Archaism and Innovation in the Semitic Languages

Selected Papers

Edited by
Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala & Wilfred G. E. Watson

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The direct object (DirObj) of a verb can be expressed by a noun or a pronoun. In this study we will describe the ways of linking both kinds of DirObjs to the verb in all pre-modern Aramaic varieties, and touch in a preliminary way upon the situation in Neo-Aramaic. A speculative calculus of syntactic slots and their fillers, based on one’s preliminary acquaintance with Aramaic, looks as follows:

1) DirObj is a noun: it is introduced by a prefixed direct object marker (= DOM) or by Ø, in certain Aramaic varieties the choice may depend on personhood and/or definiteness of the DirObj. The verb may take an anticipatory (perhaps sometimes a resumptive) bound pronoun that copies the nominal DirObj (cataphora/anaphora), depending on pragmatic considerations.

2) DirObj is a pronoun: it is bound on a DOM or directly on the verb. In the latter case, in certain Aramaic varieties there may appear linking elements between the verb and the pronoun.

In the study, we are looking at the ways these possibilities take shape in individual Aramaic idioms.

Part 1. VIII Century Inscriptions in Old Western Aramaic

1.1. DirObj is a noun

The only pre-nominal DOM used in the corpus is Ɂyt. It appears in the two extant Northwest Syrian documents of any length, KAI 202 (ZKR) and 222-224 (Sfire),

* We wish to thank Ilya Arkhipov, Maria Bulakh, Leonid Kogan, and Mixail Seleznev for their useful suggestions.

1 In this study, we do not discuss clausal complements.

2 We do not include here the Tell Fekheriyeh inscription (KAI 309), since according to the scholarly consensus it represents a different variety of Aramaic. In our view, TF is the first now available textual testimony of Old Eastern Aramaic (Sergey Loesov, 'A New Attempt at Reconstructing Proto-Aramaic. Part 1', Babel und Bibel 6 (2012), pp. 421-456). We will look at the DirObj encoding of this text later in our study.
and in a peripheral inscription (KAI 320, Bukan). It is missing from the contemporaneous peripheral inscriptions written in Old Western Aramaic and found in Zincirli (KAI 216-218). Consider all eleven extant examples:

ZKR

(1) w-hwsp[t ...] ʔyt kl mḥgt [...] ‘And I added <to a previously mentioned city> a whole circle of [...]’ (KAI 202 B 4f.).

(2-3) w-bnḥt ʔyt [...] ʔyt ṣḥṣ ‘I (re)built [a GN and] Afis’ (KAI 202 B 10f.).


(6) [...] ʔṣr w-ʔyt [...] š[r]ḥ ‘[Execute?’ the man and [...] his folk (KAI 202 B 27f.).

Sfire

(7) l-th b-hylk w-[ʾtm l-t?][w]n b-hylkm b[y]ty [w-hn ṣq[r[kl–]y]ʔḥ bgh ʔyt ṣqr[y] ‘If you, sg do not come with your army and [you do not] come, p with your armies to strengthen my house, [and if your offspring does not] come to strengthen (ʔyt) [my] offspring’ (KAI 222B 31 ff.).

(8-9) ḧbd ḥbd ḡt ḥšk w-ʔyt mlkh ‘I shall destroy (the words) “KTK” and “its king” (written on the stele’ (KAI 223 C 5 ff.).

3 In the corpus, ʔyt as a host for pronominal DirObjs appears twice (see 1.2), while prenominal ʔyt is attested at least eleven times.

4 We do not take into account assumed tokens of ʔyt restored in broken portions of texts, e.g., KAI 310:4 (Tell Dan).

5 The Zincirli vernacular was not Aramaic (cf. KAI 214-215), while the site of KAI 320 was at the time not a Semitic-speaking area at all.

6 In our grammatical description, the passages where ʔyt is intact while a nominal DirObj is broken will be not completely disregarded. Given the paucity of evidence, we cannot shunt anything usable, so in our judgement we will have to rely on the common sense, i.e., on the plausibility of suggested restorations. In the below list, we adduce all extant examples of ʔyt in order to present completely the evidence on the very existence of ʔyt in Old Western Aramaic.


8 The translation follows J. Gibson Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions. Vol. 2, p. 11. The exact meaning of ṣṣṣ is unknown, cf. DNWSI 128 (ṣṣṣ), with ref. to previous literature.

9 DNWSI 715.

10 We accept the restored ṣqr[y], since it is supported by the context/parallelism.
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(10) [...] kl Ɂłh[Ɂ[y ył]y? Ɂy b-sprʔ[zn]h Ɂy tmtʔ[Ɂ]l w-brh w-br brh w-ʃqrh w-kl mlky Ɂrpd w-kl rbwh w-ʃmhm

‘May all the gods of the treaty who are mentioned in this inscription [do something bad to] Matiel and to his son and grandson, and his offspring, and to all the kings of Arpad and all its nobles, and to their folks’ (KAI 223 C 12-16).12

Bukan
(11) zy yhns Ɂyt nšb[ʔ] [znh][...] ‘Whoever will upset13 this stele’ (KAI 320:1’).14

The current view of what the prenominal Ɂyt is doing in the corpus is epitomized by Aaron Rubin15 (with lit.):

‘The nota accusativi Ɂyt optionally appears before definite direct objects. <...> For nominal objects there are many examples with no direct object marker’.

Consider also the opinion of Fitzmyer:16

‘The syntactical function of this particle remains a mystery in these inscriptions, since it is not always used, and the reason why it is used does not clearly emerge’.

Here is an observation that helps solve the riddle:

Ɂyt does appear only before pragmatically definite nominal DirObjs, yet it shows up solely where a definite DirObj noun phrase cannot take the definite article (= DefArt) for syntactic or semantic motives.17 In other words, in definite DirObj noun phrases, Ɂyt and DefArt stand in complementary distribution.

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11 See KAI II:263 for this sagacious interpretation. The literal understanding is excluded in the context of stereotyped curses against those who would dare meddle with the stele.
12 The words ‘[do something bad]’ in the translation stand for a broken verb preceding the extant text (line 12); the verb is a predicate of the cited sentence.
15 A. Rubin, Studies in Semitic grammaticalization, p. 94.
17 The only exception is (11), a peripheral inscription from Bukan, provided the restoration of the partly broken line is correct. As we will learn presently, this is for a reason.
Let us have a glance at the above sentences: DefArt cannot appear if the noun phrase in question\(^{18}\) is a proper noun (exx. 3, 8, 10 and probably 2) or has a possessive pronoun (exx. 4, 7, 9). This makes up seven out of the ten available tokens of substantive DirObj noun phrases with \(^{?}\)yt (excluding No 11 from the count). Our ex. 5 sides morphosyntactically with the “proper noun” group (the dependent in the noun phrase is Zkr mlk Ḥmt, therefore the noun phrase cannot take DefArt). Our exx. 1 and 6 have to remain non liquet because what follows is heavily damaged.

Anticipating an attempt to understand this non-trivial distribution, we will now pass in review the whole of the evidence for DefArt within DirObj noun phrases in the corpus. Since demonstratives forming part of a noun phrase routinely co-occur with DefArt,\(^{19}\) we will first consider all six tokens of demonstrative pronouns within “arthrous” DirObj noun phrases:

(12) [w-]ḥmt qdm [ʔ/wr] nṣb? znh
‘[And] I have set up this stele before [DN]’ (KAI 202 B 13f., ZKR).

(13) w-m[ŋ y]ḥqṣ nṣb? znh ‘And whoever destroys this stele’ (KAI 202 B 18f., ZKR).

(14) ld [sp][y]ʔn ‘Efface these inscriptions’ (KAI 223 C 9, Sfire).

(15) w-ʔltṣq ḥdh mn mly sprʔ znh[ḥ]
‘And do not neglect\(^{20}\) any one of the words of this text’ (KAI 222 B 8f., Sfire).

(16) [tšʔ]mn ṣdyʔ ʔn ‘[if you carry out] this treaty’ (KAI 222 B 24, Sfire).

(17) ḥnh bnyt ḅyt? znh
‘I have built this palace’ (KAI 216:20, Zincirli).

Now there follow the rest of DirObj noun phrases that have DefArt, all of them from Sfire:\(^{22}\)

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18 i.e., in whatever syntactic slot.
20 The interpretation is disputed, see DNWSI 1200. ‘Do not neglect’ presupposes the D-stem of šṭq, while the G-stem reading ‘Let no one of the words of this inscription be silent’ cannot be ruled out.
21 Sprʔ znh ‘this text’ is not a DirObj but a part of a composite DirObj noun phrase ‘any one of the words of this text.’ We decided to include it anyway.
22 Exx. 18-22 go against the suggestion of Thomas O. Lambdin: ‘at its origin the emphatic state was 100 per cent predictable by construction’ (Th. Lambdin, ‘The junctural origin’, in
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(18) w-mm l-yṣr mly spr?zy b-nsb?znh

‘But whoever does not observe the words of the inscription which (are) on this stele’ (KAI 222 C 16f.).

(19) ḥpk tbt?

‘I shall change the good things’ (KAI 222 C 19)

(20) ḥbd spr[y]?

‘I shall destroy the inscriptions’ (KAI 223 C 4).

(21) w-yzhl h? mn ld spr[y]? mn bty ḥhy?

‘Then let this one beware from effacing the inscriptions away from «gods’ houses»’ (KAI 223 C 6f.).

(22) kl gbr zy ... ymall mlḥyt lʕly [...] tqḥ mly? mn ydh

‘Whoever … will speak bad words against me […] and you shall/will take the (aforementioned) words from his hand (= from him)’ (KAI 224:1f.).

Against the background of standard BH prose, one expects that in definite DirObj noun phrases DOM and DefArt combine freely, but as we have seen this does not happen in Old Western Aramaic. By the same token, our acquaintance with standard BH prose leads us to expect that in definite DirObj noun phrases which include a demonstrative adjective (‘this,’ ‘these,’ etc.) all three markers of definiteness combine freely (Ex 4:17, Ez 12:23 among hundreds of examples), while actually this BH kind of usage is attested nowhere except in (11), within the text which is otherwise different from the “core” corpus in terms of its use of DefArt.

Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright, ed. H. Goedicke, p. 319), i.e., at an early stage of Aramaic, DefArt is supposed to have been semantically redundant, because the respective noun phrases always had lexical or syntactic markers of definiteness (= demonstratives or relative clauses). On Lambdin’s hypothesis, our exxs. 18-22 would be among the alleged ten exceptional tokens of DefArt ‘on an otherwise unqualified noun’ (Th. Lambdin, ‘The junctural origin’, in Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright, ed. H. Goedicke, p. 318), whose list Lambdin did not care to provide (Lambdin’s corpus is Sfire alone). Anyway, the hypothesis would be worth considering only had Lambdin come up with examples of “absolute” nouns which are pragmatically/semantically definite, but this did not happen.

ld spr[y]? may as well be a noun phrase.

See various interpretation of the passage in KAI II:264-267 and J. Fitzmyer, The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire, pp. 137, 143f. Exegetical differences fortunately do not bear on our grammatical point, so we have opted for a non-committal word-for-word rendering, e.g., cf. the following (formally) definite-descriptions (i.e., noun phrases supplied with DefArt) from KAI 320 (Bukan): [k] mh mwt ‘whatever plague’ (l. 2); [k]zy hwh b-kl ?rq? ‘as much as there is on the whole of the earth’ (l. 3). In the core Old Western Aramaic of Sfire,
Now then, the above observation leads to the following rule:

DOM Ɂyt is prefixed to those referential DirObj noun phrases that cannot take DefArt as a morphosyntactic signal of their definiteness.  

This rule explains two pieces of evidence:

1) The DOM Ɂyt is incompatible with DefArt (see the above observation).

2) In all clear cases from the above list (i.e., in our exx. 1-10), the DOM Ɂyt is used either (1) with proper nouns or (2) with common nouns [+ possess.]. In the corpus, DirObj noun phrases headed by proper nouns always prefix the DOM Ɂyt, while DirObj noun phrases [+ possess.] behave one way or the other depending on their referentiality value.

To show the validity of the rule, we will take a closer look at the above sentences with DirObj noun phrases introduced by Ɂyt. The reader can ascertain for himself

almost literally identical noun phrases show up in the very same context of stereotyped maledictions as in Bukan, and they are anarthrous: [yš h]dd klmh llyh b-Ɂrq w-b-ståyn w-klmh ʃml ‘may Hadad pour over it whatever evil (there is) on earth and in heaven and whatever trouble’ (KAI 222 A 25 f.). Note that André Lemaire, in his rejoinder to Sokoloff (‘The Old Aramaic Inscription from Bukān’, *Israel Exploration Journal* 49 (1999), had already observed that “l’état emphatique irrégulier dans KL.MH.MWTN? «...» peut faire douter que l’auteur de cette inscription ait été «a native Aramaean scribe» (p. 106)’ (André Lemaire, ‘La stèle araméenne de Bukān: mise au point épigraphique’, *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 3 (1999), p. 58). On the whole, against the general background of Old Aramaic, the evidence of Bukan looks like a wrong usage of definite descriptions by a writer for whom Aramaic was a second language.

Referring expressions are those noun phrases which point to an individual referent, ideally though not necessarily within sight of the speaker. A large class of referring expressions consists of certain definite noun phrases with common nouns as heads (‘bring me that cup of tea,’ ‘my mother is waiting outside’). Another class of referring expressions is formed by noun phrases with proper nouns which in a given context pick an unambiguously identifiable individual referent (‘Barack Obama is the incumbent president’). For the purposes of this study, referring expressions are a subtype of definite noun phrases. Other kinds of definite noun phrases relevant for our inquiry are generics (‘Jesus destroyed the sin not the sinner’; ‘perhaps I am a little like the grown-ups’) and anaphoric noun phrases, i.e., the ones referring back to the entities previously mentioned by the speaker. An up-to-date introduction to comparative and theoretical aspects of definiteness is Christopher Lyons, *Definiteness*, «Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics», Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

i.e., in the passages which are reasonably intact and philologically transparent. Our ex. (7) is grammatically difficult; it will be discussed presently.

i.e., common nouns which are heads of bound possessive pronouns.
if these noun phrases are referring. Note that the DOM Ɂyt is not an “obstinate” (or a “far-reaching”) marker, in order to maintain its force it has to be prefixed immediately to each relevant noun phrase, cf. in particular (2-3) w-bnyt Ɂyt [...] Ɂyt Ɂs and (8-9) Ɂhbd Ɂyt ktk w-Ɂyt mlkh. This granted, our rule explains the wording of (10) above:

kl Ɂlh[y Ɂdyn]y zy b-spr? [zn]h Ɂyt mtlɁ w-brh w-brh w-ʃqrh w-kl mlk Ɂrpd w-kl rbwh w-Ɂnmh

*May all the gods of the treaty who are mentioned in this inscription [do something bad to] Matiel and to his son and grandson, and his offspring, and to all the kings of Arpad and all its nobles, and to their folks*. In this sentence, Matiel (mtɁɁ) the king of Arpad is referential, the rest of the DirObj noun phrases [+ possess.] are not.

As we have already said, all DirObj noun phrases headed by referential proper nouns have Ɂyt prefixed, in compliance with the above *RULE*. This is because proper nouns in Old Western Aramaic (as in so many other languages) do not take DefArt and therefore, whenever they show up as referring DirObj noun phrases, they must prefix the DOM Ɂyt as a morphosyntactic signal of their referentiality.

Thus, the only vexing example for our rule is (7) *<if you do not come>* Ɂsgb Ɂbyty ... Ɂsgb Ɂyt Ɂqr[y] ‘to strengthen (Ø) my house ... to strengthen (Ɂyt) [my] offspring’. Ɂbyty and Ɂqr[y] are near-synonymous, both seem to be non-referential, so we do not expect DOM to be used with either of them. The problem has to remain pending till more Old Western Aramaic texts show up.

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29 In this respect, Ɂyt behaves roughly like the article in English and unlike English prepositions.

30 The problem of only one Ɂyt in this passage exists anyway, independently of the present writers’ observations. On purely philological grounds, the easiest way out would be to explain away Ɂsgb Ɂbyty as nominal rection of the infinitive, as R. Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, p. 69 does tentatively. Obviously, this solution itself would require further explanations. Orthographically, we cannot judge how the assumed G-stem infinitives link to their semantic objects unless the latter take Ɂyt. Note that in the corpus philologically transparent infinitives of derived stems are always heads of noun phrases vis-à-vis their semantic objects, e.g., ɁbɁh rɁǎy lmltc w-lmltc bry w-Ɂqrr ‘<if an enemy of mine> seeks my head to kill me or to kill my son and my offspring’ (KAI 224:11); both K-stem infinitive tokens display nominal government, to the extent that the second of them has two coordinated noun phrases as dependents, which is a non-trivial fact for the classroom grammar of classical Semitics. For additional examples, see the respective paragraphs of R. Degen, *Altaramäische Grammatik*.

31 It comes to mind that in the light of our theory Ɂsgb Ɂbyty (KAI 222 B 32) forms an isogloss with a passage from Zincirli w-Ɂhzt bty Ɂby ‘I have taken over my father’s house’ (KAI
A bound possessive pronoun is not a strong enough signal of definiteness/referentiality in Old Western Aramaic. Therefore Ɂyt has to appear before referential DirObj noun phrases that include a bound possessive pronoun as their rightmost element, see exx. (4) and (9) above. The rest of DirObj noun phrases [+ possess.] of the corpus are non-referential. Consider the evidence:

(23) ʔšlḥ mlʔky ʔ[ɪ]wh <…> ʔw  yak mlʔkh ʔly
‘If I send a messenger of mine to him <…> or he sends a messenger of his to me <the freedom of movement should be secured>’ (KAI 224:8).

The sentence is part of the treaty’s stipulations, the situation is hypothetical.

(24) yhp kw Ɂlm Ɂš Ɂw-byth w-kl Ɂy [b]h w-yšmw thyth [l-f]lyth
‘May gods overturn that man <the prospective culprit> and his house and all who are in it, and may they turn it upside down (lit. ‘make its lower part into its upper part’) (KAI 222 C 21ff.).

All three noun phrases with possessive pronouns of (24) stand in the sanction/curse part of the treaty. See also two more DirObj noun phrases in the hypothetical-future-oriented clauses of the treaty text:

(25) qti Ɂhk ‘kill your brother’ (KAI 224:18); qtiw mr Ɂkm ‘kill (pl.) your lord’ (KAI 224:21f.).

216:11f.). If one considers byt Ɂby a referring expression, this is the only definite DirObj noun phrase in Zincirli Aramaic (KAI 216-218) wherein the DOM Ɂyt is missing in defiance of our description. (i.e., in terms of our study, Bar-Rakib, unlike Bukan, may not be different from Sfire and ZKR, and cf. ex. (17) above). Speculatively, byt in both passages (unlike in ex. 17) may have pointed to an abstract concept, in the way of patria potestas, while ʕqry is more reified and individuated, so the difference between lšgb Ɂbyty … lšgb Ɂyt ʕqry reflects nuances in the writer’s thinking.

The only possible counter-example from the opposite side (a referential DirObj without Ɂyt that defies our rules) will be KAI 222 A 13 pqhw Ɂnym Ɂhzyh Ɂdy brqyʔh ‘Open your eyes to see the treaty of PN.’ The text is grammatically difficult though, since in this slot infinitives of derived stems have to be heads of noun phrases (cf. an example in fn. 30), while hzyh is a hardly admissible orthography for the G-stem infinitive of a Ɂy verb (for detailed discussions of grammatical problems related to this passage, see R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, pp. 77f. and the commentaries).
All these noun phrases are non-referential, therefore Ḥyt is not called for. Note that Ḥyt is never used in composites with “light verbs” which include a DirObj noun phrase [+ possess.] with weakened lexical meaning (‘he sent his hand’ type). Cf., e.g., w-Ḥy ṣdy ‘and I lifted up my hands (to DN)’ = ‘I prayed’ (KAI 202 A 11); pqhw ʕynykm ‘open your eyes’ = ‘look carefully’ (KAI 222 A 13); yšḥ ydh ‘(if) he sends his hand (to take my land)’ (KAI 222 B 27); Ḥn l-ḥlb lḥmy ‘if you do not give my bread’ = ‘if you do not feed me’ (KAI 222 B 38), and more.

Finally, anarthrous DirObj noun phrases are all pragmatically indefinite in the corpus. Consider a couple of examples:

(26) w-šmw kl mlky Ḥyt ṣlr ʕl Ḥzr [k] ‘and all these kings laid siege to Hadrak’ (KAI 202 A 9).
(27) w-hrmw šr mn šr Ḥzrk w-ḥṣmqw Ḥṣ mn Ḥr ṣh ‘and they put up a rampart higher than the wall of Hadrak, and dug a trench deeper than its moat’ (KAI 202 A 10).

Summing up: the Old Western Aramaic corpus is made up of a few monumental inscriptions which share much in terms of contents, style and genre/structure. This kind of linguistic evidence is not favourable for most of descriptive purposes, especially given the meagre size of the extant texts. Yet we have found a non-trivial and consistent pattern of encoding the nominal DirObj across the corpus whose parts were written down by different VIII-century writers. This fact enhances the chance that this pattern reflects a genuine vernacular usage.

33 The same is true of nominal DirObjs in our ex. (27) nkh tkh Ḥyt<ty> ṣqr Ḥṣ ṣrbw ṣmwd Ḥrb ‘You shall strike him, his family, the members of his clan and his relatives with the sword’ (KAI 224:13 f.). It will be discussed in the following part of this chapter.
34 i.e. verbs with reducible semantic contents (in English, to give, to make, to take, etc.) which form compounds with noun phrases that are formally their direct objects (‘to give a hug,’ ‘to make a mistake’).
35 According to the lists created for us by the Bible Works search engine, the šlḥ yd verb phrase appears in BH thirty-three times without Ḥyt, while in fifteen cases it is supplied with this DOM. No obvious distribution rule is to be seen. Allowing for heterogeneity of our BH corpus and insurmountable dating problems, one has a reason to speculate that in the Hebrew varieties spoken by the time our Old Western Aramaic evidence had been committed to writing, this DOM was entrenched much deeper than in Aramaic. Yet even in Hebrew, compounds of ‘he sent his hand’ type were more resistant to Ḥyt than most other kinds of “formally definite” DirObjs.
36 An exhaustive list of this kind of DirObj noun phrases is as follows: KAI 202 A 4f., 9f., 15; B 9. 222 A 2f., 36. 223 A 2. 224:2. Sure enough, we target only the DirObj noun phrases that morphosyntactically could have been arthrous as well.
37 Our description is marred by the fact we do not know how to say in Old Western Aramaic ’his young daughter’/a young daughter of his’ (or simply ‘the young daughter’), since the corpus has no single example of an attributive adjective dependent on a “definite” substantive.
A Note: Pre-Nominal Ɂyt in Retrospect and Prospect

Now the reader will ask why the DOM Ɂyt of Old Western Aramaic is so special. Why, unlike in BH prose, cannot it be prefixed to arthrous substantives? In other words, why is it that in the context of Ɂyt redundancy in encoding definiteness of DirObj is avoided? This “why” is a historical question that leads us to the early (in particular, pre-Aramaic) life of *Ɂyāt. Our answer is as follows: in its early life (most importantly, in Proto-Aramaic), Ɂyt used to do to respective DirObj noun phrases something other than announcing their “general” definite status (i.e., it behaved quite unlike the Ɂāt of BH textbooks). As we already know, in the corpus DefArt alone serves the end well enough. This is proven by exx. 18-22 which contain DirObj-noun-phrases the language interprets as definite. In Old Western Aramaic, within DirObj noun phrases, DefArt alone is able to take care of anaphoric definiteness (ex.22), of generics (ex.19), and of referring noun phrases (exx. 18, 20, 21). The cumulative evidence allows one to suggest that at an earliest (prehistoric) stage of Aramaic Ɂyt was not a genuine grammatical “marker” (i.e. the otherwise meaningless nota accusativi) but rather a deictic (probably presentative) particle which had been restricted to the pre-DirObj slot for diachronic reasons (see fn. 38). In terms of its contribution to the overall sense of noun phrases, it is comparable more to demonstratives than to DefArt.

The lexically “special” (as we believe, demonstrative/presentative) nature of the early Ɂyt is corroborated by its fate in the historical Aramaic, which we will trace in the course of the study: in the corpora faithful to a vernacular usage, reflexes of *Ɂyt had never become productive, i.e., regularly employed in the pre-nominal slot as signals of definite (or any other kind of) DirObj, unlike its sister Ɂāt in the BH prose. As we will see, Ɂyt as the marker of the nominal DirObj had lived through the heyday of its glory in Old Western Aramaic. What followed was

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38 This is the original shape of the particle suggested in Leonid Kogan, Genealogical Classification of Semitic. The Lexical Isoglosses, forthcoming, chapter 2. Kogan believes, building on part of previous scholarship, that Ɂyt is etymologically related to ‘the element *-āt(i) in the oblique forms of the personal pronouns in Akkadian (šuɁāti ‘him’) and some of the WS languages.’ This etymology may help explain how Ɂyt combines its demonstrative force with the restrictedness to the DirObj slot.

39 It stands to reason that demonstratives are used as explicit anaphoric or ostensive expressions, in addition to DefArt, whenever the speaker needs them. I.e. demonstratives are compulsory escorted by the DefArt, as e.g. in Hebrew or Arabic but unlike in English or Spanish.

40 It looks like this view was foreshadowed already in A. Rubin, Studies in Semitic grammaticalization, p. 193 fn. 52, though the wording is not terribly clear: ‘Presumably, the function of this particle was more than just a direct object marker, since <...> its use is inconsistent in early dialects like Old Aramaic and Phoenician’.

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a rapid decline. First, *ʔyt had not become a part of the Proto-Eastern Aramaic.\footnote{S. Loesov, ‘A New Attempt’, Babel und Bibel 6 (2012), pp. 421-456; S. Loesov, ‘A New Attempt at Reconstructing Proto-Aramaic. Part II’, in Sounds and Words through the Ages: Afroasiatic Studies from Turin, ed. by Alessandro Mengozzi and Mauro Tosco, Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2013, pp. 91-106.} Second, in the whole of post-700 BC Western Aramaic (including the three “Middle” varieties), the regular markers of the nominal DirObj are either Ø- or l-; ʔt in this slot being marginal and demonstrably artificial.

It turns out that Aramaic started looking for a pre-nominal object marker since its appearance as an identifiable linguistic entity, but, in contrast to Canaanite, an attempt to put ʔyt to this service proved to be not a good idea (unlike its use as a host for the pronominal DirObj), so the language had to fall back on Ø- or reinterpret the addressee-recipient preposition l- as a DOM, which is a typologically trivial and therefore readily available move. As it will become clear, the rest of Aramaic (roughly, from Imperial Aramaic to the present day) has been building its nominal DirObj encoding on these two options.

We hope to survey the usage of *ʔyāt in WS outside Aramaic in an appendix to the present study, as well as the functions of *ʔyāt in the historical Aramaic besides its role as DOM.\footnote{For the history of *ʔyāt, the yātēh yawmā (‘the very same day’) construction in Middle Aramaic is most promising, especially because it is well known in Rabbinic Hebrew and Geez (August Dillmann and Carol Bezold, Ethiopic Grammar, translated by James Crichton, London: Williams and Norgate, 1907, pp. 341 f., LLA 869 f., CDG 300, Josef Trepper, Altäthiopisch: Grammatik des Gē’ez mit Übungstexten und Glossar, «Elementa Linguarum Orientis» 2, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002, p. 158.)}

1.2. DirObj is a pronoun

In the corpus, the pronominal DirObj is encoded some twenty times by bound forms.\footnote{See the list in R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, pp. 79ff.}

There is nothing particular about the tokens bounded on the Preterit.\footnote{R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 79f.} As for the Prefixing Conjugation (= PC), Degen notes as follows:\footnote{R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 80.}

‘Auffällig ist aber, daß bei dem Suffix der 3. sg. mask. zwischen Verbform und Suffix ein -n- eingeschoben wird, wenn es an ein Langimpf. angefügt wird’.

Consider all four tokens of what we will call in the rest of the study “nun-full forms”:

\footnote{\begin{enumerate}
\item For the history of *ʔyāt, the yātēh yawmā (‘the very same day’) construction in Middle Aramaic is most promising, especially because it is well known in Rabbinic Hebrew and Geez (August Dillmann and Carol Bezold, Ethiopic Grammar, translated by James Crichton, London: Williams and Norgate, 1907, pp. 341 f., LLA 869 f., CDG 300, Josef Trepper, Altäthiopisch: Grammatik des Gē’ez mit Übungstexten und Glossar, «Elementa Linguarum Orientis» 2, Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002, p. 158.)
\item See the list in R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, pp. 79ff.
\item R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 79f.
\item R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 80.
\end{enumerate}}
Thus, nun-ffull forms appear in both ZKR and Sfıre, and a glance at the corpus (cf. the whole of the evidence cited in Degen makes one suspect that the 3 ms “Langimperfekt” had to link the 3 ms object pronoun via -n-, while otherwise -n- was not used in indicative forms of the PC and was incompatible with the Jussive (“short PC”), as Degen correctly observes.

As we already know, in the corpus ıyt as a host for pronominal DO appears twice (both times in Sfıre), if we accept an emendation (i.e., a scribal omission) and a restoration, both decisions being reliable. The preposition l- is not used this way in the extant Old Western Aramaic.

Consider the examples:

(29) nkh tkh ıyt h w-ʕqrh w-šrbwh w-mwddhw b-hrb
‘You shall strike him, his family, the members of his clan and his relatives with the sword’ (KAI 224:13f.).

In the passage, ıyt as the host for a suffixed object pronoun shows up to introduce a pronominal DirObj followed by three DirObj noun phrases. So ıyt was used as an emergency measure, in order to avoid multiple copy pasting of the whole verb phrase, ‘you shall strike him, you shall strike his family…’ etc. Since ıyth looks syntactically and prosodically like a noun, it easily yields to coordination (~ “homogenization”) with nominal DirObjs.

(30) w-hn mn hd ıhy ıw mn hd byt ıby ıw mn hd bny ıw mn hd ngry ıw mn hd [p]ady ıw mn hd ınmy? ıy b-ydy ıw mn hd ın?ıw ybšt rşy l-hmtty w-hmtt bry w-ıqrı ıw l ıt th w-tqım dmy mn yd ınfy
‘If any one of my brothers or any one of my father’s household or any one of my sons or any one of my officers or any one of my officials or any one of the people under my control or any one of my enemies seeks my head to murder me and to murder my son

46 Yyny, haphel.
47 R. Degen, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 79f.
48 As we will learn in the continuation of this study, the usage of nun-full forms in Old Western Aramaic is different from the one known, e.g., in Egyptian Aramaic or Biblical Aramaic.
49 The reading is as in J. Fitzmyer, The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefıre, p. 138
and my offspring, – if they kill me, you shall come and avenge my blood from the hand of my enemies’ (KAI 224:9ff.).

In this text, Ɂyt is used to extrapolate a pronominal DirObj in order to create a pragmatic effect, like in Classical Arabic (cf. Qurʼān 1:5).⁵⁰ Thus in both cases Ɂyt as the pronominal host is used for a serious cause.

Summing up: in Old Western Aramaic, pronominal DirObjs were bound on verb forms, in certain cases via the “presuffixal nun”, as described above. The particle Ɂyt as the pronominal host was used only in cases of sheer need, unlike in part of later Western Aramaic, as we will see in the continuation of this study.

The next part of the study will deal with the situation in Egyptian Aramaic of the Achaemenid period.

Abbreviations


LLA August Dillmann, Lexicon Linguæ Aethiopicæ, Lipsiae: Weigel, 1865.

TF Tell Fekheriye