19).

It is in the context of these few Aramaic words and expressions that we must approach Apostle Paul's *maranatha* in 1 Corinthians 16:22.

This expression is unique in the Scriptures and constitutes a genuine *crux interpretum* for exegetes and translators. The difficulty arises not only from the fact that it is an Aramaic expression transliterated into Greek, but mostly from the fact that the uncial writing of the old manuscripts have the text written cursively, without spaces between the words. The grammatical form of the words that make up this expression thus becomes unclear, hence the difficulty of being certain that the interpretation and the translation of the text is correct. The history of interpretation records a number of attempts to solve this problem; in turn, these led to a number of hypotheses.

This paper aims not only to draw attention to this problem for translation and interpretation, and to update the state of research on this topic, but also to put forth a working hypothesis with regard to the correct translation of this expression in light of its subsequent theological implications.

1. The Greek text

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

In the final lines of chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians, which also mark the end of the Epistle, after the autograph greeting (v. 21), the Apostle Paul exclaims: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema! Maranatha!" (εἴ τις οὐ φιλεῖ τὸν κύριον, ἤτω ἀνάθεμα. μράνα θά - v. 22).

This final *maranatha* - an Aramaic expression transliterated into Greek – is a unique occurrence in the Scripture. As we mentioned above, given the *scriptio continua* style of the old uncial manuscripts, it is difficult to discern with certainty what the internal grammar of this expression is.[8] The words this expression is made up of are, nonetheless, quite certainly: the Aramaic noun מן (*mar*) 'Lord' and the verb אתא (*atha*) 'to come'.

According to the latest edition Nestle-Aland, or according to Thiselton, this expression is rendered in the old manuscripts in three different ways:

(1) Major manuscripts such as P^{46}, א, A, B*, C, and D* (Clarmontanus) render it as μαράνα θά; this form also seems to be the original one, which is why it has been adopted in the critical edition. According to this rendition, the second element of the expression could be an imperative, turning this expression into an invocation-prayer. If we accept this version, then the interpretation that follows is that this expression is an echo of the situation of the Early Church which, as we know from Apostle Paul's other early epistles, lived in the tension of a Parousia understood to be imminent.

(2) Other manuscripts such as B^1, D^2, G^* (9th c.), K (9^{th} c., Byzantine text, preserved in Moscow), L (9^{th} c.), Ψ (8^{th}-9^{th} c.), 323, 365, 1505, render the expression as μαρὰν ἀθά. The received text of the Greek Orthodox Church has the same rendition[9]. In this version, the verb is either an Imperative or a Present Participle, meaning 'is coming, he who comes', or a perfect, meaning 'has come'. In the first case, the eschatological is preserved. In the second case, the expression can be understood as an allusion to the moment of the Incarnation, thus emphasizing the status of Christians as members or limbs of the Body of Christ (according to a formula introduced by Charles Dodd[10]).

(3) Finally, manuscripts such as F (9^{th} c.), G^c, 0121, 0243, 1739, 1881 (14^{th} c.) render this expression as one word: μαραναθα. In this form, the expression remains open to all the aforementioned interpretations.

To sum up, this expression can be translated in three ways: (1) As an indicative: 'Our Lord has come!' or 'Our Lord is present!' In this case it works as a confession of faith and implies an already established eschatology. (2) 'Our Lord is coming' – the timing is shifting towards a future eschatology. And (3) as an imperative: 'Our Lord, come!' which preserves not only the future timing of eschatology but also echoes the

[8] Also see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text,* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., Carlisle, 2000, p. 1347.

[9] This version can be accessed via the Bible Works software using the code 'GOC' (Greek Orthodox Church).

[10] See C. H. Dodd, "The Mind of Paul: Change and Development," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 18 (1934), p. 27-31.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

tension of the expectation of the Early Church, which was awaiting an imminent Parousia[11]. All these interpretations are possible and supported by the old manuscripts.

2. Notes regarding the translation of this text

Given the diversity of the Greek manuscripts in transliterating our Aramaic expression, it would be interesting to see how this diversity is reflected in the various translations of this sacred text.

2.1. Old translations

Among the old translations we will consider only the Jerome's Latin translation – *Vulgata* –which was to be for c. 1,500 years the received text of the Roman-Catholic Church. *Vulgata* renders the Aramaic expression as one word: *si quis non amat Dominum Iesum Christum sit anathema maranatha* (1 Cor 16:22). Blessed Jerome's choice is very interesting, especially since we know that he was familiar with Hebrew and, during his translation work in the Holy Land, he had also resorted to rabbinic scholarship[12]. We don't know what exactly determined him to render the expression as one word, but his choice is worth noting.

2.2. Translation into modern languages

An overview of the current translations of 1 Cor 16:22 into modern languages will easily reveal two things:

(a) First, many of the major translations render the Aramaic expression simply by transliteration, without translation. E.g.[13].

KJV: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

NAS: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha."

FBJ: "Si quelqu'un n'aime pas le Seigneur, qu'il soit anathème ! "Maran atha"'"

TOB: "Si quelqu'un n'aime pas le Seigneur, qu'il soit anathème. Marana tha."

ZUR: "Wer den Herrn nicht liebt, sei verflucht. Maranata!"

L^{45}: "So jemand den Herrn Jesum Christum nicht liebhat, der sei Anathema, Maharam Motha."

The translation mentioned last, which belongs to Luther, raises a few question marks, since, as can be noted, the transliteration is different from the text of the Greek manuscripts. In a gloss to 1 Cor 16:22, Luther explains his option, mentioning that *maharan* is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *anathema*; *moth* he translates as 'death'[14]. Thus, according to Luther, this verse should read as: "If anyone does not love

[11] Cf. D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT, Baker Academic/Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2003, p. 773.

[12] Angelo di Berardino and Johannes Quasten (editors), *Patrology*, vol IV: "The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature. From the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon," translated into English by Rev. Placid Solari, Cristian Classics: Westminster, Maryland, 1991, p. 224-227.

[13] The names of the various versions of the Bible will be abridged according to their abbreviations in the Bible Works software, which are as follows: KJV = King James Version; NAS = New American Standard Bible; FBJ = French Bible Jérusalem; TOB = French Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible; ZUR = Zürcher Bibel; L^{45} = Luther 1545 German Bible.

[14] M. Luther, *Deutsche Bibel 1522-1546. 7. Das Neue Testament, 2. Hälfte*, H. Böhlaus: Weimar, 1931, 136-137, cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 1998, B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998, p. 232, footnote 35.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

the Lord, let him be cursed to death," without any reference to either the first or the second Coming of the Lord.

In the case of the other modern translations we quoted above it is also worth noting that the French translations seem to take a stand on the interpretation by splitting up the transliterated Aramaic expression. Thus, the Jerusalem Bible (FBJ) opts for the second set of the manuscripts we introduced earlier, hence the spelling *maran atha*. This translation choice is in harmony with the Byzantine text and also with the text in use in the Greek Orthodox Church (GOC) and the Russian Orthodox Church (RSO[15]: "Кто не любит ГОСПОДА Иисуса Христа,— анафема, маран-афа"). The ecumenical translation (TOB), however, opts for a different rendition - *marana tha* – probably in acknowledgment of the more important manuscripts that render the Greek text. Thus, the official text of the Russian Church follows the Byzantine text.

(b) Second, many modern versions seek to translate the Aramaic expression into the target language. Some examples include[16]:

NIV: "If anyone does not love the Lord - a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!"

ESV: "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!"

NKJ: "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!"

BFC: "Si quelqu'un n'aime pas le Seigneur, qu'il soit maudit! Marana tha - Notre Seigneur, viens!"

HRD: "Wenn einer den Herrn nicht liebt, sei er verflucht. Marana tha! - Unser Herr, komm!"

In sum, whether by translation or by the way they split the transliterated expression, the various translations basically follow the same three interpretations that the Greek manuscripts allow. We also note that, in some cases (BFC, HRD), although the translations do include a translation, the original Aramaic expression is also preserved, in transliteration.

2.3. The Romanian translations

Until the synodal edition in 1914, all the Romanian translations that I have been able to review seem to render the expression as a one-word transliteration: *maranatha*. Some examples include:

The Bălgrad New Testament (1648): "Cine nu va iubi pre Domnul Iisus Hristos să fie blăstămat, maranata." ["He who will not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed, maranatha."]

The Bucharest Bible (1688): "Carele nu iubeaşte pre Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos fie anathema! Maranatha!" ["He who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! Maranatha!"]

The Blaj Bible (1795): "Cel ce nu iubeaşte pre Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos să fie anatema, maranata." ["He who does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha."]

[15] RSO = Russion Synodal Orthodox Version.

[16] NIV = The New International Version; ESV = The Holy Bible, English Standard Version; NKJ = The New King James Version; BFC = French Bible "en français courant"; HRD = Herder Bibel.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

The first synodal edition - the 1914 Bible - is also the first to take a stand on the interpretation. Although they merely transliterate it, by splitting the expression up into two units, the translators are in fact opting for the Byzantine rendition: "Cela ce nu iubeşte pre Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos, să fie Anatema: Maran-ata" ["He who does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema: Maran-atha!"]. From this edition onwards, all the synodal editions up to the 2001 Jubilee edition follow the same version, with the sole addition of a translation betweent he brackets. For example, the 2008 edition writes this as: "Cel ce nu iubeşte pe Domnul să fie anatema! Maran atha! (Domnul vine)." ["He who does not love the Lord, let him be anathema! Maran atha!" (The Lord is coming)]. After rendering the expression as a one-word transliteration, without a dash, Cornilescu's translation (1921) adds a translation between the brackets which is more or less the same with that of the synodal text: "Dacă nu iubeşte cineva pe Domnul nostru Isus Hristos să fie anatema! Maranata (Domnul nostru vine!) ["If anyone does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema! Maranatha!" (Our Lord is coming!)]. The latest translation (or rather correction, as the translator states himself already in the title[17]) of the Romanian Bible – known as the Bartolomeu Anania version, also adopted by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church as the Jubilee edition – is also the only one to take into account multiple possibilities. In this version, the texts flows like this: "Dacă cineva nu-L iubeşte pe Domnul, să fie anatema! Marana tha!" ["If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be anathema! Marana tha!"]. Although by dividing the text in this manner he breaks the tradition before him (which consisted of either *maranatha*, or *maran atha*, as we could see), the author – Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania – adds a footnote where he mentions the alternatives: "In Aramaic: Lord, come! (cf. Rev 22: 20). The two Aramaic words can alternatively be spelled as 'Maran atha', in which case (as some translators have suggested) the expression means: The Lord is coming! (Which is also consistent with Paul's thought, cf. Rom 13:12)"[18]. The choice of the translation for the main text nevertheless seems to follow the Western translations (but also the latest research on the topic).

3. The history of interpretation

The challenge in translating and interpreting this expression has been noted early on. The history of interpretation has recorded many attempts to explain the meaning of this Aramaic expression, starting with the Fathers of the Church all the way up to modern exegetes. There have been many opinions and tentative explanations. Below we will review some of the major hypotheses and the reasoning behind them:

(1) In the Patristic tradition the expression has usually been understood as an indicative ("Our Lord has come!"). The idea was that it showed St Paul's humility

[17] *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură* [The Bible or the Holy Scripture]**,** Jubilee edition of the Holy Synod, published with the blessing and preface of His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Version corrected in accordance with the Septuagint, written and annotated, in acknowledgment of previous translations, by His Eminence Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, the Archbishop of Cluj, Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Bucharest, 2001.

[18] Bartolomeu Anania edition, footnote (d) on 1 Cor 16: 22, p. 1655.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

(since he was using a 'Barbarian' language for his Corinthian audience) and had to be understood as a reminder of the momentous event that the Incarnation of the Lord had been – reminder intended to put to shame the various deviations of the Christians in Corinth as well as to awaken them to the reality of the Resurrection, in which they did not believe[19]. It is interesting to note that the Byzantine text somewhat favors this interpretation, since the expression is rendered there as *maran atha*, the possible translations of which include the one that allows for the Patristic reading.

(2) In modern exegesis, a number of scholars have favored an imperative reading (Our Lord, come!), argued to express an invocation of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[20] This reading relies on a liturgic interpretation of the entire text. Other cues seen as indicative of a liturgic context are the kiss (v. 20), the word *anathema* (v. 22), and the blessing (v. 23). Another text cited in support of this reading is a text from *The Didache of the Twelve Apostles*[21] where, in a Eucharistic context, reads as follows: "If anyone is holy, let him come forth! If anyone is not holy, let him repent. Our Lord, come! Amen" (10:5-6). Yet another text is Rev 22:20, where this Aramaic expression is rendered in Greek as: ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ. ("Come, Lord Jesus!"); this rendition, too, is interpreted liturgically[22].

(3) Another interpretation of this expression is that of Peterson, according to whom *maranatha* is part of a larger expression that also includes, in the same verse, *anathema*, being, otherwise put, an element of a curse formula[23]. This hypothesis has been further developed by Moule[24], who argues that, in association with *anathema*, *maranatha* has the role of reinforcing the curse. Overall, this text is taken as an expression of the hope in the future Parousia.

This interpretation seems to underlie canon 75 of the 4th Synod of Toledo (AD 633), where we read: *qui contra vestram* [sic, read *nostram*] *definitionem praesumpserit, anathema, maranatha (hoc est) perditio in adventum Domini sit cum*

---

[19] See, for example, St John Chrysostom, *Omilia a XLI la I Corinteni* [Homely 41 on First Corinthians], in idem, *Comentariile sau tâlcuirea Epistolei întâi către Corintheni* [Commentaries or the exegesis of First Corinthians], transl. by Archimandrite Theodosie Athanasiu, Bucharest, 1908, revised by Constantin Făgeţean, Editura Sofia, Bucharest/ Editura Cartea Ortodoxă, Alexandria, 2005, p. 471; St Teophylact o Bulgaria, *Tâlcuirea Epistolei întâi către Corinteni a slăvitului şi prea-lăudatului Apostol Pavel* [Exegesis on the First Epistle to the Corinthians of the great and glorified Apostle Paul], transl. by Metropolitan Veniamin Costache, 1904, revised by Florin Stuparu, Editura Sofia, Bucharest / Editura Cartea ortodoxă, Alexandria, 2005, p. 265.

[20] E.g. A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, SCM Press, London, 1952, p. 60; O. Culmann, *Early Christian Worship*, transl. by A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance, SCM Press, London, 1953, p. 13; J. A. T. Robinson, "Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in I Cor XVI, 20-24," in JTS, IV, 1 (April, 1953), p. 38ff.; N. Clark, *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*, London, 1956, p. 70.

[21] See *Învăţătura celor Doisprezece Apostoli* [The Didache of the Twelve Apostles], X, 5, in *Scrierile Părinţilor Apostolici* [The writings of the Apostolic Fathers], translated and annotated by Fr. Dr. Dumitru Fecioru, IBMBOR Press, Bucharest 1995, p. 32.

[22] Also see H. Liezmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl*, Bonn, 1926, p. 236ff.; Ernst Käsemann, "Sätze Heiligen Rechtes im NT" in *NTS* 1 (1954-55), p. 248-260, esp. p. 250–255.

[23] For more, see E. Peterson, *Eis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926, p. 130ff.

[24] C. F. D. Moule, "A Reconsideration of the Context of *Maranatha*," in *NTS* 6 (1959), p. 307-310.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

Iuda Ischariot partem habeat…[25] ("If anyone is against our decision, let him be anathema, maranatha – that is, let him perish at the Coming or Parousia of our Lord, and share into the fate of Judas Iscariot").

Another author who adopts this interpretation is also Eriksson, who considers v. 22 from a rhetorical analysis perspective[26]. Eriksson basically tries to follow up on the Pauline arguments in 16:13-24, where he identifies six topics, which are in fact a review of the major topics of the Epistle. Of these, γρηγορεῖτε in 16:13 is said to review the eschatological topic: the believers must be in a state of continuous alert as they await the Parousia. As for vv. 22-24, Eriksson thinks that love is part of the covenant of loyalty towards God. The absence of the love of God will bring about the curse, just as its presence brings about the blessing (cf. 1 Cor 2:9). The blessing or the curse will come upon the believers at the Parousia[27].

(4) New arguments in favor of a future Parousia reading are put forth by Matthew Black, who compares this expression with Jude 14-15: "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: 'See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him,'" and with a similar text from 1 Enoch 1:9: "And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy the ungodly: and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed" (1 Enoch uses "comes"- ἔρχεται)[28]. Black argues that this reference to the Parousia was present in the Aramaic version of 1 Enoch and can be reconstructed as *maranatha.*[29] To this we must add the fact that the adjective pronoun 'our', together with the title 'Lord', has been identified in the Aramaic texts discovered at Qumran as *Marana*. For example, in 4QEnoch (4Q202) 1, col. III:14 (= *1 Enoch* 9:4), one finds *[ʾnth hwʾ] mrnʾ rbʾ [hw]ʾ* (= *mārānāʾ rabbāʾ*), "(you are) our great Lord."[30] The Greek form *maranatha* is therefore most likely an elision of the Aramaic form *mārānāʾ ʾăthāʾ*, "Our Lord, come!" In principle, the Greek *tha* could be an apocope of the Aramaic Imperative *tha*. However, since this form is mostly encountered in late Aramaic and in Syriac, the most plausible explanation remains that of an ellipsis.

[25] J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, Tomus decimus*, Firenze: Zatta, 1764, p. 639. J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 630.

[26] A. Eriksson, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians*, ConBNT, Almqvist & Wiskell: Stockholm, 1998, esp. chapter "Maranatha in the Letter's Peroratio," p. 279–298.

[27] A. Eriksson, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians*, p. 298.

[28] Mattew Black, "The Maranatha Invocation and Jude 14, 15 (1 Enoch 1:9)", in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the NT: Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 189–196.

[29] Mattew Black, "The Maranatha Invocation and Jude 14, 15 (1 Enoch 1:9)", p. 195.

[30] J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 630.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

4. Working hypothesis and theological implications

As a specialist in Aramaic, Mattew Black's arguments are worth noting. Besides, his hypothesis commands a valuable vantage point due to its flexibility. His conclusion that the expression must be read as an Imperative or a Future is hard to dismiss. If we add to this the importance of 1 Corinthians 15, we can safely state that the expression *maranatha* in 16:22 targets the Parousia and should be interpreted as an Imperative: "Our Lord, come!" As such, this expression signifies the belief of the Early Church in the Parousia. At the same time it also reveals, or stipulates, the outlook of Christians from everywhere and always toward the Parousia: in keeping with the Lord's Prayer ("Thy kingdom come") and with the words of the Apostle Paul ("for me, to live is Christ, and death is gain" – Phil 1:21), a Christians always wants to be united more fully with his/her Lord, so they pray: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

On the other hand, though, as we noted when we looked at the various translations, many of these, starting with Blessed Jerome's *Vulgata*, render this expression as one word. Comparing this trend with some of Black's observations, we could opt for a hypothesis that leaves open more possibilities. Black argues, for example, that this expression was probably very popular in the Early Church, and probably exactly because of its ambiguity and flexibility which made it suitable for a large variety of contexts. Black's idea is probably correct. Seen that the community in Corinth mainly consisted in converts from among the Gentiles, that is, people with no previous knowledge of Aramaic, the presence of this expression here without a gloss suggests that it was already part of their vocabulary, that is, part of the basic vocabulary of any Christian, perhaps even a liturgical formula. Although accompanied by a translation, the Aramaic *Abba* in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 also suggests that at least some of the Aramaic expressions used in the Mother-Church were gradually adopted throughout the rest of the Christian world as well.[31] If this was indeed so, then it is not hard to accept that the meaning of this expression may have actually been versatile depending on the context. Theologically, this versatility makes sense, since the first coming of Christ (the Incarnation) inaugurates the awaiting of the second coming (the Parousia), and the latter presupposes the former. No matter how we translate or use this expression, it remains open to both possibilities. Moreover, as Black notes[32], even if we read the Aramaic expression as a reference to the past, in our context it is still a reference to the future conveyed by a *perfectum futuri* – equivalent to the prophetic perfect[33]. In this context, therefore, the expression means either "the Lord will come" (soon, at the Parousia), or, imperatively, "Lord, come!" - obviously, in reference to the Parousia. But – as mentioned above – this reference to the Parousia already

[31] Also see Karl Georg Kuhn, "μαραναθά," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, G. Kittel si G. Friedrich (editors), Stuttgart, 1942, vol. IV, p. 470, who cites two Hebrew words that became current in Christian usage: 'hosanna' and 'amen'.

[32] Here Black seems to be responding to G. K. Kuhn's claim that a future reading of this expression is entirely out of the question ("μαραναθά," in TWNT, IV, p. 466–472).

[33] Mattew Black, "The Maranatha Invocation and Jude 14, 15 (1 Enoch 1:9)", p. 196.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

presupposes the first Coming, therefore this first Coming is not excluded but rather presupposed.

This reading, which relies on the assumption that the meaning of the passage is flexible, is in harmony with the patristic interpretation of this passage.

Conclusion

St Paul's Aramaic words read as a prayer-invocation of St Paul, the Apostle following in the early Christian tradition of praying in this language. If we accept the imperative reading according to which this expression is an invocation, then this expression becomes eschatological and aligns perfectly with other allusions to the Parousia in the context of 1 Corinthians (4:5; 5:5; 11:26; 15:23). If we read it in the Present or the Past Tense, this expression emphasizes the reality of the Incarnation and constitutes a reference to what Biblical theology calls the 'realized'[34] or 'functional' eschatology[35]. Since the early manuscripts, as well as a large number of translations, render the expression as one word, it is possible, as suggested by M. Black, that this expression is in fact intrinsically versatile, and able to fit in many kinds of contexts. In light of this, I propose that the expression should be transliterated as one word (*maranatha*), this version being supported not only by the manuscript tradition and by the tradition of some major translations but also by the eschatological perspective which doesn't allow any breach between the Incarnation and the Parousia.

Bibliography

Eusebius of Caesarea, 1987, *Istoria bisericească* [Church History], PSB 13; translated by Fr. Dr. T. Bodogae, IBMBOR Press, Bucharest

Învăţătura celor Doisprezece Apostoli [The Didache of the Twelve Apostles], X, 5, in *Scrierile Părinţilor Apostolici* [The writings of the Apostolic Fathers], translated and annotated by Fr. Dr. Dumitru Fecioru, IBMBOR Press, Bucharest, 1995, p. 26-35

Saint Jerome, 1996, *Dialogus Adversus Pelagianos*, III, 2, In PL (Migne), 23.782.2; St. Jerome, *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol 6, Philip Schaff (ed.), Albany, Oregon, 1996, p. 943 – 1018

St John Chrysostom, 2005, *Omilia a XLI la I Corinteni* [Homely 41 on First Corinthians], in IDEM, *Comentariile sau tâlcuirea Epistolei întâi către Corintheni* [Commentaries or the exegesis of First Corinthians], transl. by Archimandrite Theodosie Athanasiu, Bucharest, 1908, revised by Constantin Făgeţean, Ed. Sofia, Bucharest/ Editura Cartea Ortodoxă, Alexandria

St Teophylact of Bulgaria, 2005, *Tâlcuirea Epistolei întâi către Corinteni a slăvitului şi prea-lăudatului Apostol Pavel* [Exegesis on the First Epistle to the Corinthians of the great and glorified Apostle Paul], translated by Metropolitan Veniamin Costache, 1904, revised by Florin Stuparu, Sofia Press, Bucharest / Cartea Ortodoxă Press, Alexandria

[34] C. H. Dodd, „The Mind of Paul: Change and Development", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 18 (1934), p. 27-31.

[35] See Georgios Patronos, *Îndumnezeirea omului [The divinization of man]*, trans. by. Assoc. Prof. Sabin Preda, Ph.D., Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 2012.

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)

Berardino, Angelo di and Quasten, Johannes (editors), 1991, *trology*, vol IV, "The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature. From the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon", translated into English by Rev. Placid Solari, Cristian Classics, Westminster, Maryland

Black, Mattew, 1973, "The Maranatha Invocation and Jude 14, 15 (1 Enoch 1:9)", in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the NT*: *Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 189-196

Eriksson, A., 1998, *Traditions as Rhetorical Proof*: *Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians*, ConBNT, Almqvist & Wiskell, Stockholm

Fitzmyer, J. A., 1980, „The Aramaic Language and the Study of the New Testament," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 99, No. 1 (Mar., 1980), p. 5-21

Fitzmyer, J. A., 1998, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, 1998, B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Fitzmyer, J. A.,, 2008, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New Haven; London, Yale University Press

Folmer, M. L., 1995, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period. A Study in Linguistic Variation*, Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta 68, Peeters Press, Leuven

Garland, D. E., 2003, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT, Baker Academic/Grand Rapids, Michigan

Gzella, Holger; Folmer, Margaretha L. (ed.), 2008, *Aramaic in its Historical and Linguistical Setting,* Harassowity, Wiesbaden

Higgins, A. J. B., 1952, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament*, SCM Press, London

Johns, Alger F., 1972, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, Michigan

Käsemann, Ernst, "Sätze Heiligen Rechtes im NT" in *NTS* 1 (1954-55), p. 248-260

Kaufman, A., 1992, „Languages - Aramaic", in David Noel Freedman et al. (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 K-N, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 173-177

Kuhn, Karl Georg, 1942, "μαραναθά" in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, G. Kittel si G. Friedrich (editors), Stuttgart, 1942, vol. IV, p. 466-472

Liezmann, H., 1926, *Messe und Herrenmahl*, Bonn

Moule, C. F. D., 1959, "A Reconsideration of the Context of *Maranatha*," in *NTS* 6 (1959), p. 307-310

Peterson, E., 1926, *Eis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Robinson, J. A. T., 1953, "Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in I Cor XVI, 20-24," in JTS, IV, 1 (April, 1953), p. 38-41

Rosenthal, Franz, 1961, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Otto Harassowity, Wiesbaden

Thiselton, Anthony C., 2000, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text,* William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., Carlisle

BDD-A211 © 2013 Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 22:58:18 UTC)