

Semitica Viva

Herausgegeben von Otto Jastrow

Band 43

2008

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Hezy Mutzafi

The Jewish  
Neo-Aramaic Dialect  
of Betanure

(Province of Dihok)

2008

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

## Contents

Preface .....	xii
Symbols and abbreviations .....	xv
0. Introduction .....	1
0.1    Betanure and its Jewish community .....	7
0.2    The Neo-Aramaic of Betanure and its registers .....	8
0.3    The dialectal position of Betanure Neo-Aramaic .....	10
0.4    Research methodology .....	12
Part I – Phonology and morphology .....	13
1. Phonology .....	17
1.1    The consonantal system .....	17
1.1.1    Inventory of consonantal phonemes .....	17
1.1.2    Emphatic consonants .....	19
1.1.3    Historical discussion of the pharyngeals <i>h, ʕ</i> .....	21
1.1.4    Assimilation of consonants .....	23
1.2    The vowel system .....	25
1.2.1    Inventory of vowel phonemes .....	25
1.2.2    Minimal pairs .....	25
1.2.3    Distribution of vowels .....	25
1.2.3.1    General rules .....	25
1.2.3.2    Distribution of <i>i, e, o</i> .....	26
1.2.3.3    Distribution of <i>ū, u</i> .....	28
1.2.3.4    Distribution of <i>ā, a</i> .....	29
1.2.3.5    Distribution of <i>ə</i> .....	32
1.2.4    Apocope of vowels .....	33
1.3    Diphthongs .....	34
1.4    Word stress .....	35
1.4.1    Position of word stress in nominals .....	36
1.4.2    Position of word stress in verbs .....	37
1.4.3    Position of word stress in clitic compounds .....	39

2. Pronouns and related particles .....	40
2.1 Independent Pronouns .....	40
2.2 Pronominal suffixes .....	40
2.3 Possessive-relative particles <i>did</i> and <i>d-</i> .....	41
2.4 Paradigms with possessive suffixes and particles.....	42
2.5 Demonstrative pronouns .....	42
2.6 Interrogative pronouns .....	43
2.7 Reflexive pronoun .....	44
2.8 Reciprocal pronoun .....	44
3. Verbal system .....	45
3.1 Inflectional verbal bases .....	45
3.2 Verbal stems ( <i>binyanim</i> ) and their verbal bases .....	45
3.3 Subject markers of the verbal system .....	48
3.3.1 L-type suffixes .....	49
3.3.2 E-type suffixes .....	49
3.3.3 Copula .....	50
3.3.3.1 Present copula .....	50
3.3.3.2 Deictic present copula .....	52
3.3.3.3 Past copula .....	52
3.4 Imperative (Imp) subject suffixes .....	53
3.5 Tense-Mood-Aspect (TMA) affixes .....	53
3.5.1 Past converter <i>-wa</i> ~ <i>-wā-</i> .....	53
3.5.2 Past prefix <i>qam-</i> .....	53
3.5.3 Indicative prefix <i>k-</i> .....	53
3.5.4 Future prefix <i>b-</i> .....	54
3.6 The Tense-Mood-Aspect (TMA) system .....	54
3.6.1 TMA categories based on P .....	54
3.6.1.1 Preterite: P-L, P-E .....	54
3.6.1.2 Plupreterite: P-wa-L .....	55
3.6.2 TMA categories based on Pt .....	55
3.6.2.1 Dynamic present perfect: Cop Pt .....	56
3.6.2.2 Stative present perfect: Cop Pt ~ Pt-Cop .....	56
3.6.2.3 Deictic present perfect: Deic.Cop Pt .....	57
3.6.2.4 Dynamic past perfect: past Cop Pt .....	58
3.6.2.5 Stative past perfect: past Cop Pt ~ Pt past Cop .....	58
3.6.3 TMA categories based on S .....	59

3.6.3.1 Subjunctive: S-E .....	59
3.6.3.2 Past subjunctive: S-E-wa .....	60
3.6.3.3 Imperfective: (k-)S-E .....	60
3.6.3.4 Past imperfective: (k-)S-E-wa .....	61
3.6.3.5 Future: b-S-E .....	61
3.6.3.6 Past prospective: b-S-E-wa .....	61
3.6.3.7 Imminent future: <i>gəbe</i> S-E .....	61
3.6.3.8 Imminent past: <i>gbewa</i> S-E-wa .....	62
3.6.3.9 Object preterite: <i>qam</i> -S-E-L .....	62
3.6.3.10 Object plupreterite: <i>qam</i> -S-E-wā-L .....	62
3.6.4 TMA categories based on I .....	62
3.6.4.1 Present progressive: Cop (b-)I .....	62
3.6.4.2 Deictic present progressive: Deic.Cop (b-)I .....	63
3.6.4.3 Past progressive: Past Cop (b-)I .....	64
3.6.4.4 Past inchoative: P-L of p-y-š (b-)I .....	64
3.6.5 Imperative: O-Imp .....	64
3.6.6 TMA categories – synopsis .....	65
3.7 Predications with copular forms and the auxiliary <i>h-w-y</i> .....	65
3.8 Passive voice .....	67
3.9 Weak and irregular verbs .....	69
3.9.1 Verba primae ? .....	69
3.9.2 Verba primae <i>y</i> .....	71
3.9.3 Verba mediae <i>w</i> .....	72
3.9.4 Verba mediae <i>y</i> .....	73
3.9.5 Verba tertiae <i>w</i> .....	74
3.9.6 Verba tertiae <i>y</i> .....	75
3.9.7 Verba primae ? mediae <i>w</i> .....	76
3.9.8 Verba primae <i>y</i> tertiae <i>w</i> .....	77
3.9.9 Verba mediae <i>w</i> tertiae <i>y</i> .....	77
3.9.10 Verba mediae <i>y</i> tertiae <i>y</i> .....	77
3.9.11 Verba mediae geminatae .....	77
3.9.12 ?-θ- <i>y</i> ‘to come’ .....	79
3.9.13 ?-z- <i>l</i> ‘to go’ .....	79
3.9.14 <i>b-?-y</i> ‘to want, wish, love’ .....	80
3.9.15 <i>y-δ-?</i> ‘to know’ .....	81
3.9.16 <i>y-h-w-l</i> ‘to give’ .....	81
3.9.17 <i>m-θ-y</i> ‘to bring’ .....	82

3.9.18	<i>mh-m-n</i> 'to believe' .....	82
3.9.19	<i>m-n-x</i> 'to look' .....	82
3.9.20	<i>m-tt-w</i> 'to put' .....	83
3.9.21	<i>m-ṣ-y</i> 'to be able' .....	83
3.9.22	<i>?-r-q</i> 'to run; flee' .....	83
3.9.23	<i>h-w-y</i> 'to be; to be born' .....	84
3.10	Negation of verbs .....	84
3.11	Verbs with object affixes .....	85
3.11.1	Object affixes – inventory .....	85
3.11.2	Inflections with object affixes .....	85
3.11.2.1	Inflections of P with E object affixes .....	85
3.11.2.2	Inflections of P, S, O with L object affixes .....	86
3.11.2.3	Inflections of Pt and I with LL object affixes .....	87
3.12	Verboids .....	88
3.12.1	<i>ṣad-</i> 'to fear' .....	88
3.12.2	<i>ṭāwe-</i> 'to be worth, to cost' .....	88
3.12.3	<i>ṣājəb- ~ ?ājəb-</i> 'to wish, like' .....	88
3.12.4	<i>bāsəm- ~ basmā-</i> 'to enjoy, to be pleased' .....	89
3.12.5	<i>gəbe ~ gbe</i> 'to be necessary' .....	89
3.12.6	<i>māle</i> 'enough' .....	89
3.12.7	Existential verboid .....	89
3.12.8	<i>?ib-</i> 'there is in it; to be able' .....	90
4.	Nouns .....	91
4.1	General description .....	91
4.2	Annexation of nouns .....	92
4.3	Plural formation .....	93
4.3.1	Plural forms ending in <i>-e</i> .....	93
4.3.2	Plural forms ending in <i>-āne, -yāne</i> .....	95
4.3.3	Plural forms ending in <i>-āhe</i> .....	96
4.3.4	Plural forms ending in <i>-āye</i> .....	96
4.3.5	Plural forms ending in <i>-āḥa</i> .....	96
4.3.6	Plural forms ending in <i>-yāḥa</i> .....	98
4.3.7	Plural forms ending in <i>-wāḥa</i> .....	99
4.3.8	Plural forms ending in <i>-awāḥa</i> .....	100
4.3.9	Plural with reduplication of final consonant .....	101
4.3.10	Plural forms ending in <i>-im, -ime</i> .....	102

4.3.11	Plural forms ending in <i>-ine</i> .....	103
4.3.12	Irregular plural forms .....	103
4.3.13	Pluralia tantum .....	104
5.	Adjectives .....	105
5.1	Adjectives inflected for gender and number .....	105
5.1.1	Inflected native and adapted adjectives .....	105
5.1.2	Inflected foreign adjectives .....	107
5.2	Uninflected adjectives .....	108
6.	Derivational suffixes .....	109
6.1	Diminutive suffixes .....	109
6.2	Suffix <i>-əθ ~ -əθki</i> indicating languages .....	110
6.3	Abstract suffix <i>-ūḥa</i> .....	110
6.4	The suffix <i>-āna</i> .....	111
6.5	Gentilic ('nisbah') suffixes <i>-āya, -nāya</i> .....	112
7.	Numerals .....	114
7.1	Cardinals .....	114
7.2	Cardinals with affixes .....	116
7.3	Ordinals .....	117
7.4	Days of the week .....	117
8.	Particles .....	118
8.1	Adverbs .....	118
8.2	Prepositions .....	120
8.3	Conjunctions .....	128
Part II – Texts	.....	131
I	The district of Barwari and its fauna and flora .....	132
II	The village of Betanure and its Jewish community .....	138
III	Life in Betanure during the four seasons .....	140
IV	Masonry and house maintenance .....	146
V	Agriculture .....	148
VI	Handicrafts .....	156
VII	Other occupations .....	160
VIII	Making fire .....	164
IX	Treating snake-bite, hornet-stings and diseases .....	166
X	Games .....	168

XI	Jewish holidays .....	170
XII	From marriage to rearing children .....	190
XIII	Cryptic jargon, derisive words and euphemisms.....	220
XIV	Tales .....	224
XIV.1	The battle for the citadel of Betanure .....	224
XIV.2	The synagogue of Prophet Elijah in Betanure .....	228
XIV.3	The martyrdom of Rabbi David .....	234
XIV.4	The wise Jew who saved the Christians .....	238
XIV.5	From Adam and Eve to Noah and the ark .....	240
XIV.6	Abraham .....	244
XIV.7	King Solomon and Asmodeus .....	252
XIV.8	The wise bird .....	258
XIV.9	A Kurdistani folktale: The voyage of two merchants .....	260
XV	Supernatural beings .....	270
XVI	Short amusing stories .....	278
Part III – Glossary .....		325
Bibliography .....		403

## Preface

The dialect of the Jewish village of Betanure in northern Iraq is among the most gravely endangered varieties of Aramaic spoken at the present time. One of the most archaizing Jewish Neo-Aramaic varieties and a conservative variety within NENA as a whole, the dialect was spoken in the late 1940s by a tiny community of merely seventeen large families. Since the immigration of this community in its entirety to Israel in 1951 the number of the dialect's speakers has been gradually decreasing. This is due to the integration of their descendants into Hebrew-speaking Israeli society, as is the case with Jewish Neo-Aramaic in general. Among the Betanure-born people themselves, moreover, the dialect has been eroded through the impact of Israeli Hebrew and the intrusion of extraneous features from other Jewish Neo-Aramaic varieties to which it was exposed in Israel, most notably the Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Zakho.

Today there are at most three dozen speakers of the dialect. The majority of these exhibit a large proportion of alien influences in their speech. The only active and fully competent speakers of the Neo-Aramaic of Betanure are in their seventies and eighties. Thus, the dialect shall soon meet its ineluctable extinction and share the fate that has already befallen several other modern Aramaic idioms, namely Mlaḥsô, Jewish Bəjil (near <sup>c</sup>Aqra, Iraq), Jewish Shukho (Barwari, Iraq), Jewish Gzira (Cizre, Turkey) and Jewish Gawar (Yüksekova, Turkey).

The precarious condition and extreme rarity of the Neo-Aramaic of Betanure, coupled with the lack of both scholarly data on the dialect and traditional literature written in it, render the documentation of its linguistic profile one of the most urgent tasks in Neo-Aramaic dialectological research. Indeed, had I started my fieldwork on the dialect today rather than several years ago, it would have been impossible to assemble a text-corpus such as the one offered in this volume and to use it as a reliable data-base for the grammatical description and the glossary. An investigation of the dialect now for the first time would have been based on much less proficient speakers than the last superb speaker of the dialect, Mr. Mordechai Saidof, who died three years ago, and my second best informant, Mr. Raḥamim Khudeda, who is now hardly available due to deteriorating health. All remaining speakers display a rather poor competence as story-tellers, and their idiolects are all considerably contaminated with non-Betanure words and grammatical traits.

Beyond the fact that the present work is a description of a hitherto unknown Neo-Aramaic variety, it is my hope that the introduction, and especially the extensive and diversified text-corpus, will serve as a memorial to an Aramaic-speaking Jewish community whose history, at least four hundred years old, ended abruptly fifty six years ago, and to a traditional way of life, folklore and oral literature that are no longer in existence.

The preparation and publication of this volume was made possible by grants from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and the School of Jewish Studies at Tel Aviv University. Both deserve much gratitude for their generous support.

I am profoundly grateful to my informants - the late Mr. Mordechai Saidof; Mr. Raḥamim Khudeda, Mrs. Farḥa Refael, Mr. Raḥamim Shmuel and Mr. Avraham Eliyahu - for their cooperation and warm hospitality.

Special thanks are due to Simon Hopkins and to Samuel Ethan Fox for offering me very constructive comments and most valuable suggestions on an earlier version of my work. In addition, I am indebted to a number of other linguists with whom I discussed various topics related to this work: Steven Fassberg, Geoffrey Khan, Matthew Morgenstern, Yona Sabar and Shabo Talay. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Otto Jastrow, the editor of the *Semitica Viva* series and the author of model descriptions of unknown and hardly investigated Neo-Aramaic varieties, for accepting this book for publication.

Hezy Mutzafi, Tel Aviv University,  
May 2007

## Symbols and abbreviations

### Symbols:

>	developed into diachronically
<	developed from diachronically
→	developed into synchronically; in the glossary: see entry
←	developed from synchronically
#	word boundary
[ ]	phonetic transcription; complementary word, form, letter
[number]	number of section in the texts, following a textual example
/ /	phonemic transcription
{HM...}	question to informant asked by author (in the texts)
	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:

A	verbal stem A (§3.2)
<sup>A...A</sup> (superscript)	word or phrase from the Jewish Neo-Aramaic of <sup>c</sup> Amadiyya
acc.	according; accusative
act.	active
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
Akk.	Akkadian
<sup>c</sup> Amad.	Jewish Neo-Aramaic of <sup>c</sup> Amadiyya, Iraq
anal.	analogy
<sup>c</sup> Ank.	<sup>c</sup> Ankawa Christian Neo-Aramaic, Iraq
Ar.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
Armen.	Armenian