

The Grammar of the Aramaic of the Zohar  
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## 1. Spelling and Phonology

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### Chapter 1 Spelling

§1 The numerous differences in the spelling between the manuscripts of the Zohar and the different printings are determined by the spelling rules for the Zohar. Studies show us that the spelling in the manuscripts (for example in Ms Oxford 1546 and Ms Cambridge 1023)<sup>1</sup> and the excerpts in the first printing of Recanati, is in most cases more plene than the spelling in the common printings. In any event, meticulous comparison confirms that the manifestations of the spelling in the Vilna printing were made to fit the ways of spelling of those manuscripts and of the different printings of the Zohar. Because of this, the Vilna printing is suitable to use as a basis to determine the rules.

#### A. Vowel marks

1. The vowels held in the Aramaic of the literary sources as long, are generally indicated by one of the *matres lectionis*, in an open syllable, in a closed syllable:

תפוחין, רבוא, אורייתא, אריכה, עתיקא, אנהיר, לעילא, נפיק, חיוז.<sup>2</sup>

Note: however there are also some that are not regular:

ככבים, פרודא<sup>3</sup> (1:32a).

2. The vowels held in the Aramaic of the literary sources as short, sometimes are not marked:

קדשים, דקדשיא, כל, לקבליה, ספרא, זמנא. בסחרנו, גולגלתא,

However the plene spelling method became stronger in most of the occurrences (especially in closed syllables):

כותלא, אודנא, גולגלתא, רישומא, סיטרא, דאיתחזו<sup>4</sup> (3:190a),

Also:

אינש, איזיל and others.

Also in the printings of the Zohar Hadash (which consists of different sections from Midrash Ha-ne'elam and from the Zohar that was erased from the printings of the body of the Zohar) the plene spelling is more normal:  
סיטרא, למיסבל, דאיקרון, דאידכר, and others (Zohar Hadash 98c-d, Midrash Ruth Ha-ne'elam).

<sup>1</sup> See the appendix on the manuscripts and the Recanati.

<sup>2</sup> The examples quoted in this chapter without citations are from the Vilna printing 3:128b-129a.

<sup>3</sup> In Ms Oxford 3b: פירודא.

<sup>4</sup> In Ms Oxford this spelling recurs time after time consistently. The tendency towards plene spelling—at least an equal ratio compared to defective spelling—is also found in the manuscripts of the Mishnah (Y.N. Epstein, מבוא לניסוח המשנה, p. 1207), and this is the custom in Babylonian Aramaic (Y. Kutscher, ארמית גלילית, p.11).

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B. The letters א, ה, ו, and י (matres lectionis)

Besides vowel markers, the matres lectionis are used as consonants.

1. א– as a mater lectionis marking /aa/ in the sources:<sup>5</sup>

שמאלא, מאתן, אתמסראן, תאנא, מרגלאן טבאן

It is used to mark the definite article at the end of a noun:

גוונא, ספרא, אחדא

as the marker of the feminine:

ירותא, דרגא

in third person III- :verbs אוי

בעא

and in place of ה

מא, מחכא

Mater lectionis marking /ee/:

אהא, תהא

And as marking the diphthong /ay/:<sup>6</sup>

האי, בנאי, בתראי

and in the names of the sages:

רבי שמלאי, רבי רחומאי, רבי כרוספדאי

:as a consonant (at the beginning of a syllable א

<sup>7</sup>אחודא, אוירא, אריך אנפין

2. ה– mater lectionis marking /aa/, after א<sup>8</sup>

מאה, סתימאהת

and with the verb הוה

and also not following א: as the feminine marker

<sup>9</sup>ברירה

and as a consonant:

האי, כלהו, נהרין, ביה, בה.

3. ו– mater lectionis for /u/ and /o/:

תיאובתא, שמושא, גולגלתא, רוגזא, עליון, תהלות, אורכא, זוהמא.

As the consonant /w/ occasionally as one ו

עוא דרעוא דרעוין<sup>10</sup> חויר, חוורתא,

but in the majority of occurrences with two וו

חוורתא, חוורא, גוונא, כוותיה, אתוון

<sup>5</sup> and also the vowels mentioned henceforth, whose identification was determined according to the sources.

<sup>6</sup> By way of spelling of the Babylonian Talmud, as opposed to the Jerusalem (Kutcher studies the היי, הי; latter, .)p.31, שם

<sup>7</sup> References are not marked next to common forms.

<sup>8</sup> As is customary in the Babylonian Talmud (C. Levias, A Grammar of the Aramaic Idiom Contained in the Babylonian Talmud, Cincinnati, 1900 – henceforth abbreviated: Levias; p 26).

<sup>9</sup> In the Cambridge ms, this phenomenon is found more often.

<sup>10</sup> In the Sultzbach printing it is written in these places as חויר.

4. ם – mater lectionis marking /ii/

אריכא, דינין, לי, דילי.

Marking /e/:

כדין, אלין, הכי, לעילא, נפיק. . .

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And marking /ε/:

אינש, איזיל, איברי = אברא

As marking the diphthong /ay/, one ם in the middle ם at the end of the word, two ם<sup>11</sup>

האי, עלייהו, בהדייהו.

As the consonant /y/ one ם is written at the beginning of the word ם

ידיעין, יקרא, יתיר.

The verbal prefix for the future is always written with one ם

דיעבר, דיתחשב

Adjacent to the letters aleph, vav, he, comes one yod:

בקיומיה, אתגליא, קשיא, מחפיא<sup>12</sup>

but there are many exceptions to this:

אתחזייתא, אתחפייא, אתכסייא, תלייא, ומלייא

(especially similar to III-aleph, vav, he verbs and with the diphthong /ay/).

In the middle of a word two yods:

אתייליד, אתיישבו, אתיידע.

5. There are a few instances in which a few matres lectionis are joined to mark one sound:

אספקלריאה.

C. The letters ש-ס

The sin is maintained only in biblical words:<sup>13</sup>

שעורה שמאלא, עשר, עשרה, שבע,

Whereas samech usually marks the phoneme /s/:

סבא, סגי, סהדותא, חד סר

just as Late Aramaic.

§2

A. Letters as Numbers

1. The letters of the aleph-bet come in their numerical values in number phrases expressed in words:

תלת מאה וע"ה עלמין

Or also without these phrases:

י"ג נימין דשערי.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As is customary in the Bab. Talmud (Levias p. 27); but also is found: .)3:186b( קדמיתא

<sup>12</sup> in the Bab. Talmud one yod is customarily written in the last syllable after a letter voweled with schwa (Levias p. 27).

<sup>13</sup> Just as in the Bab. Talmud there is no known usage except in those same occurrences. An exception to this rule: )2:73a( שנאוי – which is spelled with samech in the Talmud.

<sup>14</sup> See the chapter on numbers (§22, 1:G,H).

Letters with this numerical usage are marked with a special sign (a point, or a lying line in manuscripts, inverted commas in print).

## 2. The frequent gematria in the Zohar:

ארבע מאה ועשר נימי דשערי כחושבן קדו"ש.

Words which come in gematria are marked with a special sign (as mentioned above).

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### B. Punctuation

The use of the arbitrary punctuation exists in the different sources, but it is impossible to formulate rules for them. The Vilna printing in particular uses a dot to separate sentences and a colon to separate themes, but the division of sentences is far from accurate.<sup>15</sup>

The special name is marked in the Vilna printing, as in the manuscripts discussed, with two yods .י<sup>16</sup>

### C. Beginnings of words and other abbreviations

The beginnings of common words in the printings (and in the manuscripts) are not new, most of them are known from their use in the Talmuds and the Midrashim. For example:

קב"ה, כה"ג. . . ה"הד, כד"א, מ"ט, ת"ח, בג"ד

Other abbreviations are not numerous in the Vilna printing and come in understood words:

יגו"י<sup>17</sup>

Thanks to the editors and the printers that completed the abbreviations that are in the manuscripts.

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<sup>15</sup> In the Cambridge ms a dot above the line indicates the end of a sentence, and oblique dots on the highest part of the line mark the end of the speech; in the Oxford ms a small dot above the line indicates the end of the sentence, the end of a theme and a quotation as one. In the Sultzbach printing a few dots come to mark the ends of sentences.

<sup>16</sup> In the Sultzbach printing with a .ה

<sup>17</sup> Truncations of word endings (due to the end of the line) come both in the Cambridge mss and the Oxford mss, and a few beginnings of words. The number of abbreviations is greater in the Sultzbach printing, not only at the ends of lines, but also in the middle of them (due to the need of the printing, and perhaps in order to decrease the combination of yod and he in the printing):

אוהבי' (אוהביה),

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Chapter 2  
Phonology

§3 Since we don't have a tradition of vowel pointing for the Zohar, it is upon us to understand the phonological manifestations extracted from the spelling, as far as we are allowed to witness it in the received and authoritative spelling.<sup>18</sup> The forms of words in the Zohar generally indicate morpho-phonological manifestations that are common in the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud, and in a few occurrences of manifestations of Western Aramaic.

Listed here are selected phenomena from the domain of the phonology of the consonants, as they appear in the text before us (we will not delay with transformations, that is to say on diachronic processes).

1. Sonorants

An /n/ lacking a vowel in the middle of a word is assimilated:

אפין, יפיק

There are instances in which it is not assimilated:<sup>19</sup>

אנפין, ינפול.

At the end of a word there are instances in which it is dropped:

תרי, גחתי

And there are instances in which it subsists:

תרינ, משכין.

2. Dentals

/d/ - there are instances in which it is maintained:

קדמאה, קדמיתא

and there are instances in which it is assimilated:

קמי, קמייתא.

/t/ in the prefix for the reflexive binyanim – is assimilated את

A. The consonants /t, T, d/ are treated the same as in the other dialects of Aramaic:

אדכר, אדליקת<sup>20</sup>

But many times this assimilation does not occur:

לאתטמרא, לאתתקנא, אתתקף<sup>2122</sup> מתדבא, ואתטרדו,

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B. The common assimilation of ת to other consonants

אקרי>אתקרי, איגליף>אתגליף, אבדיקת>אתבדיקת, איהסיב>אתנסיב, מגדלין>מתגדלין, אבלבל>אתבלבל.<sup>23</sup>

In I-and I ג-ve ת is dropped ת

<sup>18</sup> See the previous chapter on spelling.

<sup>19</sup> For considerations on this phenomenon in Middle Aramaic see E. Y. Kutscher, "The Language of the 'Genesis Apocryphon'," Scripta Hierosolymitana IV (1958), p. 19 f.

<sup>20</sup> The feminine form of the verb adjacent to the definite noun (see below on the syntax of the noun, §32).

<sup>21</sup> This is also the case with the Cambridge ms

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it is possible to see in this disregard of the assimilation rules a sign of the language of the Middle Ages; see BZ Bakhar, Jerusalem Guide . . . p. 123; and also M. Gottstein, Syntax and Dictionary of the Hebrew Language in the Domain of influence of Arabic, Jerusalem 5712, §22.

<sup>23</sup> 3:189a ואיהו רזא גאלף הרים דמגדלין בכל יומא.

אהדר, אערעו, ארגיז > אתרגיז, ארתח > אתרתח.

C. With verbs whose first root consonant is a sibilant, the phenomenon of metathesis of the sounds and assimilation is common, as a rule:

אזדבן, אזדרעו, אסתכלו, אצטריך, אצטערנא, אשתלים, אשתבח.

However, the extraordinary behavior of disregarding this linguistic rule is more interesting. In this disregard there is a hint of consistency that approaches a new rule, at least with verbs of clearly mystical interpretation:

<sup>24</sup>אתצייר, אתשקאה.

Consideration of the manuscripts and the first printing of the Recanati we learn that in the earlier version of the Zohar forms lacking assimilation such as these were more common, and it seems that many of them were corrected by the copyists who were striving for uniformity.<sup>25</sup>

D. Exchanges of tav for tet:

<sup>26</sup>מרגליטה.

but also

מרגליתא טבא.

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<sup>24</sup> In this form of the verb an opposition occurs in the different manuscripts: in the Oxford ms it is written in the body of the text as דאשתקיא but above it is corrected דאשתקיא

In the Cambridge ms: in אתשקיין the parallel text in the Vilna אשתקיין

Compare to the Midrash Vayyiqra' 30:6. אתצייד.

<sup>25</sup> For example, in the Cambridge ms it is written ואתסהאן but in the Vilna in the parallel place ואתסהאן

In the first printing of Recanati דאשתכח and in the Vilna דאשתכח

<sup>26</sup> An interpretation is also common based on exchange of this meaning; 'And from terror because it won't come near you' (Isaiah 54:14) replacing terror with wheat by changing the tav to tet, giving an alternate reading (3:188b).

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## 2. Morphology

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### Chapter 3

#### The Pronoun

An examination of the pronouns that preserve the original forms of the language is very informative concerning the determination of the linguistic influences on the Zohar and concerning the characterization of its place among the Aramaic dialects.

In order to effectively classify the material we will look at it from two different points of view:

1. From the aspect of the use of the pronouns, we will distinguish between:
  - a. Personal Pronoun (Pronomen personale),
  - b. Demonstrative Pronoun (Pronomen demonstrativum),
  - c. Relative Pronoun (Pronomen relativum),
  - d. Interrogative Pronoun (Pronomen interrogativum),
  - e. Reflexive Pronoun (Pronomen reflexivum),
  - f. Indefinite Pronoun (Pronomen indefinitum).
2. From the aspect of form, we must distinguish between the independent pronoun (pronomen separatum), which appears as a separate word, and the clitic pronoun (pronomen suffixum), which is attached to the verb or the noun, which together constitute one word.<sup>27</sup>

#### §4 A. The Personal Pronoun

Different functions are associated with the personal pronoun in the sentence, and it is placed into these categories according to function:

1. Subject Pronouns (Nominative),
2. Possessive Pronouns (Genitive),
3. Object Pronouns (Accusative).

##### 1. Subject Pronouns

###### (1) The Independent Pronoun

1<sup>st</sup> person singular: the customary form in all the Aramaic dialects אָנָא

וכד אָנָא אַשְׁתַּכְחָנָא חַד מֵרַבְנֵי דַאזִּיל בַּאֲרַחָא

אָנָא טַעִין אַבְתְּרִיה

רַבְנָא אָנָא טַיִיעָא אַתְעַבִּידְנָא

א ל אָנָא חַמִּינָא

2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular: אַנְתָּ

או אַנְתָּ בַשְׁטוּתָא אַמְרַתְּ, או מַלִּין רִיקְנִין אִינוּן

דַּאנְתָּ שְׁלִיט עַל כָּל מַלְכִין

ה. אַקְדִים אַנְתָּ וְקַטְלִי

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2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine singular: אַתְּ

סַבָּא סַבָּא וְאַתְּ שְׂאִיל דָּא

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<sup>27</sup> The first examples here are quoted from the section “saba” for sentences, and the complete ones from “yanuqa” (3:186a-192a) and from other sources.

ואת אמרת

3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular: the dominant form in the Zohar איהו

מסטרא דההוא עבד מטטרון דאיהו כליל שית סטרין

והאי איהו . . .

וצדיק, דאיהו יום השבת, לא תעבד בו עבודה עבד דאיהו יום דחול

,this form, common in the different dialects of Aramaic, also appears in the Zohar הוא especially in fossilized sayings:

הכי הוא

הדה הוא דכתיב

קודשא בריך הוא.

3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular: איהי

מסטרא דשכינתא דאיהי שביעית ודאי

ונשמתא דאיהי מתמן

יחידה שבת דאיהי בת

ואתקריאת איהי בת מלך

היא

אם נשמתא היא

אם היא מסטרא דההוא עבד מטטרון

כד נפקת מניה, היא בתרומת הקדשים לא תאכל

1<sup>st</sup> person plural: the dominant form in Late Aramaic אנן

דהא מה דאנן אמרי

2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine plural: אתון

זכאין אתון צדיקיא

א שמשותון לרבי שמעיה חסידאאתון חבריא דל

2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine plural: same as the masculine אתון

דאתון גרמתון לבניי דימותו

3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural: אינון

אלין אינון סידורין דגלגולא

כמה אינון בני נשא

תרין דאינון חד וחד דאינון תלתא

3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine plural: ther אינון is no special form for the feminine (similar to the spelling in Biblical Aramaic)<sup>28</sup>

מלין ריקנין אינון

פרחין מתמן אינון נשמתין

כל אינון נשמתין דאתעשקן, מאן אינון

## (2) Clitic Pronouns

The subject pronoun sometimes attaches to the verb in a participle:

מינא.אנא ח<sup>29</sup>

חדינא, ידענא, אמינא

We are not concerned here with the ambiguous meaning of this phrase (past, 1<sup>st</sup> person singular; past 1<sup>st</sup> person plural)<sup>30</sup>, since the pronoun becomes the tense morpheme of the verb and ceases to be the subject pronoun.

<sup>28</sup> The pronunciation already distinguishing between אינין and אינון

<sup>29</sup> This complex form is considered to be fixed and fossilized and the clitic pronoun –na does not suffice to mark the first person and therefore it is preceded here by the additional ‘ana’.



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## 2. The Possessive Pronoun

(1) The clitic pronoun<sup>31</sup> when the possessor is singular:

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<sup>30</sup> See the chapter on the verb §§11, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Here we first discuss the clitic pronoun because it is more frequent and basic than the independent pronoun.