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Studies in the syntax of Targum Jonathan to Samuel

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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of the position of the Aramaic of TO and TJ within the broader spectrum of Aramaic has been a moot point for decades. Part of the problem has been that for a long time the question of the origin and development of TO and TJ was inextricably connected to ideological notions that had but little to do with scientific arguments. Regarding the linguistic aspect specifically, for a time the question of the *language* of TO and TJ was abundantly discussed without linguistic arguments being actually brought to bear on the issue: depending on one's personal view on the matter, TO and TJ were Western or Eastern in origin, *ergo* the Aramaic dialect in which they had been written had to be of the Western or Eastern type.

Obviously, the reasoning should have been the other way round. Aside from Nöldeke and Dalman, the first scholar in the 20th century to understand the importance of linguistic arguments in the debate was E.Y Kutscher. His work has been seminal in that turnaround, and was continued in the years that followed by other scholars such as M. Kaddari, J. Greenfield, A. Tal, E.M. Cook and C. Müller-Kessler.

So far, however, the linguistic discussion on the position of the Aramaic of TO and TJ has in the main taken place at the levels of phonology, orthography, morphology and lexicography. Syntactic matters have been mostly omitted from the debate, and this very lacuna lies at the origin of the present study.

Within the present study, the question of the nature of the Aramaic of TJ has been tackled from the angle of syntax and morphosyntax. Five main topics have been addressed: the expression of determination (chap. 1), the morphosyntax of the numerals (chap. 2), the distribution of the genitive constructions (chap. 3), the use of the conjugations (chap. 4) and word-ordering patterns (chap. 5). For each of these topics the text of TJS has been subjected to a close scrutiny and the results of the investigation exposed as thoroughly and methodically as possible. Subsequently, these five topics have been addressed from a

diachronic/comparative perspective, the findings of TJS being confronted (on the basis of the work of other scholars) with what is known at present of the other classical Aramaic idioms, in an attempt to reach preliminary conclusions as to how the Aramaic of TJS relates to, and is positioned among, the other Aramaic dialects.

At the close of this study, an attempt must be made to bring these five conclusions together and offer, as far as possible, a unified account of what a study of the syntax of TJS can tell us about the position of the Aramaic of TJ within the broader context of Aramaic.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF THE ARAMAIC OF TARGUM JONATHAN TO SAMUEL

2.1 SYNTACTIC FEATURES RELEVANT TO THE CLASSIFICATION

On the whole, the points of syntax that prove most significant for the positioning of the Aramaic of TJS are the following:

1. **Determination.** Determination in TJS rests upon a hybrid system: one subsystem in which the distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. is carefully observed, and one subsystem in which it is largely dropped for the benefit of the st.emph.

We have seen that the former determination subsystem of TJS reflects the historical distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. prevalent in the oldest known stages of Aramaic and preserved by the Western LA dialects. In that respect, it stands in sharp contrast to Eastern LA practices (1a). In contrast, we have also noted that by its basic principle as well as by its limitations the latter subsystem is strongly reminiscent of, not to say virtually identical with, Eastern LA (1b).

2. **Genitive:** the construct relation is, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the genitive construction by default.

In this, the Aramaic of TJS stands in sharp contrast to the LA

dialects, in which the *d*-relation has largely become the standard construction and the construct relation displays the tendency to be confined to specific contexts. In this regard, TJS comes closest to the Aramaic of Daniel, Palmyrene, Nabatean and, even more remarkably, to QA, as suggested by a preliminary study, both quantitative and qualitative, of the genitive in GenApoc.

3. **Genitive:** the proleptic *d*-relation is but a marginal phenomenon.

In TJS, the proleptic *d*-relation is featured in less than 1.5% of all genitive constructions. In this, the Aramaic of TJS differs markedly from both IA and the LA dialects, which show ample use of the proleptic *d*-relation in cases in which the bare *d*-relation is the rule in TJS, e.g. in various types of genitive constructions involving human B-terms. Again, in this respect TJS comes close to QA.

4. **Numerals:** when anteposed, the numerals higher than ‘one’ are in the st.abs.

When a numeral is anteposed to the noun it modifies, TJS does not normally connect numeral and noun by a construct relation (st.cst. of the numeral), but rather by an appositional relation (st.abs. of the numeral). In that respect, the Aramaic of TJS differs from the Western LA dialects, and comes closest to BA (and possibly also Palmyrene) usage.

5. **Verb:** *yiqtol* is the standard form for the expression of posteriority.

The LA dialects, particularly in the East, bear witness to the loss of *yiqtol*’s force as an expression of the future (*qātel* having largely taken over that function) and to the fact that, depending on the individual dialects, *yiqtol* is becoming (or has already become) confined to the expression of modal nuances. In contrast, in the Aramaic of TJS *yiqtol* is still the standard form for the expression of posteriority. In this respect, TJS differs markedly from the Eastern LA dialects — crucially from JBA — and agrees with the norm set by OA and maintained as a pan-Aramaic feature until the MA period. Notwithstanding, TJS also displays the use of *qātel* for the expression of the future, but the linguistic evidence, when considered against the backdrop of the broader context of

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Aramaic, suggests that this use of *qātel* for the future is still at an embryonic stage. In these two respects — standard use of *yiqtol* and incipient use of *qātel* for the future — the Aramaic of TJS comes closest to BA and QA.

6. **Verb:** TJS does not make a distinction between long and short *yiqtol*.

In its early documented stages, Aramaic made a distinction between a long and a short form of *yiqtol*. A major use of the short form was the expression of volitive modality ('jussive'). The distinction between the two forms disappeared during the MA period: it is still known in BA and QA, but has already vanished from Palmyrene and Nabatean, and is no longer to be found in the LA dialects. In this respect, TJS sides with the latter group of dialects, inasmuch as it has only one *yiqtol* form, used for the expression of posteriority and all types of modality.

7. **Verb:** *qātel* is the usual form for performative utterances.

In the Aramaic of TJS, for performative utterances *qatal* is used only when the Vorlage features *qatal*, otherwise *qātel* is employed. In this regard, TJS differs markedly from IA, where *qatal* is still the usual form, and presents us with a linguistic stage slightly more advanced than BA, where *qatal* and *qātel* are found side by side. In this regard, TJS sides with QA and the LA dialects, where *qātel* has become the usual form.

8. **Word order:** the basic functional pattern of the verbal clause in TJS does not evince the versatility typical of Eastern Late Aramaic.

As we have seen, our discussion of the word order of the verbal clause in TJS is bound to remain largely inconclusive, as the word-ordering patterns turn out to be prominently conditioned by the Vorlage. Be that as it may, the basic functional pattern of the verbal clause in TJS is essentially VSO^dOP; in certain contexts a SV pattern seems to have been the rule. Significantly, however, the high flexibility of the word-ordering patterns in the Eastern LA dialects, which earned them their reputation as 'free word order languages', is not to be found in the investigated passages, whether they parallel the Vorlage or deviate from it.

Finally, for a number of reasons two other syntactic aspects have proven less significant than the above with reference to the positioning of the Aramaic of TJS:

9. **Verb:** use of periphrastic constructions with ܐܝܬܐ

The use of periphrastics in TJS precludes any definite conclusions. Indeed, if such constructions are slightly more frequent in TJS than in the Vorlage, the fact remains that they are altogether rather scarce in TJS. This overall infrequency of use not only precludes any definite statement on the functional range of these constructions (beyond some general statement as to their ability to highlight the semantic durativity/iterativity of the SoAs concerned), but also it cannot as such be used as an argument to categorize the language of TJ, inasmuch as it can plausibly be ascribed to a faithfulness to the Vorlage. The only observation that can be made is that periphrastics are not as widely used in TJS than in a LA corpus such as Neofiti.

10. **Numerals:** relative positioning of the numerals and head nouns.

The main feature of the morphosyntax of the numerals that really displays variation throughout Aramaic is the positioning of the numeral relative to the head noun. Unfortunately, with regard to TJS this question has turned out to be largely inconclusive due to TJS' extensive dependence on the Vorlage in matters of word order. The fact that in a few instances TJS inserts a numeral absent from the Vorlage and, when it does, consistently postposes 'one' and preposes numerals higher than 'one', is certainly noteworthy. But as such the evidence cannot be considered conclusive, inasmuch as it then faithfully reflects the patterns at work elsewhere in the Vorlage of Samuel. A BH influence is therefore not out of the question.

2.2 FINAL DISCUSSION

As the above shows, the various syntactic features of the Aramaic dialect of TJS investigated in this study are invariably characteristic for the MA and LA (especially Eastern LA) periods. Significantly, positing for TJ a linguistic setting framed by the Middle and LA periods tallies with what is currently assumed of the history and development of that corpus. Most importantly, however, from among the MA and the (Eastern) LA periods these syntactic features point overwhelmingly towards the **Middle Aramaic** period. To borrow, and adapt freely, Driver's now famous dictum with reference to the positioning of the Aramaic of Daniel,¹ it may be stated that:

- Feature 1a *excludes* an Eastern LA setting;
- Feature 8 *resists* an Eastern LA setting;
- Features 2, 3 and 5 *demand* a MA setting;
- Feature 4 *supports* a MA setting;
- Features 6, 7 and 9 *permit* a MA setting.

In contrast, only 1b *demands* a LA setting, more specifically of the Eastern type. Provided the discussion above has any legitimacy, we are therefore left with a basically MA dialect with one distinctly Eastern Aramaic feature. Obviously, an attempt must be made to account for that peculiar state of affairs. In the final analysis, it is my conviction that the interrelation between the two systems of determination may point towards a solution.

That the Aramaic of TJ should be characterized by typical Eastern Aramaic features should come as no surprise. It is an established fact that our text received its ultimate form in Babylonia, the territorial entity of Eastern Aramaic, and nowadays most scholars agree that this happened around the 4th century C.E., i.e. towards the beginning of the LA period. The notion that the second determination system of TJS has its roots in Eastern LA practices is therefore highly plausible, and finds further support in the fact that, as seen above, it shares with well-known Eastern LA dialects such as Syriac and Mandaic not only the same basic principle, but also some of its limitations.²

¹ Driver (1893: 476).

² Goshen-Gottstein's contention that 'the analysis of TO itself, with regard to its morphology, syntax, and even its phonology, yields desperately few telltale signs

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The existence of the first determination system in the Aramaic of TJS, however, is of much deeper significance for this study. Indeed, respect for the distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. indisputably points outside the Eastern LA area and period, which opens the way to a wide array of speculations. Taken on its own, however, this point cannot be taken as a decisive argument in favour of a Western provenance for TJ. Indeed, it is also a widely accepted view that the first redactional stages of TJ (i.e. ‘proto-TJ’) are likely to have taken place before the advent of the LA period,³ i.e. at a time when the classical distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. had possibly not collapsed yet in the East. In theory at least, the observance of the distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. in TJ could therefore have been a continuation of MA usage, irrespective of dialectal distinctions between East and West, and the view that the whole redactional process of TJ took place in Babylonia would not be weakened in the least.

However, if the Babylonian hypothesis is to be maintained certain essential aspects remain puzzling:

1. Even if the possible retention of the distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. in the Eastern MA dialects cannot be excluded, it can on no account be taken for granted. The grammatical features usually considered typical of the Eastern LA dialects, among which the loss of the determinative force of the st.emph. marker, are the product of a long and complex development, which culminates in the LA period but can be traced back long before its advent.⁴ As a result, any claim that the classical distinction was actually retained in the East during the MA period is unwarranted and should be treated with the utmost caution.
2. Supposing that the distinction was indeed retained, if TJ was entirely Eastern in provenance, originating in the MA period in Babylonia and enjoying there an uninterrupted growth over the years in the hands of subsequent generations of scholars until its final redaction in the LA period, one would expect the determination system of the Aramaic in which it was composed to be much more consonant with the largely common basis shared by the other

of Eastern Aramaic linguistic influence’ (1978: 178) may very well be correct, but with the second subsystem of determination in TJS we can be confident that we have at least one such ‘telltale sign’.

³ Fitzmyer (2004: 31, n. 98) is a prominent exception.

⁴ Cf. Kutscher (1970a: 361ff.); Beyer (1984: 97-98).

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Eastern LA dialects.⁵ Critically, if the Aramaic of TJ was a native Eastern Aramaic idiom, developed continuously from the Eastern variety of IA and MA along lines similar to the other Eastern LA dialects,⁶ one would not expect such a *compartmentation* in its determination system, plural nouns maintaining to the letter the classical usage so unnatural for Eastern Aramaic whereas singular nouns largely drop it to go their own (Eastern) way. Quite on the contrary, such a blind split in the determination system of TJS is strongly suggestive of a *non-natural* process. The presence, side by side within one and the same dialect, but each on its own territory, of two linguistic systems whose notional and referential frameworks are so widely divergent, can hardly be the product of a natural diachronic evolution. It is better explained by entertaining the possibility of an *artificial amalgamation* of these two systems.⁷

In other words, what we observe in the working of determination in TJS allows us to presuppose the superposition of (at least) two distinct redactional layers in the composition of TJ, which in turn points towards the existence of (at least) two distinct stages in its historical development: (1) an initial redactional process at the hands of scribes for whom the distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. was a fully active grammatical

⁵ Significantly, this is also true of other points of syntax such as 2, 3, 5, with reference to which TJ and Eastern Aramaic are radically different (which, incidentally, echoes Cook's statement that the Aramaic of TO/TJ and JBA 'are not much like' one another, cf. Cook 1994: 143). Such far-reaching divergences from Eastern LA idioms would be difficult to explain, were one to assume the emergence and continuous development of TO and TJ on Babylonian soil.

⁶ The difference between literary and spoken idiom is immaterial here. Literary idioms also evolve over time, and even though their evolution cannot properly be termed 'organic', it is no less subject than that of spoken idioms to the homogeneity, coherence and continuity of the linguistic environment.

⁷ Consequently, in my opinion Kaddari's view that the presence of the two determination systems in the Aramaic of TO should be considered the result of a natural linguistic development inherent to Western Aramaic rather than the product of some Eastern influence (cf. D:1.2) can no longer be maintained. In addition, Kaddari's views raise another problem. If the state of affairs witnessed in the Aramaic of TO as regards determination should be seen as an immanent development within Western Aramaic (from a type of Aramaic in which the historical distinction between the status was respected to a type of Aramaic in which it was lost), one would be entitled to wonder what has become of this immanent development in Western Aramaic, seeing that the later Western Aramaic idioms known to us (JPA, CPA and SA) unanimously retain the correct use of determination, and that this retention is precisely one of the hallmarks of Western LA (for a similar argument, cf. Cook 1986a: 171).

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device, and (2) a revision process in the LA period at the hands of scribes native to the Eastern Aramaic area, for whom this distinction was not a living linguistic reality any more and the *st.emph.* had become the primary form of the noun. In the course of revising TJ the scribes of the second generation would then have updated the text of TJ not only in content, but also in form. Speaking of determination specifically, their revision would have led them to adapt partly the expression of the determination of singular nouns according to their own understanding thereof. Possible explanations of this state of affairs have been discussed above (D:5.3), but on the whole it must be admitted that the reasons why only certain aspects of the determination system would have undergone revision are not clear.

Attributing the second redactional stage to scribes native to the Eastern Aramaic area in the LA period is a fair assumption, considering our current understanding of the complicated history of the transmission of TJ. Beyond that point, however, we are no longer on safe ground. Nonetheless, although one cannot afford to be dogmatic in this area, it must be emphasized that determination in TJS is strongly suggestive of a non-Babylonian provenance for our text. Indeed, the views expounded above make the Babylonian hypothesis unlikely, unless one is prepared and willing to subscribe to the two views (1) that the classical distinction between *st.emph.* and *st.abs.* was a fully active and exploited grammatical device in the Eastern dialects of the MA period; and (2) that a first version of TJ was composed in the Babylonian Rabbinic Academies towards the turn of the Christian Era in an (as yet hypothetical) Eastern MA dialect in which the distinction between *st.emph.* and *st.abs.* was observed, that it disappeared from the literary and religious scene entirely for several centuries, and that it eventually reappeared in the 3rd or 4th century and was submitted to large-scale revision and adaptation to the cultural and linguistic customs of the time. In contrast, an origin outside the Eastern LA area and period has much to commend itself as an alternative, for both linguistic and extra-linguistic reasons.⁸ On the one hand, the characteristic retention of the classical distinction between *st.emph.* and *st.abs.* in the MA (and Western LA) dialects provides a more plausible explanation for the presence of the first determination system in the Aramaic of TJS than the Babylonian hypothesis does. On the other hand, on purely geographic grounds an origin outside Babylonia

⁸ Cf. Goshen-Gottstein (1978) for a similar conclusion, though Goshen-Gottstein went one step further in insisting that this non-Babylonian origin was actually Palestinian.

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offers a rational explanation, i.e. a historical background, for the existence of the two putative redactional stages of TJ, their amalgamation and the resulting linguistic heterogeneity in the determination system of TJ.

The discussion above can be condensed into the two following points:

1. The expression of determination in TJ makes a Babylonian provenance unlikely.⁹
2. Significant aspects of the syntax of TJ (e.g. 2, 3, 5) are radically different from the Eastern LA dialects, and overwhelmingly point towards the MA period. More specifically, QA would appear to be TJ's closest relative.

Combining these two conclusions, with regard to the provenance of TJ **the present study is suggestive of a non-Babylonian setting in the Middle Aramaic period.**

Unfortunately, however, this is as far as the linguistic evidence allows us to go. Indeed, as Goshen-Gottstein and Cook suggested, the idea of a standardized type of Aramaic, by definition unmarked for dialectal features, stultifies all attempts to identify the place of origin of TJ. It bears repeating that the notions of Official Aramaic and SLA/*koine* led the scholars of respectively the second period and the third period of classifying the language of TO/TJ to a dead end. On the other hand, we have seen that the very notion of a *koine* for the MA period has been challenged. At this critical juncture, we are left with two courses:

⁹ Turning back for a moment to Müller-Kessler's latest assumptions on the origin and language of TO and TJ (Müller-Kessler 2001), it should be obvious by now that the compartmentation witnessed within the determination system of TJS may be *the* major problem connected to her otherwise interesting notion of SLBA and the related view that TO and TJ were entirely composed in Babylonia. If TO and TJ were really entirely Babylonian creations, one would be hard pressed to explain why SLBA would correctly observe the historical distinction between st.emph. and st.abs. in the plural and would apply entirely different principles in the singular. As I have suggested above, the exact nature of the relation between the Aramaic of TO/TJ and that of some of the magic bowls is as yet in need of clarification. However, as such the compartmentation in the determination system of TO and TJ advocated in this study does not necessarily invalidate Müller-Kessler's views. An alternative model, which would allow us to account for both the views expounded in the present study and Müller-Kessler's claims, might posit that TO and TJ were originally composed outside Babylonia and at a later stage transferred to, and revised in Babylonia (with the resulting compartmentation in their determination system), where they enjoyed such a prestige that their language, slightly adapted to local practices in the course of time (SLBA), was *subsequently* employed for the magic bowls referred to by Müller-Kessler.

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1. Hold on to the notion of an Aramaic *koine* for the MA period, as advocated by Greenfield and Tal. In that eventuality we must conclude, after the fashion of Tal, that TJ was composed in a dialectally unmarked type of Aramaic, to which QA also belonged. But as Goshen-Gottstein and Cook have convincingly argued, by the very nature of such a *koine* we are *de facto* forced to give up any hope of ever pinpointing the geographic provenance of TJ on linguistic grounds.
2. Drop the idea of a *koine* and posit the existence of dialect diversity in the MA period, as advocated by Cook. In such a case, we may endeavour to be more specific regarding the geographic provenance of TJ. The tight linguistic affinity between TJ and QA, highlighted by the linguistic discrepancies between TJ and Syriac, which according to some authorities occupies a somewhat middle position between Western and Eastern Aramaic, would then plead for an ultimately Western, i.e. Palestinian *Heimat* for TJ.

Be that as it may, TJ and QA differ on one important point: the fact that QA still has the ‘short imperfect’, whereas the Aramaic of TJS has lost it, its functionalities being now assumed by *yiqtol*. We have also seen that this feature is shared by other MA dialects such as Palmyrene and Nabatean. Another difference between the Aramaic of TJS and QA, as exemplified by GenApoc, is the fact that in the latter the construct relation, which is also the genitive construction by default, is even a little more frequent than in TJS. These two aspects — the non-existence of a ‘short imperfect’ and a more ample use of the *d*-relation in TJS — may suggest a linguistic stage within the development of Aramaic slightly more advanced than QA. Again, this makes plausible the assumption, made by Kutscher and echoed by others such as Greenfield, Tal and Goshen-Gottstein, of an ultimate origin of TJ in the latter first or early second century CE. To conclude, it is interesting to observe that evidence derived from the syntax and morphosyntax of TJ corroborates other scholars’ diagnosis established on the basis of orthographical/phonological, morphological and lexicographical arguments.