

28. Imperial Aramaic

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Abstract

This chapter provides a concise grammatical sketch of Official Aramaic (achämenidisches Reichsaramäisch), that is, the standard language promoted by the Achaemenid chancellery and attested by a variety of documentary and some literary texts throughout the Persian Empire, most of them from Egypt, during the fifth and the fourth centuries BC. Official Aramaic is based on a Babylonian dialect of Aramaic with distinct orthographic conventions and grammatical features. The so-called “Hermopolis letters”, composed in an older variety of Aramaic whose spelling practice already exhibits traces of the Achaemenid standard, are also included, as is Biblical Aramaic, since it attests a more progressive Official Aramaic offshoot influenced by Judaeen Aramaic.

1. Introduction

In present-day scholarship, the term “Imperial Aramaic”, or *Reichsaramäisch*, covers various linguistically distinct forms of Aramaic (Folmer 1995, 9–13). Especially in the English-speaking world, it often refers to Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian Empires from the 8th century BC onwards. However, several linguistic features suggest that the administrative language of the Achaemenids (538–331 BC), now mostly labelled “Official Aramaic” (OffA) or *achämenidisches Reichsaramäisch*, should be distinguished from preceding stages (Gzella 2008). The following remarks focus on OffA, this being the original idea of the term *Reichsaramäisch* coined by Joseph Markwart (1927, 91, n. 1). It is based on an otherwise unknown local dialect of Aramaic used in Babylonia. Greenfield 1974, followed by others, postulates a literary language alongside of and distinct from OffA (which he restricts to communication purposes), but this supraregional “Standard Literary Aramaic” has never been clearly defined and hence remains elusive. A grammar of OffA as such does not exist; the texts from Egypt have been described by Muraoka/Porten ²2003; Leander 1928 (phonology and morphology only), however, often has a more sophisticated treatment. For an up-to-date sketch, see Folmer 2009. The entire lexicon is included in Hoftijzer/Jongeling 1995, part of it, from a diachronic point of view, also in Beyer 1984–2004. Porten 1968 provides a fine, albeit dated, introduction to the world of the Elephantine texts.

While the stabilizing function of the Achaemenid chancellery accounts for the greater uniformity of this official standard as opposed to the highly heterogeneous texts from the 7th and 6th centuries BC, interaction with other dialects and languages, as well as different social and stylistic levels, led to much variation in the corpus (survey in Gzella 2004, 35–56). This corresponds to the typology of prestige languages (Kahane 1986). OffA is thus only one type of Aramaic current in the Persian period. Most of the material has been discovered at the Jewish military colony Elephantine in the 19th/20th c. The dry climate preserved numerous 5th c. BC papyri chiefly containing letters, contracts, accounts, lists, a translation of the Bisutun inscription, and a version of the Ahiqar novel. They provide the earliest documentation of the socio-economic situation and every-day life of a Judaeon diaspora community (edited afresh by Porten/Yardeni 1986–1999, which is the basis of Muraoka/Porten ²2003 and whose sigla have been adopted here; the older editions with their philological commentary, however, must always be consulted). Peculiar features in texts from other sites, like Hermopolis (see 5.) or Saqqāra (Segal 1983 with Williamson 1987, 267), prove that the language situation in Persian Egypt remained diversified even concerning Aramaic, but they also show how the Achaemenid prestige idiom encroached on earlier local varieties. OffA is moreover attested by 4th-c. papyri from Samaria (Dušek 2007), and by numerous honorific, dedicatory, and funerary inscriptions as well as *Kleinstinschriften* (seals, coins etc.) from Egypt, the Arabian Desert, Asia Minor, Babylon, Persepolis, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (5th–3rd c. BC; references in Beyer 1984, 29–33). After Alexander's conquest, OffA was gradually transformed due to continuous interaction with local dialects. This process gave rise to several new written languages, most of which preserve at least some distinctive orthographic features (see ch. 30).

2. Writing and phonology

The 22 letters of the alphabet used for OffA by and large reflect at least 23 (according to some scholars even 25) different consonantal phonemes: the voiced and unvoiced laryngeals /ʔ/ and /h/, the pharyngeal fricatives /ʕ/ and /ħ/ (and perhaps /h/, written with {h}, as well as /ġ/ = Arabic ġ, written with {ġ}, cf. Beyer 1984, 101 f.), the velars /g/ and /k/, the sibilants /z/ and /s/, the dentals /d/ and /t/, the bilabials /b/ and /p/, further the palatovelar /š/, the lateral /š/ (normally written with {š} and exceptionally with {s}), the “emphatic” counterparts of the unvoiced velar, sibilant, and dental, i.e., /q/, /s/ (presumably pronounced [ʔs], cf. Beyer 2004, 45 f.), and /t/, as well as the lateral resonant /l/ and the dental thrill /r/, the nasals /n/ (dental) and /m/ (bilabial), and the glides (semi-vowels) /y/ (palatal) and /w/ (bilabial). Post-vocalic velar, dental, and labial stops were in all likelihood still plosives (Beyer 1984, 125–128; a few scholars consider an onset of spirantization already in OffA [Kaufman 1974, 117; Muraoka/Porten ²2003, 5], but there is no direct evidence). Previous stages of Aramaic preserved reflexes of the Proto-Semitic interdentals */d/, */t/, */t/, and the voiced velar or uvular affricate /ġ/ < */š/ (to be distinguished from /ġ/, cf. Steiner 1991, 1499–1501). Since the underlying alphabet was originally designed for another Semitic language, which had already lost these phonemes, they were graphically represented by the letters for the respective sound correspondences in Phoenician or by those for similar sounds, i.e., {š} for /t/, {z}

for /d/, {s} for /t/, and {q} for /g/ (e.g., *ʾrqʾ* for /ʾarḡā/ ‘the earth’, the choice of the letter {q} instead of {g} being due to “emphatic” pronunciation). While in OffA the interdentals had merged with the corresponding dentals (*/t/ > /t/, */d/ > /d/, /t/ > /t/, all before the 7th c. BC: Beyer 1984, 100) and /g/ eventually with /ʿ/ (as in *ʾrʿʿ* /ʾar‘ā/ ‘the earth’, after 600 BC and supposedly via /g/; see Beyer 2004, 51), older spellings persisted due to scribal conservatism. Especially {z} for */d/ > /d/ was still regularly employed in the high-frequency demonstrative pronouns and the relative marker (e.g., *zy* for /dī/ < */dī/, cf. Leander 1928, 9; Huehnergard 2002, 605 f.). Younger phonetic spellings with {d} occur rarely and begin to appear in the sub-standard orthography of private letters. (The frequent spelling *šql* ‘shekel’ [< */tīqlu/ ‘weight’], alternating with expected *tql*, may either point to historical orthography or to a borrowing from Babylonian, see Kaufman 1974, 29.)

The vocalic system has to be reconstructed from consonant letters indicating vowels, transcriptions in other writing systems, later vocalized traditions of Aramaic, and comparative philology. This information points to the following phonemic vowels: /a/ and /ā/ (the latter sometimes dropped to /ō/ in pronunciation, mostly before /n/, cf. Beyer 1984, 137), /e/ (< */i/) and /ī/, /o/ (< */u/) and /ū/, /ē/ and /ē/. Differences in quantity are obvious from minimal pairs or the cuneiform Uruk text (200–150 BC) like *ti-ḫu-ú-tú* for [tēḫōt] ‘below’. The correct representation of the phonemic vowel quantity in most Akkadian words borrowed by Aramaic (Kaufman 1974, 146), many of which entered the language during the Late Babylonian Period, also suggests that OffA fully preserved a distinction between long and short vowels (*contra* Muraoka/Porten ²2003, § 7). Vowel letters (“*plene* writing”) usually mark long vowels only, although quite often even they are not indicated either (“*defective* writing”): {ʾ} for word-final /ā/ and /ē/ (word-medial {ʾ} is generally historical for */ʾ/), {h} for word-final /ā/, rarely /ē/ and /ō/, {w} for word-final and medial /ū/ (and /ō/ < */ā/), {y} for word-final and medial /ī/. The diphthongs /aw/ and /ay/ were not yet monophthongized (Folmer 1995, 173–188). While the complete loss of short vowels in open syllables, common to all later varieties of Aramaic, evidently dates to the end of the 2nd c. AD (Beyer 1984, 128–136), Kaufman 1984 suggests a gradual reduction from OffA times onwards (but cf. Huehnergard 2002, 606).

Numerous sound changes had long taken place by then, but they are often hard to trace: the elision of /ʾ/ in syllable-final position (with */aʾ/ > /ē/, cf. Beyer 1984, 104–106); the assimilation of /n/ to the immediately following consonant (a similar assimilation of /l/ in the “imperfect” of *lqh* ‘to take’ and *slq* ‘to go up’, though common in older and later varieties, is more difficult to pinpoint in OffA: Muraoka / Porten ²2003, 12); the dissimilation of emphatics (Kaufman 1974, 121 f.; Folmer 1995, 94–101). In pronunciation, dentals caused assimilation within a stress-unit even beyond word-boundaries (hence occasional sandhi writings like A4.7:20 [uncorrected] *ʿznh* for *ʿd znh* ‘until this [day]’; B.7.1:3 *ʿdbr* for *ʿl dbr* ‘on account of’). Sporadic loss of intervocalic /ʾ/ and /h/ in, e.g., Syriac may be prefigured by *byš* /bīš/ ‘bad’ (KAI 258:3, 5th c. BC) as opposed to regular *bʾyš* /baʾīš/ (a *by*-form according to Beyer 1984, 131; differently Kaufman 1984, 90) and perhaps *hn lw* ‘if not’ for *hn lʾ hw* (C1.1:176). Personal names in cuneiform sources seem to indicate a change */a/ > /e/ before syllable-final /ʿ/, /h/ or /ḥ/ (Beyer 1984, 107 f.) and indistinct anaptyctic vowels beginning to break up word-final consonant clusters (ibid., 112–115), both systematically attested only in later Aramaic. According to the same evidence, /e/ gradually replaced /a/ as the pre-

formative vowel in the G-stem “imperfect” perhaps as late as from the 5th BC onwards. This bears on the Barth-Ginsberg-Law and the resulting change */ya-/>*/yi-/ (Aramaic /yē/) of the “imperfect” preformative, but the extent to which it was operative in earlier Aramaic is controversial (see 3.). Stress mostly falls on the final syllable. The frequent preservation of etymological */n/ before another consonant in writing (like *yntn* for /yattēn/ < */yantēn/ ‘he will give’) and even the regular use of the letter {n} for long (“geminate”) non-glottal obstruents in general (e.g., *šnpr* for /šēpper/ ‘bird’) is an OffA innovation. Scholars are divided as to whether this is a purely orthographical device indicating gemination, though ultimately based on a phonetic reality in Babylonian (Beyer 1984, 89–95; cf. Folmer 1995, 74–94), or whether it reflects true “degemination” by means of nasalization (i.e., */CC/ > /nC/; Garr 2007). Because of strong evidence for the assimilation of */n/ and the use of such spellings in cases where nasalization is unlikely (e.g., *tnl* from ‘ll ‘to enter’), many opt for the former.

3. Morphology

The *independent personal pronouns* mark the subject in nominal clauses (the 3rd person also serves as a copula) or reinforce it in verbal ones, usually preceding the verb; the 3m.pl. further expresses the object of a finite verb (Muraoka/Porten ²2003, § 39): *’nh* /’anā/ ‘I’; *’nt* /’attā/ (Cook 1990, 63 f.) ‘you (m.sg.)’; *’nty* (rarely: *’nt*) /’attī/ ‘you (f.sg.)’; *hw* /hū/ ‘he’; *hy* /hī/ ‘she’; *’nhn(h)* /’anāḥnā/ ‘we’; *’ntm* /’attūm/ ‘you (m.pl.)’; *hm(w)* /ḥom(ū)/ ‘they (m.)’. No 2/3f.pl. forms have been discovered so far. Spellings with *-nt* in the 2nd person are an OffA innovation. The proximal deictic *demonstratives* (‘this’) follow the noun to which they refer: *znh* (rare sub-standard spellings: *dnh*, *zn*, *dn*) /denā/ (m.sg.); *z* /dā/ (f.sg.); *’th* /’ellē/ (pl.); likewise their distal counterparts (‘that’; Folmer 1995, 198–209): *zk* (variant spelling: *dk*) /dēk/ (m.sg.; rare by-forms: *znk* /dēnāk/;

zkm or *dkm* /dōqom/(?)); *zk* (or *dk*) /dāk/ and *zky* (*dky*) /dākī/ (f.sg.); *’lk* /’ellēk/ and older or sub-standard *’lky* /’ellēkī/ (pl.). The *relative marker*, *zy* (*dy*) /dī/ (in fact a fossilized genitive of older Semitic */dū/), connects words in a genitive relationship (‘A of B’) and introduces relative as well as object clauses. The oscillation between traditional {z} and its later variant {d} is purely orthographic (see 2.). The *interrogative pronouns* preserve an archaic distinction between animate and inanimate: *mn* /man/ ‘who?’; *mh* /mā/ ‘what?’. The *indefinite pronoun* is *mnd^cm* /medde(ə)m/ ‘anything’ (Beyer 1984, 594 f.); for persons, *gbr* /gābar/ ‘someone’ (lit.: ‘man’) is also used frequently.

Nouns in OffA, including adjectives, follow the usual Semitic root and pattern system into which also Akkadian, Iranian, and Egyptian loanwords (Muraoka/Porten ²2003, 342–356) are integrated to a varying degree. Leander 1928, § 43 gives the best overview. The non-reconstructible *qātōl*-pattern typical for later Aramaic still seems unattested; as in older Northwest Semitic throughout, the originally monosyllabic patterns *qatl*, *qilt*, *qult* have a bisyllabic plural base with /a/ between the second and the third radical: /malək/ (< */malk/) ‘king’, /malakīn/ ‘kings’. All nouns inflect for gender (masc./fem.), number (singular, dual, plural), and state (absolute, construct, emphatic). Not every feminine noun is formally marked; at times singular and plural differ in

gender (Beyer 1984, 446 f.). The abs.st. acts as the default form and is also used with *kl* /koll/ ‘every’, with numerals, and for predicative adjectives; a noun in the cstr.st. forms a stress unit with the following one and expresses a genitive relationship (although with, e.g., Persian loanwords and certain constructions a periphrasis with *zy* is preferred); the emph. (or “determinate”) st. marks definiteness, i.e., identifiability in context. These dimensions of the noun are highlighted by endings:

Tab. 28.1: Nominal inflection

	Singular	Dual	Plural
m.abs.	/-Ø/	/-ayn/ -yn	/-īn/ -n, -yn
m.cstr.	/-Ø/	/-ay/ -y	/-ay/ -y
m.det.	/-ā/ -ʔ, rarely -h	/-ayyā/ -yʔ (?)	/-ayyā/-yʔ, rarely -yh
f.abs.	/-ā/ -h, -ʔ (< */-at/)	/-tayn/ -tyn	/-ān/ -n
f.cstr.	/-at/ -t	/-tay/ -ty	/-āt/ -t
f.det.	/-tā/ -tʔ, -th	*/-tayyā/ (unattested)	/-ātā/ -tʔ, -th

The f.abs.pl. ending /-ān/ is a characteristic trait of Aramaic vis-à-vis other Semitic languages. Due to the consonantal writing system, the dual often cannot be distinguished from the plural, but it seems to be hardly productive and restricted to the numerals ‘two’ and ‘two hundred’ as well as parts of the body that come in pairs (note that the only possible attestation of the m.emph. in C2.1:11 is somewhat problematic, see Hoftijzer/Jongeling 1995, s.v. *rgl*₂, ad 3). In the discussion about the old f.abs.sg. ending /-at/, which is allegedly preserved in a few cases (cf. Folmer 1995, 252–257), it has generally been overlooked that most instances from OffA proper (on the Hermopolis letters, see 5.) can be explained as adverbs: *qblt* ‘[to send] complaining’ (A6.8:3), alternating with the variant expression *šlh qbylh* ‘to send a complaint’; *zpt* ‘on loan’ (B3.1:3); *ʔntt* ‘as a wife’ (B3.8:22); *rḥmt* ‘affectionately’, alternating with *brḥmh* ‘in affection’ (*passim*). Adverbs tend to preserve /-(a)t/ in later Aramaic, too (Beyer 1984, 96 f. and 444). *ʔgrt* ‘letter’, by contrast, may simply be a by-form of *ʔgrh* closer to Akkadian *egirtu* (Kaufman 1974, 48).

Some classes of nouns behave differently: gentilicia in /-āy/ (also used for Aramaic ordinals excepting /tənyān/ ‘second’, which in OffA is the only securely attested form) have /-ē/ instead of /-ayyā/ in the m.det.pl. (/yahūdāy/, /yahūdāy-ē/ ‘Judean(s)’) in order to avoid */-āyayyā/ due to euphony (Kaufman 1974, 127 f.). Feminine nouns originally ending in */-āt/, */-īt/, and */-ūt/ (Leander 1928, § 57; Beyer 1984, 454–456) by and large also lost their /-t/ in the abs.sg. (except in the greeting formula *šrrt* /šar-rūrūt/ ‘health’: an archaism?) and pl., but preserve the long vowel of the stem (e.g., abs.sg. *ʔhh* /ʔaḥā/, cstr. *ʔht* /ʔaḥāt/, ‘sister’). Plural forms, however, expand their long vowels into triphthongs before vocalic endings: abs. /-awān/, cstr. /-awāt/, det. /-awātā/ for */-āt/; /-iyān/, /-iyāt/, /-iyātā/ for */-īt/; /-uwān/, /-uwāt/, /-uwātā/ for */-ūt/ (to be reconstructed from Biblical Aramaic, cf. cstr. ܡܠܟܘܬܐ; < */malkuwāt/, det. ܡܠܟܘܬܐܐ; < */malkuwātā/ ‘kingdoms’). Nouns ending in */-ī/ (> /-ē/ in Northwest Semitic, as evidenced by the vowel letter {h} which is not used for /ī/), including the participles of verbal roots IIIḥ, follow similar principles (Leander 1928, § 54; Beyer 1984, 456–458): m.abs. and cstr.sg. /-ē/, det. /-iyā/; abs.pl. /-ayn/, cstr. /-ay/, det. /-ayyā/; f.abs.sg. /-iyā/, cstr. /-iyāt/, det. /-ītā/; abs.pl. /-iyān/, cstr. /-iyāt/, det. /-iyātā/. Other nouns are irregular (cf. sg.det. *byt* /baytā/ ‘house’, abs.sg. *by* /bay/ < */bayt/, det.pl. *bty* /bāttayyā/);

some expand a biconsonantal sg. base in the pl. by /-ah-/, or even use an entirely different root (“suppletion”), like ²*nth* /²əttā/ ‘woman’, abs.pl. *nš(y)n* /nešīn/ (Muraoka/Porten ²2003, 74f.; Leander 1928, § 59; Beyer 1984, 452).

Pronominal suffixes (Leander 1928, § 12) can be attached to nouns in the cstr. state for indicating possession. Together with *zyl* /dīl-/, they form an independent possessive pronoun; proleptic suffixes before the relative marker often indicate inalienable possession (Folmer 1995, 304–312). Judging from vocalized texts in later Aramaic varieties, consonantal endings (m.sg. of the regular noun and throughout in the feminine) have a linking vowel with the same quality as the original vowel of the suffix: /-ī/ -y ‘my’; /-āk(ā)/ -k ‘your (m.sg.)’; /-ék(ī)/ -ky or rarely -k ‘your (f.sg.)’; /-ēh/ -h ‘his’; /-āh(ā)/ -h, rarely -hh ‘her’; /-ān(ā)/ -n, infrequently -n’ ‘our’; /-ōkūm/ -km (occasionally /-ōkūn/ -kn) ‘your (m.pl.)’; /-ēkənn/ -kn ‘your (f.pl.)’; /-ōhūm/ -hm, very rarely -hwm ‘their (m.)’ (in the latest documents also /-ōhūn/ -hwn); /-ēhənn/ -hn (?) ‘their (f.)’ (not securely attested). However, suffixes are added directly to the ending /-ay-/ of the m.cstr.pl. and m./f.cstr.du.: /-ayy/ -y ‘my’; /-áy-k(ā)/ -yk ‘your (m.sg.)’; /-áy-kī/ -yky ‘your (f.sg.)’; /-áw-h(ī)/ (< */-áy-hū/) -why, rarely (as in Old Aramaic) -wh ‘his’; /-áy-h(ā)/ -yh, rarely -yhh and -yh’ ‘her’; /-áy-n(ā)/ -yn, infrequently -yn’ ‘us’; /-ay-kūm/ -ykm ‘your (m.pl.)’; /-ay-kənn/ -ykn ‘your (f.pl.)’; /-ay-hūm/ -yhm, very rarely -yhwm ‘their (m.)’; */-ay-hənn/ ‘their (f.)’ (unattested). ²*b* /²ab/ ‘father’ and ²*h* /²aḥ/ ‘brother’ attach consonantal suffixes to a vocalic cstr. in /-ū/ also in the sg., yet note ²*by* /²ābī/ ‘my father’ in the 1sg. (*hm* /ḥam/ ‘father-in-law’ is only attested in Post-Achaemenid times, but behaves the same way: *whmwhy* ‘and his father-in-law’, PAT 0117:3 [Palmyra]). It is unclear whether word-final /ā/ and /ī/ in some forms were still pronounced (cf. Cook 1990). The peculiar 3m.sg. suffix with vocalic forms /-áw-h(ī)/ instead of expected /-áy-h(ū)/, which also graphically distinguishes between the masc. and the fem., defies a straightforward historical explanation (see Beyer 1984, 150f., and Muraoka/Porten ²2003, 47, n. 219 for some proposals).

Cardinal numbers (Muraoka/Porten ²2003, § 21) are spelled out but infrequently due to a widespread use of ciphers and are thus little known; ‘one’ and ‘two’ are adjectives, the other numerals substantives, of which the masculine forms ‘three’ to ‘ten’ have a feminine ending and vice versa. ‘Twenty’ to ‘ninety’ are plurals.

Various *prepositions*, of which *b* /ba-/, *l* /la-/ (the /a/ is due to paradigmatic levelling), and *k* /ka-/ are proclitic, mark spatial, temporal or logical relations between entities. They govern a noun or a possessive suffix; some prepositions which go back to plural nouns take suffixes attached to the ending /-ay-/. *Function words* like coordinating (*w* /wa-/ ‘and’; ²*w* /²aw/ ‘or’) and subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *hn* /ḥen/ ‘if’, or the relative marker *zy* combined with a proclitic preposition like *kzy* /ka-dī/ ‘when’) establish connections between clauses. *Particles* like ²*p* /²ap/ ‘also’ express all sorts of nuances; *deictics*, such as *h*² /hā/ ‘lo!’, often act as discourse markers. The existence marker ²(y)t(y) /²t(ay)/ ‘there is’ (negation: *lyt(y)* /layt(ay)/) together with the preposition *l* /la-/ replaces the verb ‘to have’ which is lacking in Aramaic. Prohibitive expressions use the *negation* ²*l* /²al/, all other utterances ²*l* /lā/. Since Aramaic has but a restricted number of *adverbs* (some being lexicalized usages of nouns), adverbial relations are often conveyed by means of modal verbs.

Verbs express the interaction of tense, aspect, and modality by using of two main inflectional categories marking distinctions of person, number, and gender by means of affirmatives alone or pre- and affirmatives, i.e., the “perfect” (with a merger of

3m.pl. and 3f.pl. in OffA) and the “imperfect” conjugation. Syllabic spellings may indicate that a total levelling of the preformative /yē-/ of the “imperfect”, as in the vocalized traditions, is rather late in Aramaic, the first direct attestation being *lypwq* /lēp-pōq/ ‘may he go out!’ in a papyrus from ca. 200 AD (Beyer 1984, 108–112). However, Lipiński 1981, 192 f., suggests that it was */yi-/ already in early Aramaic. The normal “imperfect” has a shorter counterpart (“jussive”) serving also as the base of the imperative (on which see Beyer 1983, 131 f.) and a by-form attaching /-an/ to forms without affirmatives (“energic”). The verb *ktb* ‘to write’ acts as an example for sound roots in the unmarked stem (“G”) here, with a characteristic vowel after the second root consonant (“radical”, referred to as I, II, or III) in both the “perfect” and the “imperfect”:

Tab. 28.2: Finite verbal forms

	Perfect	Imperfect	Jussive	Imperative
3m.sg.	<i>ktb</i> /katab-Ø/	<i>yktb</i> /ya-ktōb-Ø/	<i>yktb</i> /ya-ktōb-Ø/	–
3f.sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-at/	<i>iktbt</i> /ta-ktōb-Ø/	<i>iktbt</i> /ta-ktōb-Ø/	–
2m.sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-t(ā)/	<i>iktbt</i> /ta-ktōb-Ø/	<i>iktbt</i> /ta-ktōb-Ø/	<i>ktb</i> /k(ə)tōb-Ø/
2f.sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-tī/	<i>iktbt(y)n</i> /ta-ktōb-īn/	<i>iktbt</i> /ta-ktōb-ī/	<i>ktby</i> /k(ə)tōb-ī/
1sg.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-(ə)t/	<i>ʔktb</i> /ʔa-ktōb-Ø/	<i>ʔktb</i> /ʔa-ktōb-Ø/	–
3m.pl.	<i>ktbw</i> /katab-ū/	<i>yktb(w)n</i> /ya-ktōb-ūn/	<i>yktbw</i> /ya-ktōb-ū/	–
3f.pl.	<i>ktbw</i> /katab-ū/	(unattested)	(unattested)	–
2m.pl.	<i>ktbt(w)n</i> /katab-tūn/	<i>iktbt(w)n</i> /ta-ktōb-ūn/	<i>iktbw</i> /ta-ktōb-ū/	<i>ktbw</i> /k(ə)tōb-ū/
2f.pl.	<i>ktbt</i> /katab-tən/	<i>iktbn</i> /ta-ktōb-(ə)n/ or /ta-ktōb-ān/	<i>iktbn</i> /ta-ktōb-(ə)n/	(unattested)
1pl.	<i>ktbn</i> /katab-n(ā)/	<i>nktb</i> /na-ktōb-Ø/	<i>nktb</i> /na-ktōb-Ø/	–

(Concerning the feminine plural of the “imperfect”, later evidence unanimously points to an affirmative /-ān/, presumably on analogy with the masculine /-ūn/. This change from expected */-n/ either occurred secondarily [Beyer 1984, 147] or had already happened by the time of Old Aramaic [Huehnergard 1987].)

The “perfect” covers various nuances of relative past (punctual, durative, resultative; in subordinate clauses also pluperfect) and performatives as well as gnomic expressions; in the protasis of conditional clauses it acts as a kind of *futurum exactum*. The “imperfect” is less strongly marked for tense, expressing a broad range of present-future notions (with *zy* /dī/ also for final clauses) and several types of deontic as well as epistemic modality (Gzella 2004, 301–310). OffA by and large preserves the old distinction between the “jussive” for deontic modality and the “(long) imperfect” (see 6.), but not all forms can be clearly distinguished on morphological grounds. No specific meaning of the “energic” has yet been identified, but it acts as the default form for suffixed “imperfects”. The active participle *ktb* /kātēb/, inflected like a noun, had begun to be integrated into the verbal system as a present-tense or imperfective form already in a previous stage of the language. Together with the “perfect” or “imperfect” of the auxiliary verb *hwy* ‘to be’, it explicitly renders the imperfective aspect for the durative or iterative *Aktionsart* in the past and in the future respectively. Its passive counterpart *kt(y)b* /katīb/ is sometimes used actively, most notably in the resultative construction /šamīc lī/ ‘it is heard by me’, i.e., ‘I have heard’, a calque from Old Persian (Gzella 2004, 184–194, and 2008, 92 f.). The infinitive *mktb* /maktab/ (except for the fossilized archaism *lʾmr* /lēmār/ ‘saying’ always with a prefixed /m-/ in OffA: Gzella 2008, 97 f.) marks verbal complements.

Several derivational categories (“verbal stems”), by contrast, express distinctions in *Aktionsart* and voice, thereby also intersecting with tense, aspect, and modality. Their semantics in Aramaic are underresearched, but generally speaking (leaving unpredictable usages apart), the D-stem with its lengthened middle root consonant expresses plurality or, with intransitive verbs, factitivity. The C-stem has a prefix */ha-/ > /ʾa-/ (spellings with [h] are presumably historical) and expresses causativity; those few causatives with a prefix /š/ or /s/ in Aramaic are generally believed to be lexical loans from other languages (Kaufman 1974, 123 f.). The basic stems each have a medio-passive variant with a /-t-/ prefix (Gt, Dt, Ct [on which see Beyer 1984, 150]; root-initial sibilants swap position with and, if voiced, undergo partial assimilation to that /t/) and an ablaut passive (Gp, Dp, Cp), but except for the participle, the latter is gradually disappearing, beginning with the “imperfect” (Gzella 2009). Some forms are only attested in Biblical Aramaic with a later vocalization (see 6.):

Tab. 28.3: Verbal stems

3m.sg.	Perfect	Imperfect	Imperative	Participle	Infinitive
G	/katab/	/yaktəb/	/k(ə)təb/	/kātəb/	/maktab/
Gp	/katīb/	(see 5.)	–	/katīb/	–
Gt	/ʾətkateb/	/yətkateb/(?)	/ʾətkateb/	/mətkateb/(?)	/ʾətkatābā/ (BA)
D	/kattəb/	/yakattəb/	/kattəb/	/makattəb/	/kattābā/
Dp	(unattested)	(unattested)	–	/makattab/	–
Dt	/ʾətkattab/	/yətkattab/(?)	/ʾətkattab/	/mətkattab/(?)	הַתְּנַדְּבוֹרַת [cstr.], Eśr 7:16
C	/(h)akteb/	/ya(h)akteb/	/(h)akteb/	/ma(ha)kteb/	/(h)aktābā/
Cp	/(h)əkteb/	(unattested)	–	/ma(ha)ktab/(BA)	–
Ct	/ʾət(h)akteb/	(unattested)	(unattested)	(unattested)	(unattested)

Roots with unstable consonants or long vowels as radicals exhibit a number of changes: /ʾ/ in syllable-final position is elided (with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel: */yaʾmar/ > /yēmar/ ‘he says’), which triggered a merger of verbs IIIʾ and IIIī (Folmer 1995, 222–236); /n/ in verbs *In* and /l/ in *lqh* ‘to take’ is assimilated to the following consonant, and the imperative has a biradical basis (*qh* /*qaḥ*/ ‘take!’). Presumably in analogy with this feature (Huehnergard 2002, 606), several verbs *Iy* lengthen their second radical in the “imperfect” in order to compensate for the unstable first radical (*yd* /*yadda*ʿ/ ‘he knows’; Beyer 1984, 149) and also form a biradical imperative (*hb* /*hab*/ ‘give!’). In the C-stem series of these verbs, original root-initial */w/ (> /y/) reappears. Verbs with a geminated second radical lengthen the first one instead (often with “degemination”, at least in spelling; see 2.) in forms with preformatives or prefixes ending in a vowel, e.g., ‘*lt* /ʿallət/ ‘I entered’ (G-perf. 1.sg.), but *m*ʿl /taʿʿəl/ ‘you enter’ (G-impf. 2m.sg.), perhaps due to a simplification of the imperative (* /ʿəl/ > /ʿəl/ ‘enter!’) or vice versa. Gt, D, and Dt forms (and perhaps also the G-participle, as in later Aramaic) inflect like sound roots. “Hollow roots” with a long vowel as a middle radical have that vowel in forms based on the G-“imperfect”, otherwise the corresponding long vowel of the sound verb: *qm* /*qām*/ ‘he rose’, but *yqwm* /*yaqūm*/ ‘he rises’. The G-stem active participle and the entire D-stem of most verbs inflect like sound roots: *symyn* /*šāyemīn*/ ‘fasting (m.abs.pl.)’; some, however, have a L(engthening)-stem instead of the D (like *rym*, cf. BA מְרִוּמִים ‘exalting’). Verbs IIIīʾ

preserve their original word-final /-ī/ in all “perfect” and imperative forms (> /ay/ with /ī/ and > /aw/ with /ū/ of the affirmatives), but change it to /-ē/ in all “imperfect” and participle forms and in the G-infinitive. Many verbs, however, have a “perfect” in /-ā/ (/ay-/ before consonantal affirmatives, /-āt/ in the 3f.sg., /-aw/ in the 3.pl.).

Pronominal suffixes can also be attached to all verbal forms except for the participle in order to mark a pronominal direct object (e.g., *yhbth* /yahabtā-hā/ ‘you gave her’), but from OffA on, the 3m./f.pl. suffix has been regularly replaced by the independent pronoun as a direct object (Gzella 2008, 93). Practically the same suffixes as with nouns are used, no doubt including the linking vowel after consonantal forms. However, the 1.sg. has /-(a)nī/ -ny ‘me’, and “imperfect” forms without affirmatives usually attach suffixes to the “energetic” ending /-an/, but without a linking vowel; /n/ presumably assimilates to /k/ in pronunciation: *yšymnk* /yašimákkā/ < */yašim-án-kā/ ‘he places you’. The morphological opposition between “imperfect” and “jussive” is thus restored. Vocalic forms of verbs IIĪ dissolve into diphthongs before the linking vowel (e.g., *hḥwyn* /-(h)aḥwiyán(ā)/ ‘he informed us’).

4. Syntax

A supposed VSO word order as in Old Aramaic seems not rigid in OffA, since many pragmatic factors cause variation; a tendency towards verb-final sentence patterns has often been attributed to Akkadian influence (cf. Folmer 1995, 521–587), and fronting of the direct object to Persian. Double subordination is avoided in favour of parataxis (Gzella 2004, 160). When a definite, animate noun acts as a direct object, it normally has the object marker *l* (presumably identical to the preposition; Folmer 1995, 340–371). Agreement in number and gender between subject and predicate is often straightforward, but can be overridden with coordinative subjects, passive predicates, and collectives like *ḥyl* ‘force’ (ibid., 429–492).

5. The Hermopolis letters

Eight private letters on papyrus discovered at Hermopolis in 1945 (A2.1–7; Hug 1993, 35–41, with grammar) are clearly distinct from OffA proper, whose “official air” they lack, no less than from the rest of Old Aramaic. On palaeographic grounds, they can be dated to the late 6th/early 5th c. BC and presumably reflect a typologically older variety of Aramaic present in Egypt even before Persian times. Its provenance, however, remains controversial; based on some linguistic features, Greenfield/Porten 1968, 219–223 suggest a Western origin, but the matter requires further investigation. Most personal names in these documents are Aramaean or Egyptian. The spelling is largely phonetic and less consistent, with non-standard {h} instead of {ʿ} for /ā/ also in the m.det.sg., *dh* instead of *z*’ for the f.sg. proximal deictic, and a certain preference for defective spelling; as in Old Aramaic, etymological */n/ is often not written. Due to its prestige, however, Achaemenid spelling practice has left some traces (see Hug 1993, 53). In striking contrast to OffA, but like other 7th/6th c. material, the noun patterns attested are almost exclusively “internal”, i.e., without pre- and suffixes (ibid., 61–63),

and the 3pl. object suffix *-hm* with verbs has not yet been replaced by the independent pronoun *hmw* (*ibid.*, 20 and 59). Possessive suffixes of the 2/3m.pl. ending in *-n/* are a hallmark of the Hermopolis corpus as opposed to the rest of older Aramaic (but do not necessarily preclude the same change in later Aramaic, since */m/* and */n/* alternate frequently in Semitic); unfortunately, there is no instance of the 3f.pl. “perfect”, whose identity with the masculine form counts as a diagnostic feature of OffA. Further, the old f.abs.sg. ending *-at/* has been preserved even in nouns which act as grammatical subjects and direct objects (Folmer 1995, 252–257; the few instances of the same ending in OffA, by contrast, seem to mark adverbs), but there is no obvious functional distinction as opposed to younger *-ā/* (the fact that almost all cases of *-at/* occur with direct objects no doubt results from the general scarcity of feminine subjects in this corpus). A similar feature in the Aramaic contracts from Saqqāra might have been influenced by Phoenician, also used in that area (cf. Segal 1983, 11 f.). The Hermopolis letters might still attest a (fossilized?) “imperfect” of the G-stem passive **/yōktab/* (*y(w)bl* /*yūbal*/ ‘let it be delivered’, often in a formulaic expression at the end; see Muraoka/Porten ²2003, 119 f.). As in later Western Aramaic and Syriac, the C-stem infinitive has a prefix */m-/* (Folmer 1995, 192–198). The most distinctive syntactic feature is the “periphrastic imperative”. It has been explained as polite (Gzella 2004, 266–269) or conative (Gianto 2008, 21), but both are not mutually exclusive (e.g., ‘try to be on time!’ is a conative expression used for politeness).

6. Biblical Aramaic

With Ezr 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26, Dan 2:4b–7:28 (containing many famous passages like those about the Feet of Clay, the young men in the Fiery Furnace, the Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar’s Feast, the vision of the Son of Man etc.), Jer 10:11, and Gen 31:47, Biblical Aramaic (BA) encompasses ca. 1 % of the Old Testament canon. While the exhaustive grammar of Bauer/Leander 1927 has not yet been replaced, Rosenthal ⁷2006 provides a concise and reliable modern presentation. Dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew normally include the BA lexicon as well, but Vogt 1971 is unrivalled in its attention to philological detail, whereas Beyer 1984–2004 situates all words in their broader Aramaic context. Since the heterogeneous material covers several centuries of language history, its linguistic position oscillates, but most scholars agree that BA is largely identical with OffA (Rosenthal 1939, 60–71; ⁷2006, 10). According to redactional criticism, too, the nucleus of Daniel goes back at least to the 4th c. BC, and Ezra might contain even older material (Gzella 2004, 41–45).

Literary reworkings (the final redaction of Daniel took place ca. 165 BC), scribal transmission, and vocalizations (Tiberian and Babylonian; on the latter cf. Morag 1964) which were heavily influenced by a much later stage of the language, however, led to a quite distinct linguistic garb, because in Palestine OffA came into contact with a local Judaeen variety and developed further. The Tiberian pointing of BA is more heterogeneous than that of Biblical Hebrew, but follows similar principles: stops in weak articulation are spirantized (also after */ay/*) and short unstressed vowels in open syllables lost or, rarely, lengthened. At times, consonantal text and pointing reflect forms belonging to different varieties of Aramaic (Gzella 2004, 125 n. 31; 133). The

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Holger Gzella, Leiden (The Netherlands)