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## Direct Object in Old Aramaic (10<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century BC)

Giulia Francesca Grassi

Several members of various linguistic departments of the University of Marburg (Germany) are currently involved in a three-year project entitled *Exploring fundamental linguistic categories (Fundierung linguistischer Basiskategorien)*<sup>1</sup>, which aims to empirically validate the basic categories that operate both in the production and processing of individual signs in the spoken language (i.e. the phonological word) and the linking of signs so that complex meaning is created (i.e. the syntax/semantic interface).

Within the latter section is included a subproject on case syncretism (*Kasussynkretistische Prozesse in der Langzeitdiachronie / Case-syncretistic Processes in long-term diachrony*), the main research question of which is how the roles of actor and undergoer are assigned when all morphological means of distinguishing them (mainly, case marking) are lost. The working hypothesis is that, after the collapse of the case system, the identification of the roles must still be possible, and based on fundamental, non-morphological parameters. In this part of the project German dialects, Middle Welsh, Modern Irish, Hittite, and Aramaic are investigated.

The group of scholars working on the subproject has developed a theoretical concept (Kasper 2012-) which is the basis for an online database facilitating the collection of the linguistic data. The database

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<sup>1</sup> The project is carried out with the financial support of the Hessian Ministry for Science and Arts through the LOEWE (Landes-Offensive zur Entwicklung Wissenschaftlich-ökonomischer Exzellenz) programme. I would like to express my gratitude to all the people involved in the conception, implementation and improvement of the database, particularly to Magnus Breder Birkenes, Felix Esser, Sara Hayden, Axel Harlos, Mícheál Hoyne, Simon Kasper, Frank Nagel, Julia Schüler, and Paul Widmer. I would also like to sincerely thank Mícheál Hoyne for reading and commenting on the manuscript.

allows the collection of relevant morphosyntactic and semantic data with regard to a nominal unit in a clause. The online database mirrors these data by providing a sequence of input screens allowing a step-by-step data collection for all the languages involved in the project. Eventually, the data collected in this way should allow a comparison between the different languages investigated and their morphosyntactic properties with regard to the aims of the project.

The database contains the following information, in the following order, from the largest to the smallest unit:

*Text*

Edition

Name

Language

Dialect

Date

Genre

The text is then divided into sentences.

*Sentence*

The sentence is subsequently divided into clauses.

*Clause(s)*

Type (independent, dependent)

Completeness/Pro-drop

Mode (declarative, interrogative, imperative)

Polarity

Diathese

The clause is divided into phrases.

*Phrase*

## Syntactic Function

Proto Roles (Proto Agens > Proto Patiens > Proto Rezipient > Proto Locational)<sup>2</sup>

Causal structure (causer > instrument (causer and caused) > symmetric cause/ not affected > information > positively affected > negatively affected > positively affected with substance change > negatively affected with substance change)<sup>3</sup>

Discourse Pragmatic Scale (+/- Speech Act Participant)<sup>4</sup>

Scale semantic (“Animacy hierarchy”; self > kin/name > human > animate > inanimate > location > abstract > mass)<sup>5</sup>

Structural information scale (“Accessibility hierarchy”; indefinite description > full name + modifier > full name > long definite description > short definite description > last name > first name > distal demonstrative pronoun + modifier > proximate demonstrative pronoun + modifier > distal demonstrative pronoun > proximate demonstrative pronoun > stressed pronoun > unstressed pronoun > clitic pronoun > verbal person > zero)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Thematic roles based primarily on Dowty 1991 and Primus 1999 (esp. pp. 32-60). These Proto-Roles include the following traditional roles:

Proto Agens: Agent, Causer, Effector, Instrument

Proto Recipients: Recipient, Beneficient, Maleficient, Possessor, Cognizer, Perceiver, Emoter, Co-Agent

Proto Patiens: Theme, Patient, Stimulus, Information, Co-Cognizer, Co-Perceiver, Co-Emoter

Proto Locational: Extent, Source, Location, Goal, Duration

<sup>3</sup> Causal structure based primarily on Talmy 2000 and Langacker 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Based on De Lancey 1981. This is actually a person hierarchy, in which first and second person outrank third person.

<sup>5</sup> Based on Silverstein 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Based on Ariel 1988, 1991 and 2008 (esp. p. 44): “Each referring expression on the marking scale indicates a relative degree of memory activation for the address-

Scale specificity (individuate > not individuate and countable > not individuate and not countable)

Category (proper name, personal pronoun, clitic pronoun etc.)

Agreement

Alignment

Verb gloss

The phrase is divided into words

*Word*

Type

Finite verb

Non finite verb

Conjugation (Stem)

Mood

Tense

Voice

Person

Number

Gender

Definiteness

Form (free, clitic)

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see is to retrieve. Top expressions are ones used to indicate lower degrees of activation (where the representations are deemed harder for the addressee to retrieve), whereas bottom forms are used when relatively high degrees of activations are involved (where the representations are deemed easier for the addressee to retrieve"). In contrast to Ariel, "indefinite description" is included in our scale, and it is, of course, the least accessible referring expression.

## Type of prepositions/particles

Unlike the majority of ancient Semitic languages (and the Indo-European ones), Aramaic had already lost its cases in the most ancient phases of its attestation, substituting a system based on cases with a system based on prepositions. Thus, with the exception of the rarely attested direct object marker (which will be dealt with later in this paper), nominal subject and nominal direct object are formally indistinguishable, because none of them is preceded by an adposition, at least in Old Aramaic.<sup>7</sup> However, a formal distinction is still visible in personal pronouns.

Such a situation may generate structurally ambiguous clauses, in which the verbal form may potentially agree not only with the subject, but with the direct object as well.<sup>8</sup> In other words, structurally ambiguous clauses are clauses in which there are no formal means to determine the syntactic functions and the semantic roles, while unambiguous clauses are clauses in which the form of the subject and/or of the direct object and/or of the verb clarifies the syntactic functions and the semantic roles.

Within the context of this research project, the main questions which this fact prompts are: how high the percentage of the ambiguous clau-

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<sup>7</sup> Another case of syncretism in Aramaic, which is also investigated in the project, is the partial merger of the marking of direct and indirect object through the use of preposition *l-*. Originally the marking of indirect object, the preposition *l-* may be prefixed to the direct object from Imperial Aramaic onwards (and it is thus not recorded in Old Aramaic). On *l-* in Imperial Aramaic, see Folmer 1995, pp. 340-371 and Kalinin, Loesov 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Many verbal forms are homographic, because the writing system rarely marks the vowels. For example, *ktbt* could be the first person singular, the second person masculine singular and the third person feminine singular of the perfect of *ktb*, “to write”; however, the vowels in these words, if they were written, would be different. Thus, a form like *ktbt* is not considered ambiguous, if it is a first/second person singular of the perfect, and the direct object is a third person singular, but only when both the subject and the direct object are third person feminine singular.

ses is, and what strategies are employed in order to distinguish the different semantic roles and syntactic functions in ambiguous clauses.

The first step is to examine the percentage of the ambiguous clauses, both in the entire *corpus*, and in the three subgroups related to the word order, namely  $S < O$  (subject before direct object),  $O < S$  (direct object before subject), and  $S$  and/or  $O = \emptyset$  (where  $S$  and/or  $O$  is dropped). The *corpus* consists of the main Old Aramaic inscriptions (including Samalian)<sup>9</sup>, with the exception, because of its very bad state of preservation, of Deir Alla. Moreover, some parts of other inscriptions are excluded because of difficulties to do with reading or interpreting them.

Clauses	all	$S < O$	$O < S$	S and/or $O = \emptyset$	Percentage $O < S$	Percentage $S/O = \emptyset$
All	173	40	14	119	8%	69%
Structurally unambiguous	133	27	13	93	10%	70%
Structurally ambiguous	40	13	1	26	3%	65%
Percentage structurally ambiguous	23%	33%	7%	22%		

In our *corpus*, 173 clauses contain a direct object, and in 119 of them (69%) we cannot speak of “word order” per se, because the subject (109/119: 92%) and more rarely the direct object (6/119: 5%) or the subject *and* the direct object (4/119: 3%) are not expressed (that means that the subject is not expressed in 113/173 clauses: 65%). Quite

<sup>9</sup> The inscriptions are Tell Fekherye, Sefire, Hazael (Samos), Zakkur, Tel Dan, Bukān, Kilamuwa 2, Panamuwa to Hadad (Hdd), Barrākib to Panamuwa (Pnm), Katumuwa, Barrākib (“Bauinschrift”).

remarkably, the percentage of the clauses with a dropped subject or direct object is not significantly different in structurally ambiguous and structurally unambiguous clauses, being only slightly higher in the latter (65% versus 70%). Thus, the omission of the overt subject does not seem to correlate with the ambiguity of the verbal form: the subject can be understood both in structurally ambiguous and unambiguous clauses.

There are 54 clauses in which word order is clear: 40 S < O and 14 O < S. More precisely (the presence of the indirect object or other complements is not taken into account), the situation can be represented as follows:

S < O < V: 3  
 S < V < O: 21  
 V < S < O: 16  
 V < O < S: 11  
 O < V < S: 3  
 O < S < V: Ø

These numbers show a preference for verb-initial constructions, which make up half of the clauses (27/54: 50%), followed by subject initial constructions, where the order SVO (21/54) is decidedly more frequent than SOV (3/54), and is actually the most frequent word order in the *corpus*. The object initial construction is usually avoided: there are no examples of the sequence OSV, while OVS is attested three times. It may be added that two of these three attestations are not a pure OVS order, since the direct object is recalled immediately after the verb by a suffix pronoun; the first direct object is actually a kind of *casus pendens*: *?by pnmw bšdq ?bh plṭwh ?lh y?dy mn šḥth*, “My father Panamuwa, because of the loyalty of his father, the gods of Ya?dy saved him from ruin” (Pnm, 2) and *krs?h yhpkh hdd whldy*, “may Hadad and Haldi overturn his throne!”, lit. “his throne, may Haldi and Hadad overturn it!” (Bukān, 11-12). The only occurrence of the pure OVS construction is once again in the inscription of Barrākib for Panamuwa, at the very beginning of the inscription, where the direct object is in focus, being the dedicated statue: *nšb zn šm brrkib l?bh lpnmw br bršr mlk y?dy*, “Barrākib set up this statue for his father, for Panamuwa son of Baršur, king of Ya?dy”. The dislike for constructions in which the direct object precedes the verb is clear also given

the rarity of the construction SOV, attested only three times, and always in sentences expressing a wish: two may be found as parallel sentences in Tell Fekherye (17-18: *mr?y hdd lhmh wmw h ?l ylqh mn ydh swl mr?ty lhmh wmw h ?lilqh mn ydh*, “may Hadad my lord not accept his bread and his water from his hand; may Sula my lady not accept his bread and his water from his hand”), and one in the Panamuwa inscription to Hadad (Hdd, 23: *hdd hr? lytkh*, “may Hadad pour his rage on him”). When the subject is not expressed, the percentage is still low: only in 16 clauses the object precedes the verb (in 139 cases the verb precedes the object). Of these 22 clauses (16 + 3 + 3) in which the verb follows the object, only 5 are ambiguous.

Moreover, when both the subject and the direct object are expressed, the direct object rarely precedes the subject (8% of all the clauses), with a significant difference of the percentage in ambiguous (3%) and unambiguous (10%) clauses. The subject precedes the object in 23% of the clauses, and the percentage is 20% in ambiguous, 32% in unambiguous clauses. These numbers may suggest that constructions in which the object precedes the verb or the subject are usually avoided, particularly with structurally ambiguous clauses. Significantly, only one of the 14 O < S clauses is ambiguous.

The structurally unambiguous clauses are the majority, and, quite remarkably for a language without cases, their percentage is very high: 77% (133/173). The verb is responsible for the disambiguation in the vast majority of cases, alone or in combination with the form of the object (in 25 cases the object is a suffix pronoun, or it is marked by the *nota objecti*), or, more rarely, of the subject (in 4 cases the subject is a personal absolute pronoun). The subject alone is never solely responsible for the disambiguation, while the direct object is the sole disambiguating factor in 14 cases, 3 as *nota objecti* (once partially reconstructed<sup>10</sup>) and 11 as suffix pronoun.

There are 40 structurally ambiguous clauses (13 S < O; 1 O < S; 26 S or O Ø). If we examine these clauses, it is immediately clear that the

<sup>10</sup> Zakkur B, 16-18; Bukān, 1; Sefire IIB, 8 (reconstructed).

most useful means to distinguish semantic and syntactic roles in the majority of them is animacy. In the 13 S < O clauses, as in the only O < S clause, the animacy of the subject is *always* higher than the animacy of the direct object, so that animacy alone can disambiguate the sentence. This is most significant, because in structurally unambiguous clauses this is not always the case. In the 13 unambiguous O < S clauses, it is quite the contrary, since in 8 clauses the animacy of the object is higher than the animacy of the subject, while in 3 clauses the degree of animacy is the same, and only in 2 cases is the animacy of the subject higher. In the 27 unambiguous S < O clauses, the animacy of the subject is higher in 16 cases; it is the same as the animacy of the object in 10 cases; and it is lower than the animacy of the object in only 1 case.

Similarly, in the 26 S or O Ø structurally ambiguous clauses animacy plays an important role, since the subject has a higher degree of animacy in 18 of them. However, there are 8 cases in which animacy alone is not sufficient to distinguish the agent from the undergoer: in 4 of these clauses the degree of animacy of the subject and of the direct object is the same, while in another 4 the animacy of the object is higher. In all these cases, the use of a second parameter, accessibility, may prove to be of major relevance, since the subject, being not expressed (“zero” in the accessibility scale), is always more accessible than the object, because it requires a higher degree of activation in the memory of the addressee (see note 6). It may seem to be quite obvious that in the above mentioned 26 sentences the subject often has a higher accessibility, being generally not expressed, but it is worth noting that the only sentence with subject *and* object dropped has a subject with a higher degree of animacy, and the same is true for the three examples in which only the object is not expressed, and therefore has a higher degree of accessibility.

In other words, animacy is the most relevant means to distinguish the agent from the undergoer in structurally ambiguous clauses, but, when animacy alone is not enough, animacy combined with accessibility disambiguates the totality of the sentences, with no exceptions.

On the other hand, discourse pragmatic scale (+/- Speech Act Participant) and scale specificity do not seem to play an important role in the strategies for distinguishing semantic roles.

### *The Nota objecti in Old Aramaic*

In Old Aramaic, the direct object may be marked by the use of the so called *nota accusativi/nota objecti* *ʔyt*, which may also be found in later Aramaic dialects.

We may now wonder what role the *nota objecti* plays in such a context, if any. Before turning to the evidence, it must be stressed that the attestations are few, and that they occur quite frequently in fragmentary contexts. The *notae objecti* of the *corpus* are often partially reconstructed, and in a couple of instances the context is far from being entirely clear. Since the tools in the database can only consist of complete clauses, either fully written in the text, or partially but reasonably reconstructed, some of the *notae objecti* are not recorded in the database. However, in order to take into account all the material, which is admittedly scanty, the following list contains also the partially reconstructed occurrences of the *nota objecti*<sup>11</sup>, even those that are not universally accepted (in the articles by Kalinin and Loesov mentioned below, only the occurrences marked with \* are taken into consideration). The 19 possible occurrences, of which only 12 are fully readable, would be approximately the 10% of the direct objects of the *corpus*.

\***Zakkur B, 4-5:** *whwsp[t ...] ʔyt kl mḥgt [...]*, “And I added [to it] a whole circle of [...]”.

\***Zakkur B, 10-11:** *wbnyt ʔyt [.....] ʔyt ʔpš*, “and I built [.....] Afis”.

<sup>11</sup> Samalian occurrences are not included, but Samalian *wt-* behaves differently from Aramaic *ʔyt*, being limited to suffix pronouns; Samalian *wt-* may be found in Hdd, 13 (partially reconstructed) and 21, and in the inscription of Katumuwa. Differently from the majority of scholars, Rubin (2005, pp. 94-95) believes that Samalian *wt-* is not a *nota objecti*.

\***Zakkur B, 14-15:** *wk[tbt b]h ø ʔyt ʔšr ydy*, “and I wrote in it the achievements of my hands”.

\***Zakkur B, 16-18:** *[...n yhgʕ ʔyt ʔš[r][ydy] zkr mlk hm[t wl]ʕš mn nšbʔ znh*, “Whoever effaces the achievements of the hands of Zakkur, king of Hama and of Luash, from this stele”.

\***Zakkur B, 27:** *[...] ʔšʔ w ʔyt [...]*, “[...] the man and [...]”.

\***Sefire IB, 32-33:** *[whn ʕq]r[k l]yʔth lšgb ʔyt ʕqr[y]*, “and if your offspring does not come to strengthen my offspring”.

**Sefire IIB, 8:** *wybʕh bry ʔ[yt rʔšy lmtty]ʔ*, “and (if) my son seeks my head to kill me”.

\***Sefire IIC, 5-6:** *ʔhbd ʔyt ktk wʔyt mlkh*, “I shall destroy KTK and its king”.

\***Sefire III, 11:** *hn ʔ[yt]y yqtlh*, “if they kill me”.

\***Sefire III, 13-14:** *nkh tph ʔy<t>h wʕrqh wšrbwh wmwddwh bħrb*, “you must strike him and his offspring and his nobles and his friends with a sword”.

\***Sefire IIC, 13-17:** *[...]n kl ʔlh[y ʕd]yʔ zy bsprʔ [zn]h ʔyt mtʕʔl wbrh wbr brh wʕqrh wkl mlky ʔrpd wkl rbwh wʕmhm mn btyhm wmn ywmyhm*, “All the gods of the treaty which is in this inscription ... *Matiʕʔel*, and his son, and the son of his son, and his offspring, and all the kings of Arpad, and all his nobles, and their people from their houses and from their days”.

\***Bukan, 1:** *zy yhns ø ʔyt nšbʔ znh*, “Who (or whoever) will remove this stele”.

**Tel Dan, 4:** *[w]yhmlk hdd ʔ[yty]*, “Hadad made me king”.

**Tel Dan, 7/8:** *[qtl ʔyt yhw]rm br [ʔhʔb] mlk yšrʔl wqtl[t ʔyt ʔhʔ]yhw*, “I killed Yehoram, son of Ahab, king of Israel and I killed Ahazyahu”.

**Tel Dan, 9/10:** *wʔšm [ʔyt ... ʔyt ʔrq hm*, “and I set [...] their land”.

As will be noted from the examples above, in contrast with the majority of the languages with a differential accusative marking, animacy does not seem to play any consistent role. Actually, one of the major problems of the *nota objecti* in Old Aramaic is that it does not behave as the differential object marking usually does. The term “differential object marking” (hence DOM) was created by Georg Bossong to indi-

cate the presence in a language of a marked direct object together with an unmarked direct object, depending on the semantic properties of the object noun phrase. The features that underlie the differentiation of the objects may be inherent or – more frequently according to Bossong – referential. Among the former, the most prominent feature is animacy; among the latter, definiteness<sup>12</sup>: these animate and definite direct objects need to be marked in order to distinguish them from the subject, which in transitive clauses is usually animate and definite.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in languages characterized by the presence of the object marker, the object marker is used for specific categories, mainly animate and/or definite, and given a marked direct object, every other direct object with a higher degree of animacy and/or definiteness is marked. This seems to be the case, for example, in the use of the marker l- in Imperial Aramaic, in which mostly animate, definite objects are marked (cp. Folmer 1995, pp. 340-371; Kalinin, Loesov 2014). In Old Aramaic, this is not the case: neither animacy (some marked objects are inanimate<sup>14</sup>) nor definiteness (the majority of definite objects are unmarked) accounts for the presence of the object marker, even if definiteness seems to be a prerequisite (there are no instances of an indefinite direct object preceded by the *nota objecti*). The fact that the *nota objecti* is quite consistently used (with one exception) with proper names is unlikely to be seen as a means of disambiguation, both

<sup>12</sup> Cp. e.g. Comrie 1979; Bossong 1983-1984. For further literature on this topic, see the references in Kalinin, Loesov 2014. For differential object marking in Semitic languages, see Khan 1984 and Rubin 2005, pp. 91-127; for DOM in Biblical Hebrew, see Malessa 2000; for DOM in Aramaic, see Folmer 1995, pp. 340-371 (with previous literature at pp. 369-371), Folmer 2008 (with further literature at pp. 132-133), Rubin 2005, pp. 94-105 and Kalinin, Loesov 2013 and 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Comrie 1979, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Folmer's suggestion (Folmer 2008, p. 153) that the *nota objecti* is not used in Old Aramaic, with the sole exception of Tel Dan, with definite inanimate nouns is problematic, since Folmer does not take Bukān into consideration, and the "uncertain" terms *ʔyt ʔšr ydy* and *ʔyt kl mḥgt* in Zakkūr (*ibid.*, note 65) are hardly animate. Also the statement that there are no instances of animate direct object in Tell Fekherye (*ibid.*, note 63) is inaccurate, since the whole section of the curses contains three animals and one baby as direct objects.

because the verb alone would always be sufficient to clarify the subject and because these names are often toponyms, which are rarely subjects of a transitive sentence (moreover, they are definitely not animate, since they are seen as urban entities and ensembles of buildings, not of inhabitants). In addition, the three above mentioned cases in which the *nota objecti* disambiguate the sentence cannot exactly be seen as means of disambiguation, since the direct object is in two cases inanimate (Zakkūr B, 16-18 (*ʔšr* is translated as plural, but it is morphologically a singular) and Bukān, 1), and in one case reconstructed (Sefire IIB, 8).

Two recent studies were dedicated to this topic by Kalinin and Loesov (2013 and 2014), who formulate an intriguing hypothesis on the use of the *nota objecti*. According to them, the use of the *nota objecti*, originally a deictic (2014, p. 496)<sup>15</sup>, would be limited to suffix pronoun “in cases of sheer needs” (*ibid.*, p. 499), to proper names, and to determined (“arthrous” in their terminology) nouns which are not able to take the definite article (as is well known, the noun in Aramaic cannot have an article when it is a proper noun, when it is bound with a suffix pronoun, and when it is the *regens* of a construct state). With proper names, the marking is compulsory, while with nouns followed by suffix pronoun, the noun must be referential (2014, p. 491), because the possessive suffix pronoun alone would not be a sufficient signal of referentiality (2013, p. 52). However, if a suffix pronoun alone may be considered insufficient, it is rather difficult to consider a proper name insufficient, given that it has a higher degree of referentiality than any definite common noun. The observation that all the proper names of the *corpus* are marked actually goes back to Folmer (2008, p. 153), but the suggestion of a correlation between the marker and the absence of the article (and the degree of referentiality of the direct object) is new and rather convincing. The proposal of Loesov and Kalinin is quite consistent, and it is able to provide a kind of rule for the use of

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<sup>15</sup> The etymology of the *nota objecti* *ʔyt* is highly disputed: see Rubin 2005, pp. 115-121.

the marked object in Old Aramaic, which otherwise seems to be quite puzzling.<sup>16</sup>

However, there are some problematic cases, which are tentatively – but in my opinion not always convincingly – explained by the authors. The major exception is, of course, Bukān, in which the marked object does have the definite article. The occurrence of Bukān is dismissed by Loesov and Kalinin as an error, due to the imperfect knowledge of Aramaic by the scribe. This suggestion, which ultimately goes back to Lemaire (1999), is due to the fact that the article in Bukān is used in an anomalous way also in another occurrence, *kl mh mwtn?*, “any type of pestilence”, since *kl mh* (“any type of”, “whatever”) in Old Aramaic precedes nouns without the article. However, the Aramaic of Bukan is correct<sup>17</sup>, and it is quite difficult to prove that the use of the article is erroneous.

Another problem is the referentiality of the common nouns, which does not seem to be *consistently* marked by the *nota objecti*. Kalinin and Loesov consider the following passage of Sefire IB, 32-33 problematic: [*whn šqr[k l]y?th lšgb šyt šqr[y]*], “and if your offspring does not come to strengthen my offspring”, because *šyt šqry* is marked, while in the preceding *lsgd byty*, “to strengthen my house”, *byty* is unmarked. This may be due, as tentatively suggested by Kalinin and Loesov, to the fact that *byty*, “my house” is here perceived as more abstract and less real than *šqry*, “my progeny”. In the very same way, *byt šby*, “my father’s house” in the “Bauinschrift” of Barrākib (line 12), would be “an abstract concept, in the way of *patria potestas*” (Kalinin, Loesov 2014, p. 493). However, the sentence runs *šhzt byt šby whybth mn byt ḥd mlkn rbrbn*, “I took my father’s house and I made it better than the house of any of the great kings”, and it is quite hard to see how the expression *byt šby* could be abstract and not refe-

<sup>16</sup> The optional and irregular use of the *nota objecti* in Old Aramaic has been remarked, among others, by Martínez Borobio (2003, p. 146), Rubin (2005, p. 94) and Folmer (2008, p. 153: but regularly used with proper names). Garr (1985, p. 192) suggests that “it marked direct objects that were of particular interest to the author”.

<sup>17</sup> “Excellent” according to Sokoloff, who considers the scribe “a native Aramaean” (Sokoloff 1999, p. 106), a view contested by Lemaire (1999, p. 58).

rential. Moreover, the term *ʕqr* is found in other points in the text with the syntactic function of direct object, and it is not marked. If in one occurrence (Sefire III, 11) it is reasonable to suppose that it does not have any marker because it is the modifier of a construct infinitive of a derived stem<sup>18</sup>, it is difficult to understand why *ʕqr* should be less referential in the following passage in Sefire IIC, 13-17 than in Sefire IB, 32-33: [...]*n kl ʔlh[y ʕd]yʔ zy bsprʔ [zn]h ʔyt mtʕʔl wbrh wbr brh wʕqrh wkl mlky ʔrpd wkl rbwh wʕmhm mn btyhm wmn ywmyhm*, “All the gods of the treaty which is in this inscription ... Matiʕʔel, and his son, and the son of his son, and his offspring, and all the kings of Arpad, and all his nobles, and their people from their houses and from their days” (the verb is missing, but it is clear from the context that all the direct objects are negatively affected). Kalinin and Loesov suggest that only Matiʕʔel is here referential (2013, p. 51), but the *ʕqry* of IB, 33 could hardly be considered more referential than *brh* “his son”, *ʕqrh*, “his progeny”, or *mlky ʔrpd*, “the kings of Arpad”. Moreover, in both cases we are in the realm of mere hypothesis, since in Sefire IB, 32-33 the text is dealing with a potential transgression of the treatise, in Sefire IIC, 13-17 with the consequences of a potential transgression of the treaty.

<sup>18</sup> As suggested by Kalinin, Loesov 2014, p. 492. The infinitives of derived stems usually behave as nouns in Old Aramaic (nothing can be said on the three possible D-stem infinitives of Tell Fekherye, which lack any endings), while the situation of the G infinitives is less clear, because they do not take any ending, and only in the presence of the *nota objecti* can it be said that they behave like verbs. The problematic form *lhzyh ʕdy brgʔyh*, “to see/to gaze at the treaty of Bargaya” in Sefire (IA, 13) might be a D infinitive (cp. Fitzmyer 1995, pp. 77-78; Martínez Borobio 2002, p. 301), and it is not in the construct state, as may be judged by the ending *-h* (not *-t*). The form is anomalous, because the verb *hzy*, “to see”, is usually found in the G form (*hzy* is however found in the D form in the second inscription of Nerab, line 5: *mhzy*, participle), but the ending *-h* is hard to explain in a G form (it is accepted by Degen 1969, p. 77); Muraoka (1984, p. 100) suggests that the ending *-h* may be a suffix pronoun, but its presence is unnecessary. Lipiński (1975, p. 27; 1994, pp. 58-59) considers *hzy* a G form, and *h* an interrogative particle.

There is a problematic case also among the proper names, but unfortunately the context is partially missing. In Zakkur B, 3-5, the text runs:  $\text{?n[h bny]t hzrk whwsp[t lh] ?yt kl mhgt [...]}$ , “I [buil]t Hazraq and I added [to it?] a whole circle of [...]”.  $\text{hwsp[t lh] ?yt kl mhgt [...]}$  has been quoted and translated above: the direct object is partly lost, but its first element is the head of a construct state. The problem is that the *nota objecti* is lacking before  $\text{hzrq}$ , a toponym, for which the use of the marker should be compulsory. The verb which precedes  $\text{hzrq}$  is missing and hypothetically but plausibly restored as  $\text{[bny]t}$  (from  $\text{bny}$ , “to build”) by all the editors of this text (cfr. e.g. KAI<sup>5</sup> 202; ARI, p. 422; Degen 1969, p. 7; Gibson 1975, p. 10; Martínez Borobio, p. 249; see already Lidzbarski 1915, p. 9). The grapheme {t} which may be read before the toponym can only be the ending of a first person singular perfect, since in the lacuna between the pronominal subject and the toponym there is no space for a verb *and* the marker of the object (as seems to be implied by Folmer: 2008, p. 153, note 63).

As already noted, Kalinin and Loesov take into consideration only the occurrences of the *nota objecti* here marked by \*. Thus, leaving aside the occurrences with suffix pronouns, they list eleven examples of *nota objecti*. One occurrence is in Bukān, and it is considered an error. Two occurrences clearly shows the object marker, but there is no trace of the objects, and nothing can be said about them (Zakkur B, 27, and the first occurrence in Zakkur B, 10-11). We are thus left with 8 occurrences, of which two are toponyms, one is an anthroponym, two are a rather obscure expression in Zakkur in the construct state ( $\text{?yt ?šr ydy}$ ), one is an incomplete construct state ( $\text{?yt kl mhgt [...]}$ : the second modifier is missing), one the syntagm  $\text{?yt ?qr[y]}$ , “my progeny”, and one the syntagm  $\text{?yt mlkh}$ , “his king”. It is worth noting that the possible occurrences in Tel Dan, none of which were considered by Kalinin and Loesov because they are, admittedly, doubtful, do not contradict the tentative rule proposed by the scholars: apart from the occurrence with a personal pronoun, the *nota objecti* would here precede two proper names and a noun with a suffix pronoun (referential, though inanimate:  $\text{?rq hm}$ , “their land”).

The proposal of Kalinin and Loesov is thus worthy of consideration, but we may ask ourselves if the examples are sufficient. The nominal marked objects which may be read *in full* number eight in total, and

one of them (Bukān, 1) would be an exception to the rule. It may be hoped that new occurrences of the *nota objecti* in Old Aramaic will shed light on this problematic situation.

What seems to be clear is that there is no connection between the degree of animacy and the use of the *nota objecti*, which is moreover not restricted to ambiguous clauses. In other words, the *nota objecti* is not meant to mark the role of the undergoer in doubtful cases<sup>19</sup>, and to distinguish the subject from the direct object after the collapse of the case system, as in many other languages<sup>20</sup>: in Old Aramaic transitive sentences, the undergoer/direct object is distinguished from the role of the agent/subject simply by a lower degree of animacy, or, more rarely, by a lower degree of accessibility.

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<sup>19</sup> This seems to be the main role of the DOM in Biblical Hebrew (cp. Malessa 2000). Unlike Aramaic, the DOM in Biblical Hebrew may also be used to mark the subject of a passive sentence (which is the undergoer) and the non-volitional intransitive subject (cp. Malessa 2000 and Khan 1984, pp. 496-497). In Old Aramaic, the verbs with which the *nota objecti* is used are all strongly transitive, and the undergoer is often negatively affected.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in Neo Iranian languages: see Bossong 1985, p. 13.

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