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Herausgegeben von Otto Jastrow

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Hezy Mutzafi

The Jewish  
Neo-Aramaic Dialect  
of Koy Sanjaq

(Iraqi Kurdistan)

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## Preface

Linguistic interest in the field of Neo-Aramaic is now over 160 years old, and yet many Eastern Neo-Aramaic varieties have not gained the scholarly attention that they deserve, and remain completely or virtually unexplored. All Eastern Neo-Aramaic regional idioms are highly endangered, and a few of them have already reached their demise: Mlaḥsô (1998), Jewish Bəjil near Aqra (1998), and probably also Jewish Shukho in Barwari, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Jewish Gawar in Hakkâri, Turkey. The precarious condition of the modern representatives of Eastern Aramaic, especially of the North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) varieties, coupled with the paucity of data as regards a large number of them, renders the need for documentation of these dialects one of the most urgent tasks in Semitic dialectological research.

The present work offers a description of one of the least known Neo-Aramaic varieties. The only published data on the Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Koy Sanjaq (henceforth JKS) thus far deal with a particular phonological feature of the dialect - the bearing of the uvular *q* and pharyngealized consonants in Proto-JKS-Jewish Azerbaijan on the retention and innovation of adjacent pharyngeals in JKS (Hoberman 1985, 1989b, 1991). This feature is discussed further in this work, based on additional observations and details (§1.1.8.2, b).

The dialect described in this work is doomed to extinction within the next two or three decades, having gradually been superseded by Hebrew since the immigration of all its speakers to Israel in 1951 and their integration into Hebrew-speaking Israeli society. Although there are still people in their forties and fifties who can speak basic JKS with their parents, these are essentially passive speakers, whereas all fully competent active speakers of JKS who can serve as good informants are now above 65 years old, and the data for the present study of the dialect was therefore obtained from the last generation of its active speakers.

This volume is based on my doctoral dissertation, *The Jewish Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Koy Sanjaq (Iraqi Kurdistan): Phonology, Morphology, Texts and Glossary* [in Hebrew], Tel Aviv 2000: Tel Aviv University. Quite a few points discussed in my dissertation have been revised or modified in this work in light of recent findings and observations (e.g. the minimal pair *zori* 'my little one' - *zori* 'force, coercion'), along with new references to over a dozen works that have

appeared since the completion of my dissertation, and new entries have been added to the glossary (e.g. *sakla* 'peg, tent-peg'). I hope that the present description and my discussion of the dialectal position of JKS (see introduction) will enrich our knowledge of the dialectal diversity of NENA and its network of isoglosses, and contribute something to the internal classification of this vast group of Neo-Aramaic languages and dialects.

My deepest gratitude is due to my informants - the late Rabbi Nissim Eliyahu, Mr. Moshe Yehezqel, the late Mrs. Hanna Noah, Salih and Nazima Eliyahu, <sup>c</sup>Ezra and Rahma Eliyahu, Mrs. Yafa Ben Menashe, Mr. Şiyon Sayna and Mr. Tzvi Avraham - for patiently helping me learn their language and for their extraordinary hospitality.

Special thanks are due to Prof. Simon Hopkins for the privilege of being his doctoral student and for contributing to my study of JKS a great deal of excellent advice and illuminating remarks. I owe much gratitude to a number of scholars who answered my questions concerning various topics related to this work: Dr. Michael Chyet, Mr. Samuel Ethan Fox, Prof. Geoffrey Khan, Prof. Estiphan Panoussi, Prof. Yona Sabar, Dr. Shabo Talay and Dr. Helen Younansardaroud. S.E. Fox has also offered constructive comments on an earlier version of my work. Dr. Saedi Barzinji, president of Salahaddin University in Arbil, kindly e-mailed to me materials related to the early history of Koy Sanjaq, and for that I am very much indebted to him. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Hanna Antwan, a resident of Koy Sanjaq, for demographic data related to his hometown. Finally, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Prof. Dr. Otto Jastrow, who offered to publish the present work as part of the *Semitica Viva* series, and whose masterful descriptions of unknown and hardly investigated Neo-Aramaic varieties have stimulated and inspired my own work in the fascinating field of Neo-Aramaic dialectology.

Hezy Mutzafi, Tel Aviv University,  
March 2003.

## Symbols and abbreviations

### Symbols:

>	developed into diachronically
<	developed from diachronically
→	developed into synchronically; in the glossary: see entry
←	developed from synchronically
[ ]	phonetic transcription; in the texts: complementary words or letters
/ /	phonemic transcription
	underlying synchronic form
+ before word	word-emphasis, viz. entirely pharyngealized word
*	reconstructed form
√	root, verbal root
~	interchangeable with
.....	hesitation / omitted Hebrew explanation (in the texts)

### Abbreviations:

<b>A</b>	verbal stem A (§3.4)
acc.	according to; accusative
act.	active
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
Akk.	Akkadian
<sup>ALT</sup> (superscript)	alternant
ʕAnk.	ʕAnkawa Christian Neo-Aramaic, Arbil province, Iraq
Ar.	Arabic
<b>B</b>	verbal stem B (§3.4)
BA	Biblical Aramaic
Betn.	Bétanure Jewish Neo-Aramaic, Barwari, Iraq
B-Ṭiare	Belatha dialect of Ṭiare Christian Neo-Aramaic, Turkey

C.	Christian NENA dialect of...
C	consonant
c.	common gender
cAr.	colloquial Arabic (especially <i>qəltu</i> )
CKS	Christian Neo-Aramaic of Koy Sanjaq
cnt.	century
coll.	collective noun
crypt.	cryptic word or phrase (see §0.2.1)
C.Sandj.	Christian NENA dialect of Sanandaj, Iran
cstr.	construct form or state
dat.	dative
denom.	denominative
dim.	diminutive
Eng.	English
euph.	euphemistic usage
f.	feminine
Gk.	Greek
H	Hebrew
<sup>H...H</sup> (superscript)	word or phrase from Israeli Hebrew
Halm.	Halmun Christian Neo-Aramaic, Turkey
Hert.	Hertevin Christian Neo-Aramaic, Turkey
inf.	infinitive
infl.	influence
inv. <sup>1</sup>	adjectives invariable for gender and number (§7.2)
inv. <sup>2</sup>	adjectives invariable for gender; facultatively inflected for number (§7.2)
J.	Jewish NENA dialect of...
J.Az	Jewish Neo-Aramaic language of Iranian Azerbaijan
JBA	Jewish Babylonian Aramaic
JKS	Jewish Neo-Aramaic of Koy Sanjaq
JNA	Jewish Neo-Aramaic
JPA	Jewish Palestinian Aramaic
J.Sandj.	Jewish NENA dialect of Sanandaj, Iran
K	Kurdish
Ko-Ṭiare	Ko dialect of Ṭiare Christian Neo-Aramaic, Turkey
KSK	Koy Sanjaq Kurdish (informant)
L	Latin

<sup>L</sup> (superscript)	loanword
lit.	literally
loc.	locative
LR	literary register
m.	masculine
Mand.	(Classical) Mandaic
n.	note, footnote
NA	Neo-Aramaic
NENA	North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic
NT	Jewish Nerwa texts, 17th-18th centuries
OA	Older Aramaic, i.e. attested Aramaic prior to the modern phase
*OA	of unattested OA etymology
onomat.	onomatopoeic
P	Persian
pass.	passive
p.c.	personal communication
pejor.	pejorative
pl.	plural
pl.tant.	pluralis tantum
P-NENA	Proto-NENA
poss.	possessive
prec.	preceding entry
prep.	preposition
ptc.	participle
st. abs.	status absolutus
st. emph.	status emphaticus
subj.	subject
suff.	suffix
Syr.	Syriac
Syr. <sup>Audo</sup>	Syriac according to Audo's dictionary (Audo 1897)
Syr. <sup>Manna</sup>	Syriac according to Manna's dictionary (Manna 1900)
T	Turkish
Targ.	Targum
Trg.O.	Targum Onqelos
Ṭur.	Ṭuroyo
V	vowel



<sup>vi</sup> (superscript)	intransitive verb
voc.	vocative
<sup>vt</sup> (superscript)	transitive verb

## Informants:

**M** - Mr. Moshe Yehezqel

**N** - Rabbi Nissim Eliyahu

[**M** + number] - Example from the texts, informant **M** + number of section

[**N** + number] - Example from the texts, informant **N** + number of section

## 0. Introduction

### 0.1 Koy Sanjaq and its Jewish community

The Neo-Aramaic dialect described in this study is spoken by approximately 200 Jews born in the town of Koy Sanjaq in Iraqi Kurdistan, 55 kilometres south-east of the city of Arbil. According to an Iraqi census of October 1947, the population of Koy Sanjaq in that year numbered 8,198 inhabitants, of whom 7,746 were Muslims, 268 Jews and 184 Christians.<sup>1</sup> In addition, with the emigration of the Jews imminent, some 80 to 100 refugees from the large village of Betwata, to the north of Koy Sanjaq, who were fleeing from their Muslim oppressors, joined the Jewish community of Koy Sanjaq in 1950, and several months later emigrated with them (cf. Ben-Yaacob 1981: 96). Thus on the eve of the exodus of the Jews of Koy Sanjaq to Israel in 1951, the Jewish community of the town numbered 350 to 400 souls, a figure that tallies well with the testimony of the community elders.

The town of Koy Sanjaq is generally referred to as *Koy* by its Jewish and Christian inhabitants, whereas the Kurds call it *Kóya*.<sup>2</sup> The full name of the town is pronounced *Kóysanjāq* by its people.

The origins of Koy Sanjaq are not entirely clear from the sources at my disposal. According to Ḥawezi 1962<sup>3</sup> the town had existed already prior to the advent of Islam under the name of *Kohsar*. Sometime after the Islamic conquest the name of the town was shortened to *Ko*. During the Ottoman era the town housed a garrison and became a military stronghold, and its name was altered to *Köy Sanjaq*, i.e. 'village of the flag' in Turkish. According to a legend related to me by one of my JKS informants, a few hundred years ago a rebellion broke out in Baghdad against Ottoman rule (an echo of the 1623 rebellion?), and the Sultan's son was dispatched at the head of the army to quell the revolt. Once the revolt was crushed, the Sultan's army began its return to Istanbul, and on the way camped close to a hill called Koy

1 I am indebted to Mr. Ḥanna Anṭwan of Koy Sanjaq for a copy of the relevant data. Mr. Anṭwan informs me that today the population of his hometown exceeds 70,000, of whom only 142 inhabitants are Chaldean Christians.

2 Koye in Kurdish orthography - see MacKenzie 1961: 27 and passim; Wahby and Edmonds 1965: 170.

3 An excerpt from this book was e-mailed to me from Salahaddin University, Arbil.

that served as the site of a seasonal bazaar for the surrounding Kurdish villages. The Sultan's son viewed this hill as a good spot for establishing an Ottoman stronghold, planted his banner and left a garrison there. Soon afterwards local villagers, including Jews, reached the vicinity of the stronghold to provide services to the soldiers. Shops were set up around the stronghold, followed by houses and a mosque. Thus the village of Koy Sanjaq was established, and in the course of time developed into a town. This story is in all likelihood incorrect as regards the time in which the town was founded, but may not be entirely ahistorical.

Information about the history of the Jewish community of Koy Sanjaq is quite limited. The earliest known sources are from the second half of the 18th century, by which time there had already been a thriving Jewish community in the town (cf. Ben-Yaacob 1981: 101-102). An important source concerning Jewish literary creativity in Koy Sanjaq is a book dating back to the late 18th century, which was brought to Israel in 1925 or 1926 by an immigrant from Arbil who was of Koy Sanjaq ancestry. The book was subsequently given to the rabbi of the Koy Sanjaq Jews, the late Nissim Eliyahu, and was recently donated to the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or Yehudah, Israel (see Sharoni-Pinhas 2001). The book comprises hymns,<sup>4</sup> homilies, prayers and matters of Jewish mysticism and religious law, written or copied by several sages, primarily Rabbi Yosef son of Rabbi Yahuda. Most of the book is written in Hebrew, but it also contains some sections in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic copied from the Talmud and, most relevant to our topic, two literary pieces in Hebrew with a rather free translation into modern Aramaic:<sup>5</sup> large fragments of a rhymed Hebrew version of the story of David and Goliath translated into archaic JKS and a poem by Yehuda Hallelevi (Spain, 11th century) translated into a Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of the Iranian Kurdistan type by one Ḥayyim son of Rabbi Yiṣḥaq. The latter author was probably an immigrant to Koy Sanjaq who wrote in the Neo-Aramaic idiom of his native province. The book contains colophons beginning in 1761 and ending in 1771. The town of Koy Sanjaq is explicitly mentioned in one of them, which reads:

”...שנת תקל”א כוי סינגאק תחת ממשלת אדוננו המלך האדיר סול[טאן] מצטפא ירום הודו  
ותנשא מלכותו אמן [...] אני יוסף בן כהר יהודה זל”.

4 Many of which are now published in Noah 2001: 9-87.

5 These two works are now published with many errors and "emendations" in Noah 2001: 155-167, 236-245.

That is: "...Year 5531 (= 1771 CE), Koy Sinjaq, under the reign of our mighty sovereign Sultan Muṣṭafa, may his kingdom prosper, amen [unclear]. I, Yosef son of the honourable Rabbi Yahuda, of blessed memory".

At the same period in which Rabbi Yosef composed his literary works, an epistle in Hebrew was sent by the elders of the Jewish community of Koy Sanjaq to Shelomo Aznati, an emissary from Palestine. This emissary, who remained for some time in Arbil, sent his servant to Koy Sanjaq in order to obtain a donation for the Jews of Palestine. Replying to Aznati's request, the Koy Sanjaq Jewish elders wrote in an epistle of 1767 as follows (see Yaari 1951: 515):

"To the honourable sage Shelomo Aznati, may the Lord preserve him, amen. From the time of our forefathers until this day we have not given alms through the offices of an emissary servant, and if sir would like to come to us...we shall give him alms and money. And if he is unable to come because of the trials of the journey and the cold weather he should send us a promissory note, and once we see it we shall send him alms as we have given to the sage Shema<sup>c</sup>ya and the sage Ḥayyim Cohen Duwek...for we have a fund from ancient times and [we have donated] generously...signed by the representative of the community and at the behest of the notables, the humble Yosef...year 5527 since the creation [= 1767 CE]"

From this letter, which may well have been signed by the very Rabbi Yosef son of Rabbi Yahuda who was the primary author of the aforementioned 18th century book, we learn that in the second half of the 18th century Koy Sanjaq had a prosperous Jewish community that was willing to offer generous donations to emissaries from Palestine. The epistle alludes to the antiquity of the Koy Sanjaq community ("from the time of our fathers"; "from ancient times"), and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that this community, well established in the second half of the 18th century, had already existed many years earlier.

The Jews of Koy Sanjaq (the *Koyne*), more accurately the men among them, were weavers, tailors, dyers, goldsmiths and merchants. In 1848 some of the *Koyne* were engaged in agricultural pursuits (Benjamin 1859: 93). Despite the religious-cultural isolation of the *Koyne*, that led to a condescending and scornful attitude towards them on the part of the local Kurds (cf. Hay 1921: 87), they were generally not persecuted, for they were given the patronage of local rulers by virtue of their contribution to the town's economy. Nevertheless, in 1896 the community's rabbi was murdered by Kurds, and the intervention of the Ottoman authorities against the culprits was followed by great hostility of the local Kurds towards the Jewish