

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Aramaic first appeared on the stage of history when several newly emerging kingdoms, or chiefdoms, decided to use it as a written language during the opening centuries of the Iron Age. This process coincided with a change from syllabic cuneiform to alphabetic scribal culture and the rise of a novel style of public epigraphy, formerly unattested in Syria-Palestine, by means of which local rulers striving for prestige among their peers overtly celebrated their deeds. From a comparative point of view, Aramaic constitutes a sister branch of the idiom used in the Bronze-Age city-state of Ugarit, on the one hand, and Canaanite, which comprises languages further south in the speech area such as Hebrew, Phoenician, and Moabite, on the other. All three branches can be subsumed under the more general rubric “Northwest Semitic” and thus share a common origin according to a widespread model of historical linguistics. In addition, Aramaic also participated in a number of common structural developments that affected the languages of Syria-Palestine during the Iron Age, especially the loss of morphological case marking, a restructuring of the verbal system, and the rise of a definite article.<sup>1</sup>

##### 1.1 *Features of Aramaic*

The linguistic situation in Syria-Palestine, however, was already diversified during the Late Bronze Age. Although Aramaic cannot be directly connected to any of the Bronze-Age manifestations of Northwest Semitic, it exhibits a number of grammatical and lexical traits that set it apart from both contemporaneous Canaanite and earlier Ugaritic.<sup>2</sup> Several of these can be identified even in the largely consonantal writing system:

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<sup>1</sup> The Northwest Semitic background of Aramaic is briefly described in Gzella 2011a.

<sup>2</sup> Gianto 2008 succinctly outlines the early history of Aramaic as a language.

a reflex of the Proto-Semitic lateral \*/š/ written with the grapheme {q}; the third-person masc. singular possessive suffix \*/-ay-hū/ > /-aw-hī/ (following dissimilation of the final /ū/) with vocalic bases; aphaeresis of /ʔ/ in the numeral ‘one’ /ḥad/ (< \*/ʔaḥad/); the shift \*/n/ > /r/ in /bar/ ‘son’ and the numeral ‘two’; fem. plural forms with the ending -n /-ān/ in the absolute state; distinctive vocalic reflexes of the final vowel of verbal roots ending in /-ī/ in the “long imperfect” and the “short imperfect”; the loss of the N-stem; a few lexical items like *yhb*, ‘to give,’ or specific meanings such as *ʿbd*, ‘to make’; later also a post-positive definite article in /-ā(ʿ)/. One may thus assume that Aramaic, like Canaanite, took on its distinctive shape at some point in the Bronze Age but remained unwritten, and hence invisible, for several centuries.

### 1.2 *The Dialect of the Tell Fekheriye Inscription*

The first direct witnesses of Aramaic, composed between the 10th and the 8th centuries B.C. and unanimously subsumed under the term “Old Aramaic,” exhibit variation and thereby anticipate the enormous linguistic diversity within this group.<sup>3</sup> They are nonetheless connected by common literary forms and formulaic expressions.<sup>4</sup> The earliest attestation is a royal inscription from Tell Fekheriye in northeastern Syria, written on a statue around 850 B.C. in an archaic form of the Phoenician alphabet, with its Assyrian parallel version.<sup>5</sup> It conforms to a different spelling practice that is characterized by a more extensive use of word-medial vowel letters and by the employ of the grapheme {s} for the sound /θ/, and has some grammatical peculiarities vis-à-vis Aramaic from central Syria: loss of intervocalic /h/ in *kln* and *klm* ‘all of them’; no assimilation in contact (at least not in writing) of /l/ in the root *lqh* ‘to take’ and of /n/ in the only attested instance; the fem. singular demonstrative *zʿt* ‘this one’; the preformative /l-/ with the third person of the non-negated “short imperfect”;

<sup>3</sup> The internal subdivision of Aramaic remains a subject of debate; Beyer 1984: 23–71 with additions in id. 2004: 13–41 fully accounts for the complexity of the data in light of chronological, regional, and social variation, whereas simpler models operate first and foremost on the basis of consecutive developmental stages (“Old,” “Imperial/Official,” “Middle,” and “Late” Aramaic).

<sup>4</sup> The same curse formula, for example, recurs in Tell Fekheriye, Sfire, and Bukan, but has been affected by the respective regional variety of Aramaic (hence the /l-/ preformative in Tell Fekheriye; the problem of gender concord in l. 7 of the Bukan inscription could result from the substrate influence of another, unknown, local language that did not have the same gender system).

<sup>5</sup> Abou-Assaf – Bordreuil – Millard 1982 and Kaufman 1982.

G-stem infinitive forms with /m-/ prefix; a Gt-stem with infix /-t-/; and the by-forms *nšwn* ‘women’ and *sʿwn* ‘ewes’ instead of *nšn* and *šʿn*. They will be discussed at greater length in the sections on script, phonology, morphology, and lexicon.

### 1.3 *Aramaic in Central Syria*

Central Syrian Aramaic is best preserved in extensive royal treaties inscribed on three stelae from Sefire near Aleppo and dating from ca. 750 B.C.,<sup>6</sup> a short dedicatory inscription of King Bar-Hadad as well as a longer memorial inscription of King Zakkur from the same region and period; and a couple of graffiti consisting of personal names from Hamath. These texts appear to be rather homogeneous in terms of spelling and language. While the Aramaic variety underlying the Tell Fekheriye inscription has disappeared from the written record, the standard idiom of the region between Aleppo and Damascus subsequently seems to have become more influential in the west and in the south. Such a situation can explain the presence of numerous Old Aramaic phonological and morphological features in the Transjordanian Tell Deir ‘Alla plaster inscription from ca. 800 B.C. in addition to several lexical and stylistic Canaanisms in the same literary composition.<sup>7</sup> Aramaic varieties also grew deep roots in the administration of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires. They are associated with a younger stage of “Old Aramaic” by some and with early manifestations of “Official Aramaic” by others. During the Achaemenid Empire, however, these were all largely eclipsed by Official Aramaic in the strict sense, i.e., the medium of the Persian chancellery, which is based on a formerly unattested Babylonian dialect of Aramaic. Western forms of Aramaic nonetheless re-emerged after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, especially in Palestine.<sup>8</sup> It is often maintained that the wisdom sayings of Aḥiqar, which have been incorporated into an Official Aramaic composition preserved in an Elephantine papyrus, originated in Syria between ca. 750 and 650 B.C.<sup>9</sup> Given the present state of knowledge, this claim is rather difficult to substantiate on purely linguistic grounds.

<sup>6</sup> See Fitzmyer 21995 for an edition with translation and extensive commentary.

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of the discussion, see Beyer 2011: 123–126.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gzella 2008 for a brief outline of the history and impact of Official Aramaic.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lindenberger 1983: 279–304 (northern Syria); Kottsieper 1990: § 62h (southern Syria).

1.4 *Sam'alian and Aramaic at Zincirli*

Another language variety close to Aramaic emerged in the kingdom of Sam'al, modern Zincirli, in northwestern Syria, where it appears to have succeeded Phoenician as the regional prestige idiom after the 9th century B.C.<sup>10</sup> This change may reflect a shift in political loyalties as well as in cultural preferences. Two relatively long royal inscriptions by the kings Panamuwa (mid-8th century B.C.) and Bar-Rakkab (second half of the 8th century B.C.) constitute the chief witnesses. As some features agree with Aramaic while others do not, the place of Sam'alian within Northwest Semitic is still debated.<sup>11</sup> Distinctive grammatical phenomena will be treated separately in the present overview. The use of a first-person singular pronoun *'nk* 'I', the lack of a post-positive definite article, the presence of N-stem forms, and, especially, the distinction between nominative and genitive-accusative in the masc. plural can be explained as archaic vestiges inherited from an earlier type of Northwest Semitic. As a consequence, it could be suggested that Sam'alian still mirrors a developmental stage prior to the split of Northwest Semitic into Aramaic and Canaanite. The area's peripheral location may have cocooned this idiom from several linguistic innovations originating in the central areas of Syria-Palestine. Since most of the aforementioned traits (leaving apart the masc. plural) match the situation in Canaanite, however, these could be explained as contact-induced.<sup>12</sup> Sam'alian would then belong to Aramaic, distinguished only by some minor regional traits like the direct object marker *wt*. The pronoun *'nk* and an occasional N-stem form may indeed constitute individual lexical loans; the post-positive article, on the other hand, was not yet fully developed in Old Aramaic, hence its absence in Sam'alian is not really surprising.

Soon afterward, the rulers of Sam'al decided to adopt a form of Aramaic closely resembling the central Syrian variety, perhaps due to the latter's growing importance. It is documented by six texts and fragments issued by the same King Bar-Rakkab, as well as by four seals and silver bars, which contain little linguistic information. The recently discovered inscription

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<sup>10</sup> The use of Phoenician in Zincirli is documented by the Kulamuwa inscription (KAI 24) and perhaps also the Kulamuwa scepter (KAI 25). The latter is sometimes subsumed under Sam'alian or Aramaic because of the grapheme {h} used for the third-person masc. singular suffix (which is atypical for the Phoenician dialect adopted by the rulers of Zincirli) yet may in fact reflect a transitional stage (cf. Gianto 2008: 12 n. 2).

<sup>11</sup> Noorlander 2012 provides an up-to-date assessment of all relevant arguments.

<sup>12</sup> Gianto 1995 and id. 2008: 12.

of the royal functionary Kuttamuwa, servant of Panamuwa (one of Bar-Rakkab's predecessors on the royal throne?),<sup>13</sup> can be situated typologically between Sam'alian, with which it shares *'nk* 'I' and the object marker *wt*, and Aramaic, whose absolute masc. plural ending *-n* it has. It may indicate that another variety of Aramaic, again influenced by local peculiarities, was more widely in use at Sam'al outside the domain of royal inscriptions until a more international form of Aramaic also encroached on that prestigious register.

Another 9th- or even 10th-century textual witness was found at Ördëk-burnu, in the immediate vicinity of Zincirli. It is written in the alphabetic script but remains controversial as to its linguistic affiliation.<sup>14</sup> Several sequences of letters can perhaps be read as Northwest Semitic words, but the enigmatic composition may contain a mixed Luwian and Semitic code.<sup>15</sup> Because of these fundamental uncertainties, it will receive no further consideration here.

### 1.5 Sources and Tools

The following grammatical sketch is based on the Aramaic dialect reflected in the Tell Fekheriye text, the Aramaic inscriptions from central Syria, and Sam'alian as well as its Aramaic successor at Zincirli.<sup>16</sup> For easier reference, primary sources (except for the Kuttamuwa stele) will be cited according to their sigla in KAI:<sup>17</sup> Tell Fekheriye = KAI 309;

<sup>13</sup> Pardee 2009a; id. 2009b; Nebe 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Edited by Lidzbarski 1915: 192–206, who doubts that the text reflects a Semitic language. But cf. Lemaire – Sass 2012 and iid. 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Nebe 2010: 315; Lemaire – Sass 2012; iid. 2013.

<sup>16</sup> There is no up-to-date synopsis of this material in its entirety. The Aramaic texts from Syria and Zincirli are discussed in detail, though from a largely synchronic perspective, by Degen 1969. More recent discoveries, such as the Tell Fekheriye and the Bukan inscriptions, as well as progress in Northwest Semitic philology, render a number of his conclusions obsolete. A grammatical outline with a glossary in Fitzmyer <sup>2</sup>1995: 177–232 is specifically devoted to the Sefire stelae. Folmer 2011 provides a concise but very nuanced overview of Old and Official Aramaic according to the most recent research and should serve as a starting point for further inquiry. These descriptions, however, exclude the Sam'alian language variety, which is extensively treated by Dion 1974 with comprehensive bibliographical references; on the new Kuttamuwa inscription and its relation with the rest of Sam'alian, see Pardee 2009a. The standard dictionary for Old Aramaic and Sam'alian, excepting Kuttamuwa, is Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995, who give copious references to the scholarly literature in every entry; Beyer 1984: 503–728 supplies valuable material on the wider Aramaic background (including etymological noun patterns) of many lexemes.

<sup>17</sup> Donner – Röellig <sup>3-5</sup>1971–2002. The 2002 edition, to which the Tell Fekheriye inscription has been added, is confined to the first volume with all texts transliterated into square script. Degen 1969: 5–23 contains an edition of the Old Aramaic inscriptions in Latin

Sefire I–III = KAI 222–224; Zakkur = KAI 202; Bar-Hadad = KAI 201; graffiti from Hamath = KAI 203–213; Sam’alian = KAI 214–215; Aramaic from Zincirli = KAI 216–221. Nonetheless, the respective *editiones principes* with their photographs, drawings, and extensive philological notes should always be consulted.

## 2. SCRIPT AND ORTHOGRAPHY

### 2.1 *The Breakthrough of Alphabetic Writing*

After the collapse of cuneiform scribal culture in Syria and Palestine on the threshold from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age, alphabetic writing became the standard in the chancelleries of various emerging kingdoms. The decline of syllabic cuneiform coincided with the appearance of new official languages like the Aramaic varieties, Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite, and others, all supposedly based on existing though erstwhile unwritten local vernaculars, in epigraphic documents. The reasons underlying this process are not yet well understood, but one may suppose that rulers who had recently risen to power consciously promoted their dialects to written, standardized, idioms. In doing so, they could rely on a writing system that, except for Ugarit and its vicinity, was formerly attested only for low-profile usages such as property marks or simple dedications. Consequently, this writing system appears to have been less affected by the breakdown of scribal institutions following the grave socioeconomic changes that washed over Syria-Palestine at the end of the Late Bronze Age. It was thus most readily available when administrative and royal propaganda needed a reliable form of recordkeeping.

### 2.2 *From the Phoenician to the Aramaic Alphabet*

Because the earliest Aramaic witnesses are, in terms of palaeography, essentially identical to the 10th-century Byblian inscriptions, it is commonly assumed that the 1st-millennium type of the alphabetic script spread from the Phoenician city of Byblos at the beginning of the Early Iron Age.<sup>18</sup> In all likelihood, the prestige of this ancient center for writing

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characters, supplemented by textual and grammatical notes. Dion 1974: 5–43 presents the Sam’alian material in Latin transliteration together with a French translation.

<sup>18</sup> For a succinct survey of this process, see Naveh 1970 and, more recently, Millard 2011. Further bibliographical references can be found in Beyer 2004: 14.

played an important role in advancing the Phoenician variant of the alphabet in Palestine, Syria, and Transjordan. The reduced set of twenty-two letter-signs (“graphemes”) of that particular script was more suitable for the inventory of distinctive consonantal sounds (“phonemes”) of a Canaanite language like Phoenician than for Aramaic, which had initially preserved some of the older Semitic consonantal phonemes already lost in Canaanite. Earlier variants of this type of script—structurally closer to some of the 2nd-millennium cuneiform alphabets, which still contained proper letters for these phonemes—would have been a more practical choice, but they were apparently forgotten by then or at least eclipsed by the Phoenician variant.

Since not every consonant that can be reconstructed for the earliest attested stages of Aramaic was thus represented by a proper letter-sign in the alphabet accepted by the Aramaeans, some letters served at least double duty: {z} for /z/ and /ð/; {š} for /š/, /θ/, and presumably also /ś/ or, in the Tell Fekheriye inscription, {s} for /s/ and /θ/; {ṣ} for /ṣ/ and /θ/ (Arabic /ṣ/); and {q} for /q/ and the reflex of the Proto-Semitic lateral \*/š/ (Arabic /ḏ/), whose pronunciation in early Aramaic, however, remains controversial. Sam’alian spelling generally agrees with the standard variant of Syrian Aramaic reflected by the Sefire inscriptions.

### 2.3 *The Rise of Vowel Letters*

The original type of the West Semitic alphabet was purely consonantal and did not indicate any vowels. While this practice of writing survived for a considerable period of time in Phoenician scribal schools, other spelling traditions in Syria-Palestine employed, to an increasing degree, the graphemes {h}, {w}, and {y} for indicating long vowels (“*plene* spelling”), thereby reducing the amount of ambiguity. Hence, {h} could denote the laryngeal /h/ as well as the vowels /ā/ and /ē/, {w} served for the glide /w/ as well as the vowel /ū/ (later also regularly /ō/), and {y} could indicate the glide /y/ as well as the vowel /ī/ (later also habitually /ē/).<sup>19</sup> This innovation is generally attributed to the Aramaeans, since it occurred first in Aramaic inscriptions, but was soon thereafter adopted by other scribal

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<sup>19</sup> The grapheme {ʿ}, by contrast, did not yet serve as a vowel letter for /ā/ although it was in certain cases preserved in historical spelling when the loss of the consonant /ʿ/ produced a long vowel, especially in the so-called “emphatic state.”

traditions in Palestine and Transjordan. It is to some extent inherent in the writing system.<sup>20</sup>

The three “vowel letters,” or *matres lectionis*, are used inconsistently, however, and “defective” spelling of long vowels without vowel letters continued as well: the surviving Sam’alian texts only have them for word-final long vowels, the inscriptions from central Syria regularly use them for word-final long vowels but feature very few instances with word-medial ones (e.g., *yṃwt* /yamūt/ ‘he will die’ in KAI 224: 16),<sup>21</sup> and the Tell Fekheriye inscription, despite its early age, contains a considerable number of examples with both word-final and word-medial vowel letters. This curious distribution may result from a greater familiarity with cuneiform spelling in eastern Syria. *Matres lectionis* are a device that became increasingly popular in the history of the Aramaic script, but, like punctuation in several modern European languages, they could be employed somewhat unpredictably even in the same text as the oscillation between *šʿryn* (KAI 309: 19) and *šʿrn* (KAI 309: 22) for /ša‘ārīn/ ‘barley’ shows. In many other respects, by contrast, the orthography of early Aramaic between Sam’al and Tell Fekheriye appears quite homogeneous. This points to a fairly standardized scribal training that was adopted by the chancelleries of the region.

#### 2.4 Local Forms of the Alphabet

Identifiable local forms of the West Semitic alphabet evolved during the 1st millennium B.C.; the first distinctive traits of the Aramaic family of scripts appeared at the end of the 9th century B.C.: a {d} with a slightly elongated final stroke and a {z} in the form of a modern *zed* with a wavy central bar. The lion’s share of the evidence consists of monumental inscriptions chiseled in stone and thus employing a “lapidary” style, whereas more ephemeral documents were presumably written with ink on perishable materials. Cursive styles for daily use, at any rate, become visible during the 7th century B.C. However, at least the Aramaic hand of the Tell Deir

<sup>20</sup> A combination of sounds like /-iya/ in certain forms, for example, is customarily spelled *y*. Following the strong tendency of such triphthongs to monophthongize in Northwest Semitic, it would soon become /-ī/. Yet orthography does not change at the same pace as pronunciation, hence the traditional spelling *y* would quite naturally come to denote the sound /-ī/.

<sup>21</sup> Assuming that word-medial vowel letters were occasionally used in Sefire is the easiest explanation of this form and receives additional support from scribal practice at Tell Fekheriye, cf. Gzella 2004: 322 n. 60.

‘Alla plaster texts from Transjordan, which dates from about 800 B.C., exhibits early cursive forms of {t} and {q}, with open circles, and the joining of the three vertical bars of {h} to a single stroke. Such local shapes were eventually replaced by a reasonably unified cursive chancery style during the Achaemenid period all over the territory of the Persian Empire. Some texts like the Tell Fekheriye inscription use vertical word dividers, but this practice was never generalized.

### 3. PHONOLOGY

Due to the inherent deficiencies of its largely consonantal writing system, the phonology of Old Aramaic has to be reconstructed on the basis of internal and external evidence. *Matres lectionis*, when used, provide important clues for identifying long vowels; additional information can be gleaned from transcriptions into other languages (in addition to the Uruk incantation text, much of the evidence consists of personal names in syllabic cuneiform, which may nonetheless reflect an older stage of the language), later vocalized traditions (chiefly the Tiberian pointing of Biblical Aramaic and reliable vocalized manuscripts of Targumic Aramaic and Classical Syriac), and comparative data from other Semitic languages. Despite the uncertainties of historical reconstruction, this practice yields a more adequate understanding of the language than simply employing the vocalization of Biblical Aramaic or Syriac, which postdates the epigraphic texts by more than a thousand years.

#### 3.1 Consonants

The 22 letters of the West Semitic alphabetic script represent at least 27 consonantal phonemes (that is, phonetic units that can convey a distinction in meaning) in the oldest textual witnesses: the voiced and unvoiced laryngeals /ʔ/ (IPA /ʔ/) and /h/, the pharyngeal fricatives /ʕ/ (IPA /ʕ/) and /ħ/ (IPA /ħ/), the velars /g/ and /k/, the sibilants /z/ and /s/, the dentals /d/ and /t/, the interdentalals /ð/ (as in English ‘*this*’; written with {z}) and /θ/ (as in English ‘*thin*’; usually written with {š}, in Tell Fekheriye with {s}), the bilabials /b/ and /p/; further the palatovelar /š/ (IPA /ʃ/, as in English ‘*ship*’), the lateral /ś/ (normally written with {š} and only exceptionally with {s}), and a reflex of the Proto-Semitic voiced velar or uvular affricate \*/ṣ/ (written with {q}); the “emphatic” counterparts of the unvoiced velar, sibilant, dental, and interdental, i.e., /q/, /ṣ/, /t/, and /θ/ (written with {s}); finally the lateral resonant /l/ and the dental trill /r/,

the nasals /n/ (dental) and /m/ (bilabial), and the glides (semi-vowels) /y/ (palatal) and /w/ (bilabial). The stops /b/, /g/, /d/, /k/, /p/, and /t/ were, as far as one can tell, still unaspirated plosives in all positions;<sup>22</sup> the pronunciation of the “emphatics” (which may once have been glottal ejectives), the lateral /š/ and the Aramaic reflex of \*/š/, however, are controversial. At least the latter seems to have been close to /q/, if indeed the choice for the grapheme {q} results from a similar pronunciation; consequently, it is at times understood as a voiced emphatic fricative.<sup>23</sup> Some scholars also suppose that earlier Aramaic still preserved the distinction between Proto-Semitic /ħ/ and /ḥ/ (IPA /x/), both written with {h}, on the one hand and between /‘/ and /ğ/ (IPA /ɣ/), written with {‘}, on the other,<sup>24</sup> but this is more difficult to demonstrate. Aramaic phonemes without a corresponding grapheme were spelled with the letter designating the respective sound correspondence in Canaanite (as with the interdental) or the most similar sound (as, presumably, with the reflex of \*/š/; the same applies to {s} for /θ/, which is closer to /s/ than to /š/, in Tell Fekheriye, at a greater distance from the Phoenician sphere of influence). All consonants could be lengthened (“geminated”), but it would seem that even lengthened consonants were only articulated once, like *mamma*, *fatto*, *spesso*, etc., in Italian.

At some stage after the Old Aramaic period, the merger of the interdentals with the corresponding dentals (/ð/ > /d/, /θ/ > /t/, /ʔ/ > /t/) and the slightly later merger of the reflex of \*/š/ with /‘/ had been completed.<sup>25</sup> Yet orthography often lagged behind these phonetic developments, hence historical spellings like {z} for old /ð/, then pronounced like /d/, lingered on in a few high-frequency words such as the demonstrative pronouns (*znh* /ðenā/ > /denā/ ‘this [m.sg.]’) and the relative marker (*zy* /ðī/ > /dī/), especially in formal orthography (as opposed to sub-standard *dnh* and *dy*). In part, these mergers may have been underway in the last stages of Old Aramaic. The reason for this hypothesis is that at least the Bukan inscription (KAI 320), which dates from ca. 700 B.C. and was discovered in the western part of present-day Iran, oscillates between traditional {š} for /θ/ in *šwrh* /θawrā/ ‘cow’ (line 5) and {t} for the same etymological sound in *tnn* \*/θanān/ > /tanān/ ‘smoke’ (line 8). A chronological gap of

<sup>22</sup> Beyer 1984: 125–128.

<sup>23</sup> See Beyer 2004: 45f, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Beyer 1984: 101f.

<sup>25</sup> Beyer 1984: 100 and id. 2004: 51.

some size (decades or even centuries) nonetheless separates a change in pronunciation from the according modification of spelling. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence for this phenomenon in the Syrian varieties of Old Aramaic or for Sam'alian.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2 Vowels

The Proto-Semitic short vocalic phonemes \*/a/, \*/i/, and \*/u/, as well as their long counterparts \*/ā/, \*/ī/, and \*/ū/, each have reflexes in Old Aramaic. Transcriptions and later vocalizations indicate that original short \*/i/ was realized as [e] and that original short \*/u/ was realized as [o] in pronunciation. It is quite feasible to assume, though impossible to prove beyond a doubt, that this was already the case for the earliest attestations of Aramaic. Yet it seems a matter of definition whether [e] and [o] were allophones of the phonemes /i/ and /u/ in Aramaic, or whether the etymological Semitic phonemes \*/i/ and \*/u/ shifted to /e/ and /o/ at some stage of the language. Unfortunately, much relevant information about allophones and other features of pronunciation is irrevocably lost. In addition to that, the phoneme /ē/ (a long open *e* like German [ä:]), which cannot be reconstructed for Proto-Semitic, appears in various 1st-millennium Northwest Semitic languages and presumably results from stressed long word-final /-ī/. Its quality can be established on the basis of later Hebrew and Aramaic vocalizations; spellings with {h}, which is not used as a vowel letter for /-ī/, in early Aramaic, Moabite, and Hebrew inscriptions indicate that this change had taken place by the 9th century B.C. in at least some Syro-Palestinian idioms, even if its prehistory remains elusive. Older Aramaic was not yet affected by the later reduction of short unstressed vowels in open syllables. Likewise, the Proto-Semitic diphthongs \*/aw/ (written with {w}) and \*/ay/ (written with {y}) were still preserved; only later did they monophthongize to /ō/ and /ē/ (a long closed *e*), respectively,<sup>27</sup> which then led to the secondary use of {w} and {y} as vowel letters for /ō/ and /ē/.

<sup>26</sup> A possible instance in Sefire, *yrt* /yaret/ 'may he inherit' for expected \**yrš* /yareθ/ (KAI 222 C: 24–25), is ambiguous and can also be explained as an instance of dissimilation triggered by the following {š} for /š/ (cf. Degen 1969: 43).

<sup>27</sup> According to Beyer 1984: 116–120 and id. 2004: 55, this process was completed by 200–150 B.C., but occasional spellings of etymological \*/aw/ and \*/ay/ without a written reflex of the corresponding glide could also suggest that it was underway in some varieties of Aramaic at a much earlier date (cf. Folmer 2011: 134).

3.3 *Sound Changes*

Most surviving witnesses of Old Aramaic in Syria and elsewhere are the products of royal chancelleries. Due to a conservative, reasonably standardized, orthography and a linguistic register no doubt quite remote from the contemporary vernaculars, many phonetic changes of the actual, spoken, language go unnoticed. Regressive assimilation of /n/ to the immediately following consonant, to be sure, has been inherited from a previous stage of Northwest Semitic and is consistently reflected in writing, e.g., ʾt ʾáttā/ ‘you’ (< \*ʾanta/, KAI 224: 11, 20). Its preservation in the exceptional form *mhnḥt* /mahanḥet/ ‘he who brings down’ in the Tell Fekheriye inscription (KAI 309: 2; C-stem participle of the root *nḥt* ‘to descend’) may have been caused by the pharyngeal and should not be confused with the later orthographic or phonetic phenomenon of “degemination” in Official Aramaic.<sup>28</sup>

The /l/ in the roots *lqh* ‘to take’ and *slq* ‘to go up’ behaves similarly, at least from a synchronic point of view, hence *yqh* ‘he will take’ (KAI 222 B: 27), *tqh* ‘you will take’ (KAI 224: 2), and *ysq* ‘it comes onto’ (KAI 224: 14). Sam’alian, too, only has spellings without *l* in the “imperfect” of *lqh*. Occasionally, however, unassimilated forms of this root crop up without any noticeable functional difference, especially in Tell Fekheriye (*mlqh* in KAI 309: 10, *ylqh* in l. 17, *tlqh* in l. 18; the root *slq* does not occur in this text, neither do instances of /n/ in contact with another consonant except for the special case *mhnḥt*), but also in Sefire (KAI 222 B: 35, whereas the more regular form is used in l. 27 of the same text).<sup>29</sup> The limited amount of data makes it impossible to say whether this is a phonetic peculiarity, and thus perhaps a dialectal feature of an “eastern” variety of Syrian Aramaic, perhaps triggered or reinforced by Akkadian pronunciation, or merely a variant spelling.

Assimilation of dentals may have been more frequent in actual speech than the conservative orthography suggests (see the remark on metathesis of /t/ in the section on verbal stems below). Judging from the traditional pronunciation of Classical Syriac, for instance, one may assume that *rṣt*

<sup>28</sup> On degemination, cf. Beyer 1984: 89–95; Folmer 1995: 74–94; Gzella 2008: 96f.

<sup>29</sup> Degen 1969: 40 n. 38 discusses a few other proposals with reference to KAI 222 B: 35, but in light of the Tell Fekheriye text far-reaching grammatical explanations in earlier studies (such as a reflex of an entirely different verbal conjugation) have lost much of their plausibility.

/rāḫt/ 'I ran' (KAI 216: 8) sounded like [rātt].<sup>30</sup> There is also some evidence for the dissimilation of the first of two emphatics in the same word, the best example being *kys'* 'summer' (KAI 216: 19) instead of the expected \**qys'* from the original \*/qayḫ-/ (written *qyt* in later Aramaic). It mostly seems to target /q/ > /k/, but not consistently (cf. *llqṭw* /lalqoṭū/ 'let them collect' in KAI 309: 22). However, the true extent of this phenomenon remains elusive, as dissimilated forms appear side by side with regular ones even in the same text (e.g., *ṣdq* 'justice' in KAI 216: 4–5).<sup>31</sup>

Other sound changes are rather difficult to pinpoint. There is general agreement that syllable-final /ʾ/ disappeared at some stage between Old Aramaic and Official Aramaic, thereby causing compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel if that vowel was short. As a consequence, (most) verbs originally ending in /-ʾ/ merged with those ending in /-ī/. The grapheme {ʾ} was often preserved in historical spelling, especially for what has become /-ā/ in the emphatic state, and eventually triggered the use of {ʾ} as a vowel letter for /-ā/ even in cases where that vowel did not originate from the loss of a glottal stop. Furthermore, the grapheme {ʾ} for an etymological glottal stop could drop out or be replaced by {h} (the normal means of indicating /-ā/) in the emphatic state in less formal orthography. Cuneiform transcriptions of personal names may imply that this process began in the second half of the 9th century B.C.; direct evidence from Aramaic, however, appears only gradually.<sup>32</sup> Aphaeresis of word-initial /ʾ/ in the numeral 'one' *ḥd* /ḥad/ (< \*/aḥad/), fem. *ḥdh*, by contrast, is common to all Aramaic languages from the outset, whereas prosthetic /ʾ/ (especially with sibilants) seems to be merely incidental (cf. *ʾšm* /ešm/ in

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Brockelmann 1965: 18 (§§ 26–27), hence *pšytt'* 'the simple one (fem.)' of course has to be transcribed *pšittā*.

<sup>31</sup> Regressive dissimilation of two emphatics in Aramaic resembles Geers's Law in Akkadian. It appears to be more frequent in Mandaic (which was spoken on the territory of Babylonia and seems to exhibit other traits of Babylonian as well, such as phonetic degemination) than in other Aramaic varieties (Gzella 2008: 97 with n. 38). One may thus entertain the possibility of substrate influence of Akkadian pronunciation, but it is important to note that this dissimilation does not produce identical results in Akkadian and Aramaic (Kaufman 1974: 121f, who rejects the hypothesis of a contact-induced feature). See Folmer 1995: 94–101 for likewise sporadic evidence from later periods.

<sup>32</sup> Beyer 1984: 104–106 and id. 2004: 52f. The earliest possible example is *z* /ḏā/ (< \*/ḏā'/) 'this one (f.sg.)' in the pedestal inscription from Tell Halaf in Assyria (KAI 231) instead of the usual spelling *z'*. No uncontroversial examples of {h} for /-ā/ in the emphatic state are yet attested in the oldest Aramaic texts, although this became more common in later periods; the only possible case, *mlkh* in the graffito KAI 203 from Syria, can be explained differently (Degen 1969: 8 n. 40; e.g., 'his king' instead of 'the king').

KAI 222 C: 25 and 223 B: 7 but, if this is indeed the same word, *šm* /šem/ ‘name’ in 202 C: 2).

The loss of intervocalic /h/, which increasingly affected the “imperfect” of the causative stem during the Official Aramaic period, already seems to appear once in Sefire (*yskr* /yasker/ ‘he shall deliver’ in KAI 224: 3; see the discussion in the section on the verbal stems). The same phonetic feature underlies the non-standard forms *klm* and *klm* ‘all of them (fem. and masc.)’ in Tell Fekheriye (KAI 309: 3.4.5). Later varieties of Aramaic have *klhn* and *klhm*, but there is no comparative evidence for these forms in other Old Aramaic sub-corpora.

Vowel shifts are even more elusive. Cuneiform transcriptions of names seem to point to an occasional change of /a/ to /e/ before syllable-final /‘/, /h/, or /ḥ/.<sup>33</sup> The extent of the dissimilation of /a/ to /e/ in the preformative vowel of the G-stem “imperfect” remains controversial for older Aramaic; hence it is difficult to say whether the Barth-Ginsberg Law, according to which \*/yaktab-/ regularly changed into \*/yiktab-/ in Canaanite and Ugaritic (and the /i/ vowel was subsequently generalized in the preformative in vocalized Hebrew and Syriac), was operative in the Aramaic varieties described here.<sup>34</sup> Stress is mostly on the final syllable, except for some pronouns and forms with certain suffixes and endings that exhibit penultimate stress; there seem to be no special forms for sentence-final intonation (“pause”); inherited word-final short vowels had disappeared by the time the first Aramaic texts emerged.

#### 4. MORPHOLOGY AND MORPHOSYNTAX

##### 4.1 *Pronouns*

As in other Semitic languages, the independent personal pronouns mark the subject in different types of nominal clauses (ʾš *nh* *nh* ‘I am a humble man,’ KAI 202 A: 2; *h*ʾ *byt* *kys*ʾ ‘it was the summer mansion,’ KAI 216: 19) and can reinforce it (e.g., for highlighting a contrast) together with finite verbal forms, which also encode information on the person, number, and gender of the agent. The paradigm is incomplete for the oldest texts but

<sup>33</sup> Beyer 1984: 107.

<sup>34</sup> According to Beyer 1984: 108–112, this change began in the 5th century B.C., whereas Lipiński 1981: 192f assumes that it was already operative in Old Aramaic.

can be partially supplemented by evidence from the subsequent stage of Aramaic:

Person	Singular	Plural
1 masc./fem.	<i>ʾnh ʾanā/</i>	— (later: <i>ʾnhn(h) ʾanāhnā/</i> )
2 masc.	<i>ʾt ʾáttā/</i>	— (later: <i>ʾntm ʾattom/</i> )
2 fem.	— (later: <i>ʾnty ʾáttī/</i> )	—
3 masc.	<i>hʾ /hūʾ/ (&gt; hw /hū/)</i>	<i>hm(w) /hóm(ū)/</i>
3 fem.	<i>hʾ /hīʾ/ (&gt; hy /hī/)</i>	—

Samʿalian, by contrast, differs from all known varieties of Aramaic in that it consistently exhibits the “long” first-person singular personal pronoun *ʾnk*. Since it remains unclear whether this form has been inherited from an older stage of Northwest Semitic, which used both a long form *\*ʾanāku/* and a short form *\*ʾanā/* (these occur side by side in Ugaritic), or borrowed from Phoenician (with *\*ʾanāku/ > ʾanōkī/*),<sup>35</sup> its exact pronunciation cannot be determined. However, one instance of the *plene* spelling *ʾnky* (KAI 215: 19) indicates that the final vowel of this pronoun has shifted to /ī/, which appears to be a typical feature of Canaanite<sup>36</sup> and thus supports the idea of a Phoenician loan (Phoenician being the most obvious candidate for Canaanite influences in this region). The second-person masculine singular form is always spelled without a final vowel letter in Old and Official Aramaic, presumably because unstressed word-final /-ā/ was normally written defectively. In addition to the independent personal pronouns, suffixes could be added to nouns and verbs in order to highlight a pronominal possessor or a pronominal direct object. These will be discussed below in the section on nouns.

A set of proximal demonstratives (‘this, these’) consists of *znh /ðenā/* (masc. singular, later > /denā/), *zʾ /ðāʾ/* (fem. singular, later > /dā/), and *ʾl ʾellē/* (KAI 202 A: 9.16; B: 8) or *ʾln ʾellēn/* (masc. and fem. plural). Variation in the Northwest Semitic demonstrative pronouns is reflected, on the micro level, in Old Aramaic and Samʿalian. The Tell Fekheriye inscription contains an example of the fem. singular *zʾt /ðāʾt/* (KAI 309: 15), otherwise unattested in Aramaic but with straightforward cognates in Hebrew and Moabite. Samʿalian, on the other hand, has the masc. singular form *zn*

<sup>35</sup> Gianto 1995; cf. Beyer 2004: 15 (“die phönizischen Wörter [sc. in Samʿalian] stammen aus der vorhergehenden Schriftsprache”).

<sup>36</sup> The /ī/ can be explained as a result of dissimilation of two back vowels, following the Canaanite shift of the preceding vowel /ā/ to /ō/, an analogy to the Canaanite first-person singular “perfect” ending /-tī/, or an assimilation to the Common Semitic first-person singular possessive suffix /-ī/.

(KAI 214: 1; Kuttamuwa l. 5), presumably a defective spelling for /ḏenā/, and a by-form *znn* /ḏenān/ (Kuttamuwa l. 9).<sup>37</sup> Defective spellings like *zn* and ʾ, as well as the much later by-form *dn* in Aramaic texts from Qumran, could entail that the stress was originally on the first syllable in these forms.<sup>38</sup> Proper distal counterparts ('that, those') are only attested for later periods,<sup>39</sup> whereas Old Aramaic, like Phoenician, Hebrew, and much of Official Aramaic, used the third-person independent pronouns for this purpose.

The common Aramaic relative marker *zy* /ḏī/ (later > /dī/, eventually spelled *dy*), by contrast, has evolved from a determinative-relative pronoun and preserves a fossilized genitive that no longer inflects.<sup>40</sup> It can introduce relative (KAI 214: 1) and, especially in combination with prepositions, other subordinate clauses (e.g., it marks a causal relationship in KAI 201: 4) or act as an analytical genitive marker. The latter function is but rarely attested in the oldest Aramaic texts, uncontested examples being *dmwt' zy hdy'sy* 'the image of Haddayisi' (KAI 309: 1) and *m'ny' zy bt hdd* 'the vessels belonging to the house of Hadad' (KAI 309: 16–17). Both occur in the Tell Fekheriye inscription and have perhaps been reinforced by Akkadian *ša* due to extensive bilingualism in that area.<sup>41</sup> This particle can also resume another antecedent, as in *mlk gzn wzy skn wzy 'zrn* 'the king of Gozan and the one of Sikan and the one of Azran' (KAI 309: 13).<sup>42</sup> In subsequent stages of Aramaic, however, analytical genitive marking increasingly competes with the construct state, especially for further qualifications such as materials. Together with the preposition /la-/ and a suffix, *zy* can form an independent possessive pronoun (*zy ly* 'what belongs to me', KAI 224: 20).

Despite the otherwise gender-based nominal and pronominal system, the two interrogatives *mn* /man/ 'who?' and *mh* /mā/ 'what?' distinguish

<sup>37</sup> The form *znn*, which is now first attested in the new Kuttamuwa stele, has a later parallel in *dnn*, which occurs frequently in the Aramaic legal papyri from Naḥal Ḥever (Beyer 2004: 380). However, there is a tendency in Aramaic to expand final long vowels in certain forms by /-n/ (Beyer 1984: 149), so one does not necessarily have to posit a direct relationship between both forms.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Beyer 1984: 555f.

<sup>39</sup> Evidence from Official Aramaic is conveniently summarized by Folmer 2011: 142.

<sup>40</sup> The alleged fem. singular variant *'zh* 'which' in Sam'alīan (KAI 215: 2) is debated and may be a ghost form (see Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 61 for the reading *'lh* 'conspiracy'[?]).

<sup>41</sup> Kaufman 1982: 151. The title *šbt zy nrgl* 'the plague of Nergal' in the same text (KAI 309: 23) may be calqued directly from Akkadian and bears less weight for determining the function of *zy* in Aramaic.

<sup>42</sup> For examples from later periods, see Beyer 1984: 549.

between persons, or animates, and things, or inanimates. They may preserve traces of an erstwhile more prominent role of animacy in Semitic. No proper indefinite pronouns exist in Old Aramaic, but *ʾnš* /ʾenāš/ or *gbr* /gabr/, in the Kuttamuwa stele also *ʾš* /ʾiš/ (l. 7), all meaning ‘man’, can have generic, and presumably gender-neutral, nuances (‘person’) due to semantic bleaching, e.g., in the phrase *kl gbr zy* ‘everyone who’ (KAI 224: 1–2). A similar usage is attested for the numeral *ḥd* /ḥad/ ‘one’ in *mn byt ḥd mlkn rbrbn* ‘than the house of any of the great kings’ (KAI 216: 13–14). Its inanimate counterpart *m(n)dʿm* ‘something, anything’ only appears in Official Aramaic. These circumlocutions mirror the distinction between animate and inanimate in the interrogatives, arguably because gender is in most cases either unknown or irrelevant with interrogatives and indefinites. The interrogatives, too, can be used as indefinites: *kl mh* ‘anything’ (KAI 216: 15).

#### 4.2 Nouns

Nouns follow the usual root-and-pattern system of derivation,<sup>43</sup> which is so typical for Semitic languages, and inflect for gender (masculine, feminine), number (singular, plural, and vestiges of the dual), and state (absolute, construct, emphatic). Morphological case marking collapsed around 1000 B.C. in Northwest Semitic. The feminine plural absolute ending /-ān/, patterned after its masculine counterpart as opposed to common Semitic \*/-āt-/, which is still preserved in Samʿalian (cf. *msgrt*/masgirāt/ ‘prisons’ in KAI 215: 4.8), belongs to the typical features of Aramaic, as does the emphatic (or “determinative”) state. Although direct evidence is lacking, one may assume that Old Aramaic agrees with other Northwest Semitic languages in using a bisyllabic base /qVtal-/ (i.e., with an additional /a/ between the second and the third root consonant) for the noun patterns *qatl*, *qitl*, and *qutl* besides adding the customary plural endings. Forms confidently to be reconstructed on the basis of later evidence from Official Aramaic are given in parentheses but they are as yet unattested in the oldest Aramaic texts:

<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the etymological patterns are not specified in the synopsis given by Degen 1969: 44–50, which is arranged according to the consonantal spellings and hence does not reveal the pronunciation of these words in light of later transcriptions and vocalizations. Much of the relevant information, however, can be found in Beyer 1984: 503–728.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
masc. abs.	/-Ø/	(-yn /-ayn/)	-n <sup>44</sup> /-in/
masc. cstr.	/-Ø/	-y /-ay/	-y /-ay/
masc. emph.	-ʾ / -āʾ / (> /-ā/)	—	-yʾ /-ayyāʾ / (> /-ayyā/)
fem. abs.	-h /-ā / (< /-(a)t/) <sup>45</sup>	(-tyn /-tayn/)	-n /-ān/ <sup>46</sup>
fem. cstr.	-t /-at/	-ty /-tay/	-t /-āt/
fem. emph.	-tʾ /-tāʾ / (> /-tā/)	—	-tʾ /-ātāʾ / (> /-ātā/)

The gender of a noun in Semitic can be known from its agreement with adjectives and verbs; not all nouns that behave like feminines in concord have the corresponding ending though: unmarked feminines include *nbš* /*nabš*/ ‘self’ (KAI 222 B: 39) and many place names; judging from later and comparative evidence, body parts that naturally come in pairs, like *yd* /*yad*/ ‘hand’, are also feminine, but direct evidence from the earliest texts is lacking. Sometimes singular and plural take opposite gender endings, e.g., *mlh* /*mellā*/ ‘word’, plural *mln* /*mellin*/ (KAI 224: 2), or *šnh* /*šanā*/ ‘year’, plural *šnn* /*šanin*/ (KAI 222 A: 27). A few nouns have different bases in singular and plural (some of them by means of expansion or reduplication), e.g., *ʾb* /*ʾab*/ ‘father’, cstr. plural *ʾbhy* /*ʾabahay*/ ‘fathers of’; *br* /*bar*/ ‘son’,<sup>47</sup> cstr. plural /*banay*/ ‘sons of’ (KAI 222 A: 2 and elsewhere); *byt* /*bay(t)*/ ‘house’,<sup>48</sup> cstr. plural *btty* /*bāttay*/ (< \*/*bayatay*/?) ‘houses of’ (KAI 202 B: 9); *rb* /*rabb*/ ‘great’, plural *rbrbn* /*rabrabin*/ ‘great ones’ (KAI 216: 10 and elsewhere). At times this coincides with distinct gender marking, as in the cstr. plural *nšy* /*nešay*/ ‘women of’ (KAI 222 A: 41; but the absolute plural *nšwn* /*nešawān*/ with the corresponding feminine

<sup>44</sup> The Tell Fekheriye inscription has some instances of a plene spelling {-yn} with this ending (e.g., *ʾlhyn* /*ʾelāhīn*/ ‘gods’ in KAI 309: 4 or *šʾyn* /*šaʾarīn*/ ‘barley’ in l. 19, but *šʾrn* in l. 22), although defective spelling of the absolute masc. plural remains dominant even in Official Aramaic.

<sup>45</sup> A remnant of the older ending /-(a)t/ seems to survive in *šʾt* /*šaʾt*/ ‘sheep’ (KAI 222 A: 21; otherwise spelled *šʾh* in KAI 215: 6, 9), but the context is broken. Another alleged example, *mrmt* ‘treachery’ (KAI 224: 22), by contrast, could be better analyzed as an absolute fem. plural (see Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 694, s.v.).

<sup>46</sup> Exceptionally, a vestige of older \*/-āt-/ may have been preserved in *mln* *lhyt* ‘evil words’ (KAI 224: 2), perhaps because this was a formulaic expression.

<sup>47</sup> The vowel differs in cuneiform transcriptions and may originate from an indistinct central vowel due to syllabic /r/ (unless these spellings reflect different words).

<sup>48</sup> It remains unclear whether *by* in *by tb* ‘a fine house’ (KAI 216:16) is an early attestation of the shift \*/*bayt*/ > /*bay*/ of the absolute form of this word in Aramaic (so, among others, Beyer 1984: 530) or a so-called “sandhi writing” for expected *byt tb* due to assimilation of dentals in a stress-unit beyond word-boundaries (Degen 1969: 43). However, the only clear example for sandhi writing is the personal name *brkb* /*Bar-Rākeb*/ in KAI 215: 19 instead of the usual *brkkb*. Comparable instances appear, again with names or filiations, in the earliest Phoenician inscriptions (KAI 6: 1; 7: 3), hence this phenomenon may have been inherited from there.

ending appears in Tell Fekheriye, KAI 309: 21.22)<sup>49</sup> for the singular /'ettā/ 'woman', which is unattested in the earliest phase of Aramaic. Some nouns without overt plural marking but that, according to the context, must refer to more than one entity (e.g., *nhr klm* 'all the rivers' in KAI 309: 4 or *mt kln* 'all the lands' in KAI 309: 3.5), have been analyzed either as collectives (like "army") or as remnants of an "internal plural" formed by means of a different vowel sequence.<sup>50</sup> Following a common tendency in Semitic, the dual ceases to be productive but survives in paired body parts and, supposedly, the numeral '2' for which there is, however, no evidence in this corpus.

In contradistinction to gender and number, state is a dimension peculiar to Semitic. The "absolute" state (or "unbound form") acts as the unmarked form; with the emphatic state gradually turning into a marker of definiteness, that is, contextual identifiability (thus serving like a post-positive definite article, though the origin of the morpheme /-ā'/ remains controversial), the absolute came to signal indefiniteness and is especially used with the quantifier *kl* /koll/ 'all' (*kl gbr* 'everybody', KAI 224: 1), many adverbial and numerical constructions (*'d 'lm* 'forever', KAI 224: 25; *šb' šnn* 'for seven years', KAI 222 A: 27 etc.), and predicative adjectives (*wšdq 'nh* 'and I am loyal', KAI 217: 5). This process took place during the Old Aramaic period and forms part of a common tendency of Northwest Semitic to acquire morphological definite marking at the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. It can also be observed in the corpus under review here. The lack of attestations for the emphatic state in Sam'alian, even with demonstrative pronouns and therefore in contextually clearly definite noun phrases (e.g., *nšb zn* 'this stele' in KAI 214: 1; 215: 1.20; Kuttamuwa l. 5),<sup>51</sup> thus conserves a more archaic developmental stage of Semitic. Moreover, except for *qlqlt* 'the garbage heaps' (KAI 309: 22), the few relevant examples in the Tell Fekheriye text occur either together with a demonstrative pronoun (KAI 309: 15), as the antecedent of a relative clause (KAI 309: 1), or in a genitive construction with a proper name (KAI 309: 16–17), whereas other nouns are marked as definite by a possessive suffix or by a genitive relationship with a proper name, or simply remain unmarked (e.g., *'lh rḥmn* /'elāh raḥmān/ 'a/the gracious god' in KAI 309: 5 or *mr' rb* /māre' rabb/ 'a/the great lord' in KAI 309: 6). And even

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *s'wn* /θa'awān/ 'ewes' in KAI 309: 20 but *š'n* /θa'ān/ in KAI 222 A: 23 (Sefire).

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Lipiński 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Nebe 2010: 328.

in the Sefire inscriptions, which exhibit a somewhat more widespread use of the emphatic state for definiteness marking, the majority of instances are still construction-bound in that they appear before a demonstrative or the relative marker.<sup>52</sup>

The “construct” state (or “bound form”), on the other hand, establishes a stress unit with the noun that immediately follows it and thus expresses a genitive relationship. Chains of more than one construct noun are also possible, but a construct noun modifying more than one non-construct element is generally avoided.<sup>53</sup> If the last element of a construct phrase is formally definite (i.e., a proper name, a suffixed noun, or a noun in the emphatic state), the entire phrase counts as definite. Due to the bound character of a construct phrase, the inherited fem. singular and plural endings \*/-at/ and \*/-āt/ have been preserved. Constructs constitute the usual form of rendering a genitive relationship in Old Aramaic. However, the functional overlap of the emerging analytical expression with the relative marker *zy* /ðī/ as a *nota genitivi*, which only plays a greater role in later forms of Aramaic, appears already in the parallelism between *dmwt' zy hdys'y* ‘the image of Haddayis’i’ (KAI 309: 1) and *šlm hdys'y* ‘the statue of Haddayis’i’ (KAI 309: 12) in Tell Fekheriye.<sup>54</sup>

While Aramaic agrees with other Northwest Semitic languages attested after 1000 B.C. in that the morpheme /-ay/, formally similar (and perhaps identical) to the dual, serves as the construct ending for the masc. plural, the retention of more archaic construct forms constitutes the distinctive hallmark of Sam’alian. For prior to the breakdown of inflectional case marking, Northwest Semitic in the 2nd millennium B.C. distinguished, in the masc. plural, between a nominative ending \*/-ūma/ (with “mimation”) or \*/-ūna/ (with “nunation”) and a corresponding genitive-accusative ending \*/-īma/ or \*/-īna/. The construct forms, on the other hand, simply ended in the long case vowel without /-ma/ or /-na/, respectively. This was still the situation in Ugaritic. After the loss of short unstressed word-final vowels, the genitive-accusative form (presumably being the more

<sup>52</sup> Lambdin 1971: 318f. This pattern thus resembles the use of the emerging definite article in Phoenician; see Gzella 2006a.

<sup>53</sup> The alleged exception *gwg'l šmyn w'rq* ‘the irrigation-master of heaven and earth’ (KAI 309: 2) in Tell Fekheriye is presumably a calque based on the corresponding divine title in Akkadian, which has two consecutive genitives (*gú-gal šamê u eršeti*, line 1 of the Akkadian version).

<sup>54</sup> The use of *zy* in the former expression right in the opening sentence may have been influenced by the standard West Semitic format of dedicatory inscriptions (cf. KAI 202 A: 1).

frequent one, as it covered several distinct semantic roles, such as the possessor and the patient) was generalized, hence /-īn/ in Aramaic (and Moabite) and \*/-īm/ in Hebrew and Phoenician.

Contrary to other Northwest Semitic idioms of the same period, however, the majority of the Sam'alian corpus seems to exhibit a different ending for the old nominative /-ū/ and the old genitive-accusative /-ī/ in both the construct and the absolute states of the masc. plural. Hence the surviving texts clearly distinguish between *ʾlhw* /'elāhū/ 'the gods' (KAI 214: 2, subject) and *b'bn̄y* /ba-'abanī/ 'with stones' (KAI 214: 31, with the old genitive ending after a preposition) in the absolute. All unambiguous construct forms, by contrast, have the former genitive ending due to syntactical reasons, as in *bywmy* /ba-yawmī/ 'in the days of' (KAI 215: 10). In analogy with the absolute, a defective spelling like *ʾlh y'dy* 'the gods of Yādiya' (KAI 215: 2, subject of a transitive verb) should be thought to reflect a nominative /'elāhū/, but this is difficult to verify.<sup>55</sup> However that may be, the old construct state appears to have been extended to the absolute state of the masc. plural at the expense of the etymological forms with nunation or mimation.<sup>56</sup> When the chancellery language of Sam'al shifted from Sam'alian to an Old Aramaic variety more similar to that used in central Syria, customary formulaic expressions were adapted: contrast Sam'alian *bm̄ṣ't mlky* 'amidst of kings' (KAI 215: 10) with Old Aramaic *bm̄ṣ't mlkn* (KAI 216: 9–10). The new Kuttamuwa inscription possibly reflects an intermediate stage. On the one hand, it features lexical peculiarities of Sam'alian, as opposed to Aramaic, like *ʾnk* 'I' or the object marker *wt*, and lacks the emphatic state. On the other hand, masc. plural absolute forms seem to have the ending /-īn/ according to the expression *ywmn bywmn* /yawmīn la-yawmīn/ 'year by year' (l. 10) and perhaps also the epithet *hdd krmn* /Hadad karamīn/ 'Hadad of the vineyards'.<sup>57</sup> If that interpretation is correct, the Kuttamuwa text illustrates the gradual transition from Sam'alian to Old Aramaic.<sup>58</sup>

Certain differences of inflection can be observed with other noun patterns throughout Aramaic. At some point in time, nisbe adjectives in /-āy/, as in many gentilics, replaced the emphatic masc. plural /-ayyā'/'

<sup>55</sup> It is of course not altogether impossible that the formal distinction between nominative and genitive-accusative had already been leveled in the construct state.

<sup>56</sup> Unless one supposes that the inherited /m/ or /n/ of the absolute form disappeared due to nasalization.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Pardee 2009a: 58, 65 and Nebe 2010: 328f.

<sup>58</sup> See also Nebe 2010: 330.

(> /-ayyā/) by /-ē/, supposedly an Assyrian form used for euphonic reasons (i.e., in order to avoid the cumbersome ending /-āyayyā).<sup>59</sup> The latter became the dominant form in later Eastern Aramaic,<sup>60</sup> but its frequency in Old Aramaic cannot be confidently assessed. Feminines ending in \*/-āt/, \*/-īt/, and \*/-ūt/<sup>61</sup> generally lost the /-t/ in the absolute singular and plural but preserved the long vowel of the stem (e.g., *rʿy* /reʿī/ ‘pasture’ and *mšqy* /mašqī/ ‘watering places’ in KAI 309:2.3).<sup>62</sup> In the plural, however, these long vowels would be expected to triphthongize before vocalic endings, hence, absolute /-awān/, construct /-awāt/, emphatic /-awātāʾ/ > /-awātā/ for \*/-āt/; /-iyān/, /-iyāt/, /-iyātāʾ/ > /-iyātā/ for \*/-īt/; and /-uwān/, /-uwāt/, /-uwātāʾ/ > /-uwātā/ for \*/-ūt/. Yet the situation in Old Aramaic largely has to be reconstructed in light of later evidence. Similar principles would then apply to nouns ending in \*/-ī/ > /-ē/ (e.g., *ʿrbh* /ʿarbē/ ‘locust’ in KAI 222 A: 27 and participles as well as adjectives of verbal roots in /-ī/ like, supposedly, *ʿnh* /ʿanē/ ‘humble’ in KAI 202 A: 2): absolute and construct masc. singular /-ē/, emphatic /-iyāʾ/ > /-iyā/; absolute plural /-ayn/, construct /-ay/, emphatic /-ayyāʾ/ > /-ayyā/; absolute fem. singular /-iyā/, construct /-iyat/, emphatic /-ītāʾ/ > /-ītā/; absolute plural /-iyān/, construct /-iyāt/, emphatic /-iyātāʾ/ > /-iyātā/.<sup>63</sup> These should be distinguished from the small group of nouns in \*/-y/ (like *šby* /ṣabī/ < \*/ṣaby/ ‘gazelle’ in KAI 222 A: 33).<sup>64</sup> This difference seems to be related to the dual nature of the glide /y/, which combines properties of vowels and consonants.

Pronominal suffixes can be attached to prepositions and the construct state of nouns in order to render a genitive relationship with a pronominal possessor. Depending on whether the construct form of a noun ends

<sup>59</sup> Kaufman 1974: 127f and Beyer 2004: 50.

<sup>60</sup> Gzella 2008: 100.

<sup>61</sup> Beyer 1984: 454–456.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Kaufman 1982: 164. Beyer 1984: 27, by contrast, seems to suppose that {y} here atypically renders /-ē/, but the former explanation is easier.

<sup>63</sup> Beyer 1984: 456–458.

<sup>64</sup> Sometimes nouns ending in \*/-y/ can merge with those in \*/-ī/, hence *šdh* ‘owl’ (KAI 222 A: 33), which is presumably to be read /šadē/ although it belongs to the same class as \*/ṣaby/. The same then applies to *gdh* /gadē/ ‘goat’ (KAI 223 A: 2) from \*/gady/. Comparative evidence (e.g., the Hebrew plural *kēlīm* ‘vessels’ from \*/kily/ or \*/kaly/ as opposed to the expected *gdāyīm* ‘goats’) shows that such crossovers are less surprising than Degen 1969: 27 believes. An influence of the large group in \*/-ī/ on the few similar nouns in \*/-y/ is especially likely. There is no need to assume (with, e.g., Fitzmyer 1995: 90 and 126) an ending /-ay/ for nouns written with {y} and a change of /-ay/ to /-ē/ for those written with {h}. Monophthongization of \*/ay/ occurs by closing the mouth and thus invariably leads to a “closed” ē, whereas {h} as a vowel letter is only attested for an “open” ē.

in a consonant (most singulars and the fem. plural) or a vowel (masc. plural, the dual, and some vocalic singular bases), these suffixes undergo certain changes so that, from a synchronic point of view, two different sets of suffixes can be distinguished. A short linking vowel intervenes between a consonantal noun base and a suffix beginning in a consonant. In all likelihood, this vowel is a remnant of the original case ending. When morphological case marking disappeared in Northwest Semitic around 1000 B.C., the corresponding vowel lost its grammatical function. Later vocalized traditions of Aramaic suggest that it had the same quality as the final vowel of the respective suffix, which is also assumed in the following reconstruction, but this cannot be verified for older stages of the language. Once again, Official Aramaic evidence fills in some gaps in the paradigm:

Suffix	After consonants (sg./f.pl.) ("singular suffixes")	After vowels (m.pl./dual) ("plural suffixes")
3 masc. sg.	-h /-eh/	-wh /-áw-hī/ (later -why)
3 fem. sg.	-h /-ah/	-yh /-áy-hā/
2 masc. sg.	-k /-ákā/	-yk /-áy-kā/
2 fem. sg.	(later -ky /-ékī/)	(later -yky /-áy-kī/)
1 sg.	-y /-ī/	-y /-ayy/
3 masc. pl.	-hm /-ohūm/	-yhm /-ay-hūm/
3 fem. pl.	-hn /-ehenn/	—
2 masc. pl.	-km /-okūm/	-ykm /ay-kūm/
2 fem. pl.	(later -kn /-ekenn/)	(later -ykn /-ay-kenn/)
1 pl.	-n /-ánā/	(later -yn /-áy-nā/)

The reason for the dissimilation of the construct ending /-ay/ before the third-person masc. singular "plural" suffix is debated.<sup>65</sup> Of the few Semitic nouns whose singular construct state ends in a (long) vowel, the suffixed form *'bwh* /'abūhī/ 'his father', according to Aramaic spelling, occurs in Sam'alīan (KAI 215: 2).<sup>66</sup>

### 4.3 Verbal Conjugations

The intersecting semantic notions of tense, aspect, and modality are expressed by inflectional categories. Tense denotes the location of an event or a state in time in relation to some reference point, distinguishing between past and present-future in the older stages of Aramaic; aspect

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Brockelmann <sup>10</sup>1965: 49f (§83).

<sup>66</sup> As opposed to the defective spelling *'bh* without a word-medial vowel letter according to local custom in KAI 214: 29; 215: 1, 3, 7.

refers to the “internal” viewpoint of a situation as completed or in progress regardless of its location on the time line; and modality can encode nuances of possibility, obligation, or doubt.<sup>67</sup> The boundaries between them are not always sharp, since, for example, future tense overlaps with modality (for the idea of uncertainty governs both), the present is by definition ongoing, and past events are often presented as completed. The “perfect” (or “suffix conjugation”) and two basic variants of the “imperfect” (or “prefix conjugation”) constitute the backbone of the verbal system in Old Aramaic and Sam’alian. In these finite conjugations, affirmatives alone (for the “perfect”) or a set of pre- and affirmatives (for the “imperfect”) mark distinctions of person, number, and, except for the first person, gender. The following forms of the “perfect” for sound verbal roots like *ktb* ‘to write’ in the unmarked stem are attested or, if absent from the corpus due to its focus on narratives about kings and their deeds (which allows but limited room for female agents), can be reconstructed with reasonable confidence on the basis of the more varied Official Aramaic material (in parentheses):

Person	Singular	Plural
3 masc.	<i>ktb</i> /katab-Ø/	<i>ktbw</i> /katab-ū/
3 fem.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-at/	— (presumably /katab-ā/?) <sup>68</sup>
2 masc.	<i>ktbt</i> /katáb-tā/	<i>ktbtm</i> /katab-tūm/ (later <i>-t(w)n</i> /-tūn/)
2 fem.	( <i>ktbty</i> /katáb-tī/)	( <i>ktbtn</i> /katab-tenn/)
1 masc./fem.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-t/	<i>ktbn</i> /katáb-nā/

Defective spelling of affirmatives presumably ending in /-ā/ may have been triggered by penultimate stress. The historical final vowel of the first-person singular ending \*/-tu/ (> /-tī/ in Canaanite) had been lost in Aramaic already at the beginning of the textual record, supposedly because the quantity of this vowel was not stable. Sam’alian agrees with the rest of Aramaic here.<sup>69</sup> The base vowel in the second syllable of the “perfect” stem is lexical; most verbs referring to events have /a/, whereas /e/ (< \*/i/) often occurs with stative verbs and still points to the origin of this form in a conjugated adjective. Evidence from later vocalized traditions,

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the theoretical implications of tense, aspect, and modality, see Gzella 2004: 57–110.

<sup>68</sup> In Official Aramaic, this form has merged with its masculine counterpart, although a proper feminine form, as in many other Semitic languages, reappears in later Aramaic varieties. The situation in Old Aramaic remains thus unclear. Cf. Gzella 2008: 93f.

<sup>69</sup> E.g., KAI 214: 1, 14; 215: 5; Kuttamuwa l. 1, 2. The alleged spelling *šmty* ‘I have erected’ in KAI 215: 20 instead of the conventional reading *šmt* (as in Kuttamuwa l. 2) is by no means certain (see Nebe 2010: 319).

however, does not necessarily match the situation in Old Aramaic. The “perfect” with dynamic verbs usually refers to past events, but it is controversial whether the form as such anchors an event in time (past tense) or simply marks it as completed (perfective aspect) regardless of its position on the time line. Various types of past events occur, such as *wqm* ‘my /wa-qām ‘emmī/ ‘and he arose together with me (= to my help)’ (KAI 202 A: 3, punctual and completed in the past) or *mh ktbt* /mā katabt/ ‘what I have written down’ (KAI 222 C: 1–2, resultative with present relevance). Other nuances, such as performatives, are not attested in the Old Aramaic inscriptions from Syria and in Sam’alian, even though their existence can be assumed on the basis of similar usages in Official Aramaic. With subordinate clauses, the “perfect” expresses an event anterior to the one indicated by the verb in the main clause, e.g., *zy nZR lh* /ḏī naḏar leh/ ‘who (= because he) had made a vow to him’ (KAI 201: 4).<sup>70</sup> Like the “long imperfect,” it can also appear in the protasis or apodosis of a conditional clause; this particular usage extends beyond past-tense reference. Stative verbs in the “perfect,” by contrast, express timeless states, while the “perfect” of *hwī* ‘to be’ acts as a past-tense marker (cf. KAI 215: 2).

The “imperfect,” on the other hand, comprises two historically distinct conjugations, here labeled “long” and “short” form, each with its own functional range. (No traces of the old “subjunctive” survive in Aramaic.) They were once distinguished by a final /-u/ in the long form where the short one has a zero ending, but the disappearance of short unstressed word-final vowels leveled the morphological difference in most persons with sound roots.<sup>71</sup> Due to the presence or absence of the final /-n/ in certain forms, a number of instances can still be distinguished in writing (though the “short imperfect” began to vanish already in Official Aramaic):

Person	‘Long form’	‘Short form’
3 masc. sg.	<i>yktb</i> /ya-ktob-Ø/	<i>yktb</i> /ya-ktob-Ø/
3 fem. sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /ta-ktob-Ø/	<i>ktbt</i> /ta-ktob-Ø/
2 masc. sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /ta-ktob-Ø/	<i>ktbt</i> /ta-ktob-Ø/
2 fem. sg.	(later <i>ktbt(y)n</i> /ta-ktob-īn/)	(later <i>ktbt(y)</i> /ta-ktob-ī/)
1 sg.	<i>’ktb</i> /’a-ktob-Ø/	<i>’ktb</i> /’a-ktob-Ø/
3 masc. pl.	<i>yktbn</i> /ya-ktob-ūn/	<i>yktbw</i> /ya-ktob-ū/
3 fem. pl.	<i>yktbn</i> /ya-ktob-(ā)n/ <sup>72</sup>	<i>yktbn</i> /ya-ktob-n(ā)/

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gzella 2004: 159–161.

<sup>71</sup> See Gzella 2004: 310–326.

<sup>72</sup> Later evidence points to an affirmative /-ān/ in the third-person fem. plural, no doubt patterned after the masculine. It is debated whether Old Aramaic preserved the

2 masc. pl.	<i>tktbn</i> /ta-ktob-ūn/	<i>tktbw</i> /ta-ktob-ū/
2 fem. pl.	(unattested)	(unattested)
1 pl.	(later <i>nktb</i> /na-ktob-Ø/)	(later <i>nktb</i> /na-ktob-Ø/)

In addition, Old Aramaic verbs ending in a long vowel (/ī/) preserve a difference between both conjugations even with forms of the “long imperfect” not expanded by /-n/. Hence the “short imperfect” is *thwy* /tahway/ ‘may she be’ (KAI 222 A: 25, from *hwī*)<sup>73</sup> as opposed to the “long imperfect” *yhw̄h* /yahwē/ (< \*/yahwī/) ‘he will be’ (KAI 223 A: 4). *Plene* and defective spellings for the corresponding forms of hollow roots in the Tell Fekheriye inscription, if they do not result from coincidence, appear to point to a similar distinction, i.e., a “short imperfect” *lšm* /lašim/ ‘may he erect’ (KAI 309: 11; see below for the preformative /l-/ in Tell Fekheriye), but a “long imperfect” *yšym* /yašim/ ‘he will erect’ (KAI 309: 12).<sup>74</sup> The vowel of the preformatives cannot be securely established for Old and Official Aramaic; the paradigm given here is based on the inherited forms /ya-/ , /ta-/ , /ʔa-/ , and /na-/ , but the /a/ was eventually replaced by /e/ at some stage.<sup>75</sup> As with the “perfect”, the vowel of the “imperfect” base is lexical. Most transitive verbs have /o/ (< \*/u/).

The “short imperfect” covers various nuances of deontic modality, that is, obligative (commands), optative (wishes), and permissive (permissions), hence the widespread term “jussive”. It requires the negation ʔ /ʔal/. In the Tell Fekheriye inscription, non-negated forms of the “short imperfect” invariably occur with the proclitic asseverative particle /la-/ after which the original preformative consonant /y-/ seems to have disappeared, whereas negated forms follow the usual pattern. However, only third-person forms are attested, e.g., *wlʔrʕ wʔl yḥšd* /wa-lazraʕ wa-ʔal yaḥšad/ ‘and let him sow but not harvest’ (KAI 309: 18–19), and the nature of the underlying phonetic process (presumably \*/la-yaktob/ > /laktob/ due to elision of intervocalic /y/? ) is not fully known. This feature seems

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etymological form \*/-n(ā)/ (Beyer 1984: 147) or had already shifted it to /-ān/. For /-n(ā)/ as the ending of the fem. plural “short imperfects” in Old Aramaic, see Huehnergard 1987.

<sup>73</sup> According to later vocalizations, however, /-ay/ has subsequently become /-ē/ in such forms. Other scholars assume that {y} stands for /ī/ (< \*/tahwīy/, with a different base vowel).

<sup>74</sup> Since no non-jussive “imperfect” forms of the plural or the second-person fem. singular appear in Tell Fekheriye, this is the only possible evidence for a morphological distinction between “short” and “long imperfect” in this Aramaic variety.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. the remark on the Barth-Ginsberg Law in the section on phonology. The first clear direct attestation of the preformative vowel /e/ in Aramaic seems to be the spelling *ḫpwwq* /leppwq/ ‘may he go out!’ in a papyrus from Dura Europos from ca. 200 A.D. (Beyer 1984: 110).

to foreshadow the consistent use of /l-/ (secondarily shifting to /n-/ in, e.g., Classical Syriac) in the preformatives of the third-person “imperfects” in later Eastern Aramaic.<sup>76</sup> Since it also occurs with formulaic expressions that in other varieties have the usual /y-/ preformative,<sup>77</sup> the /l-/ in Tell Fekheriye seems to constitute a dialectal trait of that particular region. Similar “short imperfects” with a prefixed *l-* /la-/ (perhaps shifted to /le-/ there?)<sup>78</sup> appear, albeit inconsistently, in Sam’alian but do not lead to syncope of the original preformative. One may tentatively conclude that the use of /la-/ was obligatory in Tell Fekheriye (where it produced a new form of the third-person “short imperfect”) but optional in Sam’alian.<sup>79</sup>

While the “short imperfect” is thus strongly marked for deontic modality, the functional range of the “long imperfect” seems more elusive. Basically, it includes the related notions of present-future (or non-past), ongoing situations (imperfective aspect), and types of epistemic modality such as certainty, doubt, or ability. These are often difficult to distinguish, consider examples like *’bd lhm* /’a’bad lahūm/ ‘I will do to them’ (KAI 224: 3; future tense or intention) or *yšlhn ’lhn* /yašlahūn ’elāhīn/ ‘the gods will send’ (KAI 222 A: 30; future tense or assertion). With the root *hwī* ‘to be’, however, this form marks the future tense (cf. KAI 223 A: 4). The interpretation of the few “imperfects” referring to past events (e.g., KAI 202 A: 11.15 in the corpus discussed here) is debated.<sup>80</sup> “Long imperfects” take the negation /lā/, which is attached directly to the prefix and spelled *l-* in Sefire as well as in some other varieties of Old Aramaic: *wlyšm’ mh* /wa-lā-yašma’ ‘ammeh/ ‘and his people do not obey’ (KAI 223 B: 3).

The imperative is identical to the respective second person of the “short imperfect” without its preformative. The word-initial consonant cluster of the base /ktob-/ may have been resolved by a non-systematic helping vowel in pronunciation. No feminine forms are attested in the oldest stage of Aramaic and in Sam’alian. Like the “short imperfect”, to which it is historically related, it mostly expresses various shades of deontic modality,

<sup>76</sup> See Gzella 2008: 103. Cf. Brockelmann <sup>10</sup>1965: 84 (§172).

<sup>77</sup> That is, the Sefire stelae and the Bukan inscription; see Folmer 2011: 146.

<sup>78</sup> Following a suggestion by Dion 1974: 124.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Huehnergard 1983: 589f.

<sup>80</sup> If these morphologically ambiguous forms are “short imperfects”, one might wish to ascribe them to Canaanite influence, since the use of the “short imperfect” as a narrative preterite similar to Hebrew *wayyiqtol* seems unusual for Aramaic (Gzella 2004: 322–324). Alternatively, they can be explained as “long” forms serving as a kind of historical present. At least the latter usage is clearly attested in early Aramaic (see Gzella 2005: 404f on KAI 233: 16).

i.e., obligations, wishes, and permissions, but it remains confined to the second person. Imperatives cannot occur with negations; instead, the second person of the “short imperfect” after *ʾl ʾal/* takes its place.

Suffixes could be attached to finite verbs in order to mark a pronominal direct object. Except for the first-person singular *-ny /-nī/* ‘me’, the forms of the object suffixes presumably correspond to those of the possessive suffixes with nouns in the construct state (see above), although only a few are actually attested. Forms of the “perfect” ending in a consonant most probably took a linking vowel, hence *hmlkny /hamlekānī/* (C-stem) ‘he made me king’ (KAI 202 A: 3). Suffixed “imperfects” with an *n* intervening between the verb and the suffix are customarily interpreted as “long” forms plus a remnant of the old “energetic” ending */-an/* or */-anna/* (> */-enna/*), whereas no such *n* appears to have been used with suffixed forms of the “short imperfect” and the imperative, e.g., *ʾl tʿšqny /ʾal taʿšaqnī/* ‘you shall not oppress me’ (KAI 224: 20). Perhaps the “energetic” in */-an/* (without a linking vowel before the suffix) was originally confined to forms of the “imperfect” without affirmatives. The */-n/* of the “energetic” ending assimilated to suffixes beginning with */k/*, e.g. *ʾhšlk /ʾaḥṣṣelákkā/* (D-stem) ‘I will save you’ (KAI 202 A: 14, < *\*ʾ-án-kā/*). Those forms ending in */-n/*, by contrast, may have taken the long variant of the “energetic” in */-anna/* (*/-enna/*) and replaced its final */-a/* by the linking vowel of the suffix,<sup>81</sup> but the situation is unclear for Old Aramaic.<sup>82</sup>

Besides the finite conjugations, Aramaic also disposes of several verbal nouns. The active participle corresponds to the pattern *ktb /kāteb/* and inflects like a noun. Construct and emphatic state forms only occur with participles acting as substantives; when used as predicative adjectives, by contrast, they regularly appear in the absolute state. The hymnic description of Hadad at the beginning of the Tell Fekheriye text furnishes many examples (KAI 309: 1–6). Only in later forms of Aramaic has the participle been integrated into the verbal system as a present tense or continuous form.<sup>83</sup> Infinitives, on the other hand, follow a variety of noun patterns in Old Aramaic. The inscriptions from Syria and Samʿal have an

<sup>81</sup> See Beyer 1984: 474–478.

<sup>82</sup> Hence it cannot be said with certainty whether a form like *wyqtlnh* ‘and he will kill him’ (KAI 222 B: 27) has to be vocalized */wa-yaqtolánhī/* (energetic */-an/* without linking vowel) or */wa-yaqtolenneh/*. In later stages of Aramaic, the former often has *plene* spelling (i.e., *-nhy*, see the examples in Beyer 1984: 477), yet no such distinction occurs in the oldest Aramaic texts.

<sup>83</sup> Gzella 2004: 194–203.

archaic form without an /m-/ prefix, lost in later Aramaic,<sup>84</sup> but the Tell Fekheriye text consistently uses a by-form based on the pattern /mak-tab/, which subsequently became the dominant form in Aramaic: *wlmšm' tšlwth wmlqḥ 'mrt pmh /wa-la-mašma' tašluteh wa-la-malqaḥ 'emrat pūmeh/* 'and in order to hear his prayer and to accept the word of his mouth' (KAI 309: 9–10, featuring the infinitives of *šm'* 'to hear' and *lqḥ* 'to take'). Both are mostly preceded by the preposition /la-/ (less frequently /ba-/ and /men/) and mark purpose or, occasionally, object clauses. Infinitives can be construed verbally in the absolute state with a direct object or nominally in the construct state forming a genitive relationship with a following noun.<sup>85</sup> Contrary to Official Aramaic, Old Aramaic also has a so-called "infinitive absolute", presumably identical to the common Semitic infinitive pattern /katāb/, but it is confined to paronomastic constructions with a subsequent finite form of the same root in order to reinforce the truth of a proposition.<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.4 Verbal Stems

Situation type (factive and causative) as well as diathesis (active and medio-passive) are expressed by a number of derivational categories, or verbal stems, which underlie the finite conjugations and verbal nouns. Their exact semantic nuance differs by root, and not all verbal stems are equally productive. Still, some general tendencies vis-à-vis the unmarked stem ("G-stem") can be outlined. The D-stem is characterized by a lengthened middle root consonant and expresses plurality or, with intransitive verbs, factitivity. The C-stem, by contrast, exhibits a prefix /ha-/, which later shifted to /ʔa-/, and often renders a causative nuance. The G-, D-, and C-stems each have a medio-passive variant with a /-t-/ prefix (Gt, Dt, Ct), which could swap position with a root-initial sibilant.<sup>87</sup> This metathesis did not happen consistently, though, not even in the same text: [*yš*] *tḥt* 'may it be destroyed' (KAI 222 A: 32, Dt-stem from *šḥt*), but *ytšm'* 'may it be heard' (KAI 222 A: 29, Gt-stem of *šm'*).<sup>88</sup> If later Aramaic evidence proves to be of any significance, the /t/ partially assimilated to /z/ and /š/

<sup>84</sup> A fossilized form *l'mr* /lēmar/ 'saying' survives in Official Aramaic but was subsequently lost as well (Gzella 2008: 97–99).

<sup>85</sup> See Degen 1969: 117.

<sup>86</sup> The examples can be found in Degen 1969: 116f; cf. Folmer 2011: 148.

<sup>87</sup> Most Gt, Dt, and Ct forms cannot be distinguished in unvocalized texts but must be identified on the basis of the corresponding active counterparts and vocalized traditions.

<sup>88</sup> A similar variation is attested in later Aramaic as well, see Folmer 2003.

(\**/tz/* > */zd/*, \**/tʂ/* > */ʂt/*). In addition to that, the three active stems also dispose of an apophonic passive (Gp, Dp, Cp) featuring the same consonantal skeleton as the respective active variant but a different vowel sequence. It is not always easy to determine the exact nuance of the t-stems as opposed to the apophonic passives, but the former often have a reflexive nuance.<sup>89</sup> Due to the limited textual corpus, the paradigm contains many lacunae, but some forms can be reconstructed with reasonable confidence on the basis of other Old Aramaic varieties, Official Aramaic, and vocalized Biblical Aramaic:<sup>90</sup>

	“Perfect”	“Imperfect”	Imperative	Participle	Infinitive
G	<i>/katab/</i>	<i>/yaktob/</i>	<i>/ktob/</i>	<i>/kātēb/</i>	<i>/maktab/</i> , <i>/ktab/</i>
Gp	<i>/katīb/</i>	<i>/yoktab/</i>	—	<i>/katīb/</i>	—
Gt	<i>ʾetkateb/</i>	<i>/yetkateb/(?)</i>	<i>ʾetkateb/</i>	<i>/metkateb/(?)</i>	<i>ʾetkatābā/</i>
D	<i>/katteb/</i>	<i>/yakatteb/</i>	<i>/katteb/</i>	<i>/makatteb/</i>	<i>/kattābā/</i>
Dp	(unattested)	(unattested)	—	<i>/makattab/</i>	—
Dt	<i>ʾetkattab/</i> <sup>91</sup>	<i>/yetkattab/(?)</i>	<i>ʾetkattab/</i>	<i>/metkattab/(?)</i>	(unattested)
C	<i>/hakteb/</i>	<i>/ya(ha)kteb/</i>	<i>/hakteb/</i>	<i>/ma(ha)kteb/</i>	<i>/haktābā/</i>
Cp	<i>/hokteb/</i>	(unattested)	—	<i>/ma(ha)ktab/</i>	—
Ct	<i>ʾethakteb/</i> <sup>92</sup>	(unattested)	(unattested)	(unattested)	(unattested)

Contrary to some offshoots of Old Aramaic attested around 500 B.C. and later Western Aramaic as well as Syriac, the infinitives of the derived stems in the majority of Old and Official Aramaic witnesses lack an */m-/* prefix. The Tell Fekheriye inscription also contains a number of forms that can be understood either as D-stem infinitives without the feminine ending */-ā/* or as masculine nouns belong to a different pattern (*ḥyy*, *kbr*, *šlm*, KAI 309: 7–8).<sup>93</sup> Another peculiarity is the Gt-“imperfect” *ʾlygtzr* *ʾal yeg-tazer/* ‘may it not cease’ (KAI 309: 23; an agentless middle of the root *gzzr* ‘to cut’ with the meaning ‘to be cut loose’, cf. Dan 2: 34) with an infix, and

<sup>89</sup> Following the loss of the apophonic passives in Aramaic at the end of the 1st millennium B.C., however, the t-stems become more clearly marked for passive diathesis at the expense of their reflexive meaning. For a general outline of the passive system in Semitic and its historical development, see Gzella 2009.

<sup>90</sup> See Folmer 2011: 149–151 for a succinct but comprehensive outline of the situation in Old and Official Aramaic.

<sup>91</sup> The form *htnʾbw* */hetnaʾabū/* (presumably a Dt-“perfect” from *nʾb*: Degen 1969: 67; Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 710f) ‘they were envious’ (KAI 216: 14) with */h-/* instead of *ʾ-/* and a few similar cases from other Aramaic corpora may be (graphic?) hypercorrections patterned after the C-stem “perfect,” just as in the Hebrew Dt-stem (Gzella 2009: 305 with n. 30).

<sup>92</sup> Later *ʾetʾakteb/* > (as in Syriac, with assimilation of the medial *ʾ/*) *ʾettakteb/*.

<sup>93</sup> Folmer 2011: 149.

instead of a prefixed, /-t-/. This form, exceptional in Aramaic, may be a vestige of an older stage of Semitic in which the /-t-/ was originally an infix.<sup>94</sup> The loss of intervocalic /-h-/, which presumably triggered or reinforced the later shift of the causative prefix /ha-/ to /'a-/, seems to underlie the non-standard form of the “imperfect” *yskr* /yasker/ (instead of *yhskr* /yahasker/ earlier in the same line) ‘may he deliver’ (KAI 224: 3) in Sfire.<sup>95</sup>

Unlike all known varieties of Aramaic, Sam’alian has allegedly preserved a reflex of the Proto-Semitic N-stem. The N-stem reduces transitivity with fientive verbs and thus acts as a medio-passive there, whereas it expresses a fientive nuance (which often seems to coincide with an ingressive situation type highlighting a change of state) with stative verbs.<sup>96</sup> Its form in 1st-millennium B.C. Northwest Semitic can be reconstructed as follows (assuming that /e/ is the reflex of \*/i/):

	“Perfect”	“Imperfect”	Imperative	Participle	Infinitive
N	/naktab/	/yekkateb/ <sup>97</sup>	/'ekateb/	/naktab/	/naktāb/

The historical significance of this feature depends on one’s assumptions about the position of Sam’alian within Semitic. Scholars who associate the local idiom of ancient Zincirli with a variety of the Northwest Semitic branch preceding the split into Canaanite and Aramaic, view the N-stem as a retention from an earlier developmental stage of the language. Those who basically subsume Sam’alian under Aramaic, conversely, would rather classify the relevant examples as borrowings from Phoenician, which has preserved a productive N-stem. One should at any rate emphasize that evidence for an N-stem in Sam’alian is very feeble indeed: it is restricted to the alleged and partially reconstructed participle *nḥ[š]b* /naḥšab/ ‘esteemed’ from the root *ḥšb* ‘to reckon’ in KAI 215: 10. If this reading can

<sup>94</sup> Alternatively, one could think of an Akkadian influence, but the usual tendency of infixes to turn into prefixes (rather than the other way round) would argue in favor of an archaism in this most ancient Aramaic text. Cf. Gzella 2009: 302. As a consequence, the purported metathesis of /t/ with a root-initial sibilant may actually be a remnant of an older infixation that resisted the shift from infix to prefix. Inconsistent evidence for this phenomenon in Sefire (see the remark on the t-stems) could also be adduced in support of this idea but the distribution of forms with and without metathesis in Old Aramaic remains unknown.

<sup>95</sup> See Beyer 1984: 148 and Fitzmyer 21995: 145. Even if this is a scribal mistake (cf. Degen 1969: 19 n. 79) rather than a purposefully innovative spelling, it may have been caused by a phonetic change that was already underway in contemporary pronunciation.

<sup>96</sup> Gzella 2009 provides a functional analysis and bibliographical references.

<sup>97</sup> From \*/yinkatib-/ with assimilation of /n/; this also applies to the imperative \*/'inkatib/.

indeed be accepted,<sup>98</sup> the word in question may simply be a lexical loan. Nothing points to a functional opposition between a productive N-stem and other medio-passive categories in Sam'alian.

#### 4.5 *Irregular Verbs*

Phonetic peculiarities of various classes of verbal roots cause a number of deviations from the sound paradigm. Evidence from later Aramaic provides some clues for the situation in the corpus under review here, but once again, the limited amount of material leaves many questions unanswered.<sup>99</sup>

- 1) Verbs with root-initial /n/ and *lqh* 'to take': In later Aramaic, these roots normally assimilate /n/ and /l/ to the following consonant in the "imperfect" and infinitive. As a consequence, the imperative is formed on a biradical base (i.e., /qaḥ/ 'take!'). Non-assimilated forms of *lqh* also occur, especially in Tell Fekheriye, hence the form of the imperative in Old Aramaic remains unclear. A more detailed discussion of this phenomenon can be found in the section on phonology.
- 2) Verbs with root-initial /y/ are generally thought to drop the /y/ in the "imperfect" (as in Classical Arabic) and subsequently lengthen the second root consonant instead, but the origin of this compensatory lengthening is difficult to pinpoint before the 6th century B.C.<sup>100</sup> Hence it is hard to say whether *yšb* 'he sits' (KAI 224: 17, from *yšb*) is still vocalized as /yaθeb/ or already as /yaθθeb/.<sup>101</sup> The imperative, at any rate, is based on the second and third root consonants, i.e., *šbw* /θebū/ 'dwell!' (KAI 224: 7). In the C-stem, the original root-initial \*/w/ (which has shifted to /y/ in Northwest Semitic) reappears: *hwšbny* /hawθebānī/ 'he placed me' (KAI 216: 5) from \**wšb* as opposed to *yhynqn* /yahayneqn(ā)/ 'may they suckle' (KAI 222 A: 22 and elsewhere) from \**ynq*.
- 3) Verbs with a long ("geminate") second root consonant lengthen the first root consonant in forms with preformatives or prefixes ending in a vowel: *ʕl* /ʕālel/ 'entering' (KAI 222 A: 6, participle from *ʕl*) but *yʕl*

<sup>98</sup> Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 410 have summarized other proposals.

<sup>99</sup> See especially Folmer 2011: 151–157 for a balanced survey of the evidence.

<sup>100</sup> Beyer 1984: 149f.

<sup>101</sup> Note that a form like *yētab* 'it pleases' in Biblical Aramaic (Ezra 7: 18) may also preserve a reflex of the root consonant /y/ if it indeed derives from \*/yaytab/. No such forms are attested in the epigraphic corpus of Old and Official Aramaic, though.

/ya“ol/ ‘he enters’ (KAI 222 B: 35, “imperfect”). D-stem forms inflect like sound roots; perhaps the same applies to the Gt and Dt stems, but evidence is lacking.

- 4) Verbs with a long vowel between the initial and the final root consonant (“hollow roots”) preserve this vowel in the G-stem “imperfect,” otherwise the corresponding long vowel of the sound verb appears: *qm* /qām/ ‘he rose’ (KAI 202 A: 3, from *qūm*) but *ymwt* /yamūt/ ‘he dies’ (KAI 224: 16, from *mūt*). Presumably, this vowel was shortened in the final syllable of the “short imperfect,” as the difference between *lšm* /lašim/ ‘may he erect’ (KAI 309: 11, from *šim*) and *yšym* /yašim/ ‘he will erect’ (KAI 309: 12) in Tell Fekheriye suggests (see the corresponding remark in the section on verbal conjugations). However, later vocalizations do not indicate that the vowel of the “perfect” became short before consonantal affirmatives, in contradistinction to Canaanite and Classical Arabic, hence a form like *wršt* ‘and I ran’ (KAI 216: 8, from *rūš*) presumably has to be vocalized /wa-rāšt/. The G-stem active participle and the entire D-stem of most verbs behave like sound roots in later Aramaic, but the situation cannot be assessed for the earliest attested stages. It is not impossible that some verbs replaced the D-stem by another pattern based on reduplication of the final root consonant (\* /qawmem/ in the “perfect” for *qūm*).<sup>102</sup>
- 5) Verbs with a root-final /ī/ seem to preserve this long vowel in all “perfect” and imperative forms (perhaps shifting it to /ay/ with /ī/ and to /aw/ with /ū/ of the affirmatives, as in later Aramaic varieties).<sup>103</sup> In the “long imperfect,” the participle, and the G-stem infinitive, however, word-final /-ī/ changes into /-ē/, whereas the “short imperfect” has /-ay/, hence the distinction between *thwy* /tahway/ ‘may she be’ (KAI 222 A: 25, from *hwī*) and *yhwh* /yahwē/ (< \* /yahwī/) ‘he will be’ (KAI 223 A: 4), later lost in Aramaic (see the discussion above).<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> The “perfect” *knn* ‘he set up’ from *kūn* in Tell Fekheriye (KAI 309: 10) and the corresponding “short imperfect” in the following line, however, could also be parsed as D-stem forms of a variant geminate root *knn* (cf. Beyer 2004: 332, assuming that the so-called “lengthening stem” with the expected “perfect” /kānen/ for the root *kūn* emerged, but in much later stages of Aramaic).

<sup>103</sup> Beyer 1984: 489, but cf. Nebe 2010: 319 on the spelling *qnt* ‘I have acquired’ in the Kuttamuwa inscription (l. 1), which seems to point to /qanīt/ rather than /qanayt/, since the latter would normally have been written *qnyt*.

<sup>104</sup> A form *yhy* of unclear significance occurs in the Kuttamuwa inscription (l. 7; see Pardee 2009a: 68). The syntactic environment (protasis of a conditional construction) suggests a “long imperfect” (Nebe 2010: 325, 329–330), in which case this would be a defective spelling of a root *hyi* ‘to be’, otherwise unattested in Aramaic and Sam’alian (see section 6,

Many verbs have a “perfect” in /-ā/ (/ay-/ before consonantal affirmatives, /-āt/ in the third-person fem. singular, /-aw/ in the third-person plural). When suffixes are attached, the final long vowels of such forms presumably dissolve into diphthongs before the linking vowel (e.g., as in Official Aramaic *hḥw̄yn* /haḥwiyānā/ ‘he informed us’, C-stem of *ḥw̄*). It is unclear whether the merger of verbs with final /ʔ/ and those with final /ī/, following the incipient loss of syllable-final /ʔ/,<sup>105</sup> was already underway in Old Aramaic; the consistent spelling of the root *nśʔ* ‘to lift up’ with {ʔ} would argue against this hypothesis.

#### 4.6 Prepositions and Particles

The three proclitic prepositions *b* /ba-/, *l* /la-/, and *k* /ka-/ (with leveling of the /a/ vowel in Aramaic) are the most common devices for marking spatial, temporal, or logical relations; other prepositions include *ḥlp* /ḥalp/ ‘instead of’, *mn* /men/ (without assimilation of /n/) ‘from’, in comparative expressions ‘than’, *d* /ʔad/ ‘until’ (also used as a conjunction in KAI 224: 6), *m* /ʔemm/ ‘together with’, *qdm* /qodām/ ‘before’ (spatial). Singular suffixes can be attached to them. The prepositions *ʔ* /ʔel/ ‘to’ (later largely replaced by *ʔ* /ʔal/), *byn* /bayn/ ‘between’, and *ʔ* /ʔal/ ‘above, against’, by contrast, take plural suffixes. Combinations of prepositions or of a preposition and a noun can cluster into compound expressions.

Coordinating conjunctions like *w* /wa-/ and less frequent *p* /pa-/ ‘and’ as well as disjunctive *ʔw* /ʔaw/ ‘or’ connect main clauses; subordinating conjunctions introduce clauses that are logically dependent, e.g., *hn* /hen/ ‘if’, *kzy* /ka-ḏī/ ‘when’, or *ky* /kī/ ‘because’. The Aramaic existence marker *\*ʔīḥay* /‘there is’ occurs in its negated form with what seems to be a third-person singular masc. suffix, i.e., *lyšh* /layḥeh/ ‘there is/was not’ (KAI 216: 16). Together with the “short imperfect,” the negation *ʔ* /ʔal/ serves as a vetitive, otherwise *l* /lā/ is used; /lā/ together with the “long imperfect” can also express general prohibitions. In Sefire, it appears as a proclitic form *l* written together with the “imperfect.”<sup>106</sup> Frequent adverbs include *ʔk* /ʔayk/ ‘how?’ (often followed by the relative marker *zy* /ḏī/), *ʔn* /ʔān/ ‘where?’, *kn* /ken/ ‘so’, and *kʔ* /kaʔat/ ‘now’. Definite (and thus contextually

below); defective writing of word-final /ē/ also occurs at least in the plural demonstrative *ʔ* ‘these’ in Old Aramaic (see above). The “short imperfect” *yšwy* ‘may he apportion’ in the same text (l. 12), however, conforms to expectations.

<sup>105</sup> See Folmer 1995: 222–236.

<sup>106</sup> So, too, in a later text from Syria (KAI 226: 4, 8 with the “imperfect,” l. 6 with the “perfect”).

salient) direct objects can be introduced by the particle *ʔt* /ʔiyyāt/ in Aramaic in western Syria or its by-form *wt* /wāt/ in Samʿalian, but object marking does not seem to be compulsory.<sup>107</sup> The precative particle *lw* /lū/, which occurs sometimes in Official Aramaic, is already attested in Samʿalian. Its asseverative counterpart *l* /la-/ seems to be used with the “imperfect” in Tell Fekheriye and Samʿalian (see the discussion above), perhaps also, though more freely, in the personal name *ʔdnlrm* (‘Indeed, the lord is exalted’, KAI 203) and at the beginning of the dedication *llʾbdbʾlt* (‘Indeed, for ‘Abd-baʾalat’, KAI 204).

## 5. SYNTAX

The most frequent word order pattern in Old Aramaic is VSO for verbal clauses and, if indeed such a general distinction can be made, Subject-Predicate for nominal clauses. Due to internal developments and presumably also because of contact with Akkadian and Old Persian, however, the situation seems less clear for Official Aramaic. Proleptic pronouns, which later become a characteristic feature of Aramaic, are rarely used in the earliest stages; possessive constructions like *brh zy* PN ‘his son, the one of PN’ = ‘PN’s son’, where a suffixed head noun is linked to a modifier by means of the relative marker *zy*, first seem to occur between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century B.C. This may point to a more fundamental, and possibly contact-induced, change of clause patterns in Aramaic after the period under review here. Double subordination is avoided in favor of parataxis.<sup>108</sup> Agreement usually appears to be straightforward, but, as in other older Semitic languages, the numerals from three to ten take the opposite gender to the counted noun (e.g., *šbʿ bnth* ‘his seven daughters’, KAI 222 A: 24).<sup>109</sup>

## 6. LEXICON

Besides a common stock of lexical items inherited from previous stages of Semitic, the inscriptions from central Syria, Tell Fekheriye, and Zincirli all contain a number of words distinctive of the Aramaic language group:

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Degen 1969: 95–97.

<sup>108</sup> See Gzella 2004: 160.

<sup>109</sup> See Degen 1969: 104f. Very few numerals are attested in Old Aramaic.

e.g., *ʾnš* /enāš/ ‘man, person’, *yhb* ‘to give’, *mr* /māre/ ‘lord’, *bd* ‘to make’, and *qdm* /qodām/ ‘in front of’. Tell Fekheriye and the texts from western Syria also share some other Aramaic lexemes, such as *gʾr* ‘to cut’. The “imperfect” of the root *yhb* ‘to give’ has not yet been replaced, as in later Aramaic, by the corresponding form of *ntn* (cf. *thb* /tahab/ ‘you give’ in KAI 222 B: 38).

However, the earliest witnesses of Aramaic already exhibit considerable diversity. This also affects variation in lexical items. A case in point are the demonstratives, which cannot be traced back to common Northwest Semitic ancestors: while *znh* /ðenā/ and *zʾ* /ðāʾ/ are the regular forms in Old Aramaic, the Kuttamuwa inscription from Samʿal uses a masc. singular *znn* /ðenān/ as well as /ðenā/ (spelled defectively as *zn*), and the Tell Fekheriye text contains a fem. singular *zʾt* /ðāʾt/. The latter also has the atypical absolute fem. plural *nšwn* /nešawān/ ‘women’ instead of the expected, but unattested, /nešin/, which apparently underlies the well-known construct *nšy* /nešay/,<sup>110</sup> as well as *sʾwn* /θaʾawān/ ‘ewes’ as opposed to *šʾn* /θaʾān/. In addition, Samʿalian uses the object marker *wt* /wāt/, which seems to be cognate to the Western Aramaic form (ʾ)yt /ʾiy) yāt/, whereas the Tell Fekheriye inscription, in accordance with Official and later Eastern Aramaic (where the proclitic preposition *l* serves as a *nota obiecti*), does not show traces of such a device.<sup>111</sup>

Lexical loans in all three different sub-corpora, finally, mirror the respective language situations. The first-person singular independent pronoun *ʾnk* in Samʿalian may come from Phoenician, the old prestige language of the region (if it is not to be explained as a retention of the Proto-Semitic form \*/ʾanāku/, which is lost in Aramaic). Another example may be *mt* /mett/ ‘truly’(?), but etymology and meaning are debated.<sup>112</sup> The same applies to *šr* ‘enemy’(?), with a possible Canaanite sound correspondence of the original \*/š/.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, the Kuttamuwa inscription seems to contain an instance (though a problematic one) of the root *hyi* ‘to be’

<sup>110</sup> The plural /nešawān/ or /nešuwān/ in Aramaic would normally presuppose an etymological singular in \*/-āt/ or \*/-ūt/ with a purported abstract meaning “womenfolk”, hence the form in /-wān/ could possibly denote a plural of paucity (but cf. the broken plural *nīsawān* in Arabic).

<sup>111</sup> For a more extensive discussion, see Gzella 2013.

<sup>112</sup> See Hoftijzer – Jongeling 1995: 707f for various proposals, to which add Beyer 2004: 15, who also thinks of a possible connection with Ugaritic *ʾimt* and *mt* ‘certainly’. This word is not attested in Phoenician, but since Ugaritic has a number of lexical correspondences with Phoenician, a borrowing into Samʿalian via that route seems quite feasible.

<sup>113</sup> Nebe 2010: 322.

instead of the usual Aramaic and Sam'alīan form *hwī*.<sup>114</sup> Individual words could also have been borrowed from indigenous (Anatolian?) idioms.<sup>115</sup> Extensive Aramaic-Assyrian bilingualism in the eastern part of the speech area, by contrast, has led to many Akkadian lexemes in the Tell Fekheriye stele (e.g., *'dqwr* /'adaqūr/ 'ritual container', *gwgl* /gūgal/ 'irrigation master', *mt* /māt/ 'land', and perhaps *šbt* /šibt/ 'plague') and other contact-induced phenomena such as the incidental "enclitic *mem*" in *šmym* 'my name'. Further borrowings from Akkadian, such as *krs*' /korse'/ 'throne', are also attested in western Syria.

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<sup>114</sup> Pardee 2009a: 68; Nebe 2010: 325. This is especially interesting since the known varieties of Phoenician use the root *kūn* for 'to be', even though *hyī* occurs in other Canaanite languages like Hebrew and Moabite. In addition to that, a shift from /w/ to /y/ or vice versa can be easily explained on phonetic grounds (see the variation between the object markers (')*yt* and *wt*). As a consequence, the root *hyī* in the Kuttamuwa inscription does not necessarily constitute a Phoenician loan; its origin remains open to further discussion.

Alternatively, *yhy* could be parsed as a "short imperfect" of the usual root *hwī* in Aramaic and Sam'alīan, with omission of the medial /w/, as sometimes happens in later Western Aramaic (for examples, see Beyer 1984: 560; id. 2004: 383), but the syntactic environment presupposes a "long imperfect": cf. note 104, above.

<sup>115</sup> Nebe 2010: 315 cites two religious terms in the Ördekburnu inscription that may have been borrowed from Luwian. Anatolian names also feature in the Sam'alīan onomasticon.