

# V. The Semitic Languages and Dialects III: North-West Semitic

## 18. Northwest Semitic in General

1. General
2. The data
3. Phonology
4. Morphology and morphosyntax
5. Syntax
6. Lexicon
7. Conclusion
8. References

### Abstract

*The present chapter provides an overview of the language group labelled “Northwest Semitic” in most historical-comparative frameworks or “Syro-Palestinian” in dialect geography. Since “Northwest Semitic” is commonly thought to include the Canaanite and Aramaic subgroups as well as the local idiom of the city-state of Ugarit, it constitutes the linguistic background of the Hebrew Bible. Several other textual witnesses also associated with it remain controversial concerning their classification. The presentation focuses on the direct and indirect evidence for all these languages between the second and the first millennia BC, their affiliations in genetic, geographical, and sociolinguistic terms, and an outline of a diachronic comparative grammar devoted to the most significant features. This results in an attempt to review different viable approaches to the material and to point out how elusive the concept “Northwest Semitic” actually is.*

### 1. General

The term “Northwest Semitic” (NWS) was canonized by C. Brockelmann (1908, 6) in order to systematically account for the similarities between the “Canaanite” (above all Hebrew with Phoenician) and the “Aramaic” language groups in contradistinction to Arabic and Ethiopic in the South(-west). This refines F. Hommel’s older distinction between Akkadian (“East Semitic”) and the rest (“West Semitic”) along both genealogical and geographical lines. After their discovery, further idioms from the same region, like Ugaritic, were squeezed into that framework on the basis of isoglosses. They all are distinguished from Arabic, their closest relative, by a shift of word-initial \*/w/ to /y/ and the systematic use of an originally bisyllabic base \*/qVtal-/ in the plural of *qVtl* nouns before external plural markers. Other noteworthy features emerged but gradually in the course of time.

“NWS Philology” has become a widespread designation for the study of the Hebrew Bible in its linguistic setting. While its precise subgrouping remains controversial, NWS is, together with Arabic, often subsumed to “Central Semitic” (Huehnergard 2005). However, several scholars prefer a distinction between West (= by and large NWS), South (Arabic and Ethiopic), and East Semitic; a few also add North Semitic (Lipiński 2001, 59–74). Similarities between (N)WS and Arabic would then be areal or independent phenomena. The speakers are supposed to have come in waves from their original homelands, wherever these may have been (Fleisch 1947, 22–30), to Syria-Palestine from ca. 3000 B.C. onwards (Sekine 1973). One can group the members of NWS typologically according to clusters of linguistic features (Ginsberg 1970); within a genealogical model, they all derive from a common ancestor by means of shared innovations (Hasselbach/Huehnergard 2008). Permanent contact from Antiquity onwards in a relatively small area, however, led to borrowing or convergence throughout and, presumably, the evolution of new dialects. The interrelations between them are so complicated that it proves extremely difficult to deduce them all from preceding stages. Other scholars thus point to the diffusion of linguistic features from centre to periphery along axes of social contact as the decisive origin of a continuous dialectal map of “Syro-Palestinian” languages connecting border idioms which were mutually intelligible (Harris 1939; Rabin 1963; Garr 1985). It has even been suggested to regard NWS as the basic unity (Moscati 1956; Garbini 1960). As polar opposites of that dialect continuum, Canaanite and Aramaic, only become identifiable with the breakthrough of alphabetic writing from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC onwards. Akkadian, the *lingua franca* of the day, eclipsed much of the linguistic diversity during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. It still has to be explored whether language contact can also account for the similarities between NWS and some Ancient North Arabian varieties, such as a definite article *h(n)*- and the assimilation of /n/. Very often, one has to compare the extremes of dialect diffusion instead of tracing a geographically and chronologically continuous attestation. Hence, possible examples of a wave-like spread over long periods of time have also been explained as instances of “parallel development” (e.g., Blau 1978), an Aristotelian notion of *entelecheia* according to which a basic structural affinity caused similar changes to happen independently. Comparisons between ancient and modern Semitic languages without any direct contact prove that such phenomena do occur. Their impact on the grammatical core, like the loss of inflectional case marking in Canaanite, Aramaic, the Arabic dialects, and Ethiopic, can produce typologically similar systems across sub-families. Since not all of the attested languages were necessarily used as vernaculars, taking more seriously the interaction between standard idioms and local dialects as a result of linguistic prestige, the effects of scribal traditions and imperfect learning, or the social identification of a speaker (e.g., standard and substandard), helps uncover further reasons for variation (Gianto 2008).

## 2. The data

From a maximalist vantage point, which includes names from the earliest cuneiform and Egyptian sources together with the spoken forms of Hebrew and Aramaic, NWS languages are attested for more than 4,000 years. They appear in different scripts as

isolated words, hybrid forms, literary idioms, and vernaculars, hence their linguistic status often remains controversial. None of these writing systems, however, can fully render all the basic phonemes present in any NWS language at the moment an utterance was recorded (Pfeiffer 1956). The earliest clearly identifiable traces of NWS are found in several thousand personal names of the so-called “*Amorites*” and keep appearing in Akkadian cuneiform texts from a wide geographical region between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (Streck 2000, see ch. 19). Obviously, the language reflected by these names may be much older. Non-Akkadian features include the “imperfect” preformative /ya-/ instead of /i-/. The change of word-initial \*/w/ to /y/ (/yaqar/ ‘is precious’) and assimilation of /n/ before another consonant (/yattin/ ‘he gave’, varying freely with /yantin/) correspond to NWS, but the case system of Amorite appears to preserve some more archaic traits. Internal variation points not only to different spelling practices, but perhaps also to different linguistic varieties; not necessarily all of them belong to NWS. B. Landsberger first classified this material as Eastern Canaanite, whereas M. Noth and others, for historical reasons, view the Amorites, who migrated from Northern Syria into Mesopotamia, as predecessors of the Aramaeans. But linguistic criteria do not establish a close association with any specific form of later NWS, so that a more comprehensive approach is advisable (Moran 1961; Greenfield 1969). Others group Amorite together with Ugaritic as “North Semitic” (Lipiński <sup>2</sup>2001, 51–55).

*Ugaritic*, the language of a cultural melting-pot (modern Rās Šamra in Syria) on the Mediterranean coast opposite Cyprus and discovered in 1929, has also been classified as (“Northern”) Canaanite, but is now mostly viewed as an independent NWS language (Sivan 2001, see ch. 20). It shares some grammatical and many lexical features with Hebrew and Phoenician (e.g., two forms of the independent 1sg. pronoun, deictically neutral prepositions, suppletion involving  $\sqrt{h}lk$  and  $\sqrt{y}lk$  ‘to go’, reduplication of the final radical as the normal D-stem equivalent for hollow roots, and the use of the infinitive absolute like a finite verb) and seems closer to the Canaanite branch than to Aramaic. It has no known descendants, but some Northern Iron Age dialects exhibit similarities with Ugaritic (e.g., consistent monophthongization of diphthongs). The archaic causative prefix /š-/, despite the 3sg. personal pronouns in /h-/ seems idiosyncratic within West Semitic. Ugaritic is directly attested in more than a thousand mythological and ritual texts, letters, legal documents, and economic lists inscribed on clay tablets in a cuneiform alphabet during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Bordreuil/Pardee 2009). Judging from archaisms in vocabulary and verbal morphosyntax, poetic texts reflect an older stage of the language. The unusual writing system marks the quality of a vowel following a glottal stop, but is otherwise purely consonantal. Ugaritic material also surfaces in syllabic Akkadian texts from the same place, esp. in multilingual word-lists (Huehnergard <sup>2</sup>2008). A supraregional poetic tradition links Ugaritic mythological compositions with the earliest parts of the Hebrew Bible. Some letters sent from outside contain non-standard features; a typically Phoenician construction surfaces in a letter dispatched by the king of Tyre to Ugarit (Gzella 2010a). A few texts also exhibit unexpected sound correspondences (Blau 1978, 39).

The first tangible forms of Canaanite appear perhaps already in place names in 20<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c. BC Egyptian transcriptions, whereas the few “Proto-Canaanite” inscriptions in archaic linear script (ca. 15<sup>th</sup> c. BC?), because of their poor state of preservation, are hard to evaluate. Besides substrates in Akkadian cuneiform tablets from Emar

and other places in Syria-Palestine (Sivan 1984), NWS material surfaces in more than 300 Akkadian letters in cuneiform sent during the 14<sup>th</sup> c. BC by vassal rulers of cities like Byblos, Tyre, Jerusalem, Shechem, Gezer, and Ashkelon, which were drowning into political chaos, to their inactive overlords in Egypt (Rainey 1996). After their place of discovery in 1887, modern el-Amarna on the east bank of the Nile (the capital of Amenhotep IV), they are called *Amarna letters*. The many idiosyncratic features in the Akkadian of these texts, esp. verbal morphology and lexical “glosses”, closely correspond to Ugaritic. An important isogloss is the preformative /t-/ in the 3m.pl. “imperfect”. The Amarna letters are often thought to reflect the scribes’ native language as substrate; a different model views them as an “institutionalized interlanguage” which emerged from the fossilization of an imperfect knowledge of Babylonian language and scribal traditions by speakers of NWS (Gianto 2000). Since Canaanite was subsequently used in the same cities during the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the NWS material in the Amarna letters is usually associated with that branch. Some characteristic phonological features of later Canaanite like the sound shifts /t/ > /š/, \*/d/ > /z/, and \*/t/ > /s/ are not, or not systematically, indicated by syllabic cuneiform; no information for the D-stem “perfect” (\*qattila/ > /qittila/) marking off 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium Canaanite is available. But there is evidence for several other traits: \*/ā/ > /ō/, final /-ī/ in the 1sg. independent pronoun (e.g., *a-nu-ki* /’anōkī/ in EA 287:66 as opposed to Akkadian *anāku*) with the concomitant shift of the 1sg. “perfect” affirmative \*/-tu/ > /-tī/ (*ibid.* 53), and a C-stem prefix /hi-/ (< \*/ha-/, in EA 256:7: *hi-iḫ-bi-e* /hiḫbi’e/ ‘he hid’; Ginsberg 1970, 104). Further, certain facets of verbal usage in 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium NWS evolve naturally from the linguistic situation in the Amarna letters (Moran 1961). Despite instances of linguistic variation, dialectal distinctions like “Western Canaanite” as the forerunner of Phoenician and “Central Canaanite” as the one of Hebrew (Blau 1978, 36 n. 28) are hard to establish in this corpus.

With the beginning of the “Dark Ages” ca. 1200 BC, the Eastern Mediterranean changed in socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic respects. Following population movements and an economic crisis due to the impact of the “Sea Peoples”, during a power vacuum after Egypt and the Hittites had withdrawn from Syria-Palestine, many old city-states along the coast and in the plain were destroyed or abandoned. At the same time, settlements in the highlands of Ephraim, Judah, and Transjordan grew steadily and led to the appearance of new territorial states with unclear boundaries. Their chancelleries promoted standardization and alphabetic writing instead of syllabic cuneiform for the local languages, supposedly as an expression of increasing “national” self-awareness. From then on, Canaanite, in the form of Hebrew, and Aramaic are directly attested until today. The gradual emergence of new languages no doubt continued processes begun in the late Bronze Age, but the evidence from this transition period is mostly restricted to a number of traditional personal names inscribed on arrowheads and difficult to classify (Hess 2007). Around 1000 BC, the structure of NWS in the whole area, esp. particular subject/object marking and the tense-aspect-mood system, was transformed following the loss of short unstressed word-final vowels which previously indicated inflectional cases and distinguished various verbal conjugations. Prior semantic bleaching may have reinforced this. The same idioms also acquired grammaticalized definite articles from different origins whose functions later converged. Eventually, a new “epigraphic habit” emerged once administration and institutions grew and gave new life even to the scribal culture long established in cities

like Byblos, Jerusalem and elsewhere. In the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC, alphabetic royal inscriptions commemorating the deeds of local kings begin to appear in various Syro-Palestinian languages. Perhaps the native chancelleries thereby adopted the Assyrian practice of leaving stelae and rock inscriptions with prose narrations. Consequently, these languages had to create suitable stylistic resources.

*Phoenician* (see ch. 21) yields the earliest continuous epigraphic evidence for 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium Canaanite, but is diversified from the outset into the local dialects of several ancient city-states, never formally united, along the northern Levantine coast (Friedrich/Röllig 1999; Gzella 2009c). Some have grouped these dialects together with Ugaritic, but, despite important differences, the majority opinion places them closer to Hebrew. A few inscriptions from Byblos, now generally dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> c. BC, reflect the most archaic variety, which supposedly preserved remainders of short unstressed word-final vowels in the verb (*bny* /banaya/ 'he built', KAI 4:1), had a relative particle *z* (which has an early forerunner in the Sarepta jar inscription KTU 6.70, often assumed to reflect a Phoenician dialect) instead of later ʔ, and retained the old 3sg. possessive suffix *-h* not used in other dialects. However, it still lacked a definite article. Besides later Byblian, most texts are composed in "Standard Phoenician" (marked off by, e.g., district possessive and object suffixes for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person) which was not confined to Tyre and Sidon, but used all over the Mediterranean by Phoenician colonists, travellers, and merchants; it was even adopted as a prestige language in Asia Minor. In the western colonies, an offshoot of Standard Phoenician became what is known as Punic. Punic persisted in Roman North Africa until the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD and is characterized by the reduction of gutturals and short vowels as well as by different 3m.sg. possessive suffixes. Some later texts are written in the Latin script. Typical features of Phoenician include the shift of \*/ā/ to /o/ in stressed syllables, the preservation of the genitive case ending in suffixed nouns, and the causative stem prefix /yi-/ (< \*/hi-/ [< \*/ha-/]: palatalization caused by a high vowel?). The formulaic nature of most witnesses limits the amount of linguistic information.

*Hebrew* (Sáenz-Badillos 1993; see ch. 22), too, acts as an umbrella term for several Canaanite varieties united by a common culture with considerable regional diversity. Most studies focus on those represented by the Hebrew Bible. Even after centuries of redactional history and in the phonological and morphological garb of vocalization traditions dating from a much later stage which combine archaic features with later (esp. Aramaic) influences, many chronological, geographical, and social or genre-based variations survive in the corpus (Gianto 1996). The Tiberian vocalization system, best attested in the *Codex Leningradensis* from 1008 AD, became normative for Biblical Hebrew grammar (Morag 1962). Its antiquity and original pronunciation, never widespread and soon forgotten, are debated; no current reading tradition immediately derives from it. For historical-comparative purposes, Bauer/Leander 1922 and Beyer 1969 are mines of information, but Blau (1968) voiced important methodological caveats concerning the reconstruction of pre-Tiberian Hebrew. Verbal syntax and the lexicon mark off "Early Hebrew Poetry" (Gen 49; Ex 15; the oracles in Num 22–24; Deut 32; 33; Jdg 5; 1 Sam 2; 2 Sam 1; 22 = Ps 18; 23; Ps 68; Hab 3) as a separate entity. By and large, these texts may go back to the 11<sup>th</sup> c. BC and continue an epic tradition formerly also current at Ugarit. The corpora of literary prose in "Classical" or "Standard Biblical Hebrew", the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, by contrast, are distinctive of Hebrew. The date of their composition, or at least of their last major redaction,

oscillates in the current discussion between the exilic and the early Hellenistic periods. Yet some of the “Late Biblical Hebrew” compositions (Chr, Ezr, Neh, Esth, Dan, Qoh) in a literary idiom patterned after Classical prose have only taken shape by the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Much of the poetic and prophetic material defies linguistic dating. A number of inscriptions from the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC at the latest (the so-called “Gezer calendar” may be Phoenician) reflect the same developmental stages of the language and provide a referential frame until the exilic period which anchors part of the Biblical material in time and place (Gzella 2009d). The few textual witnesses from the five Philistine cities are hard to distinguish from Hebrew, but some scholars assign them to a local Canaanite dialect featuring a relative marker *š* and the 3m.sg. suffix *-h* (Israel 1999). The 8<sup>th</sup> c. “Samaria Ostraca” are believed to reflect a Northern variety of Hebrew (“Israelite”) close to contemporary Phoenician (monophthongization of diphthongs and the preservation of the old feminine ending */(a)t/*, also in the “Philistine” texts), while most of the rest is based on the Southern dialect of Judaea. The latter is also lying at the heart of Biblical Hebrew at large; Northern and Transjordanian traces survive there as well, but are not always easy to identify. Presumably, Judaeian was a prestige dialect that eclipsed many coexisting varieties and influenced neighbouring idioms (Gianto 1996, 494–496). The rise of a formerly unattested narrative *Kunstprosa*, replacing older epic poetry, triggered the complementary distribution of a grammaticalized “consecutive imperfect” *wayyiqtol* (< \*/(wa-)yaqtul/; the */wa-/* was facultative in earlier times) for narrative chains and a likewise grammaticalized “consecutive perfect” *w-qāṭal* for various other usages. The literary character of the evidence renders a consistent description in functional terms difficult. Following the Babylonian Exile from 586 BC, Aramaic slowly became the pragmatically dominant language in daily life (Beyer 2004, 34–36), but Hebrew continued to be used for literary compositions, as the classicizing texts from Qumran demonstrate. Not every instance of Aramaic influence in Hebrew is necessarily late, though. Moreover, the Bar-Kosiba-letters and a few contracts show that Hebrew was briefly revived for every-day use during the two Jewish revolts against Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD. Some of these later varieties follow up on older Hebrew dialects for the lack of characteristic Southern innovations. They prefigure Rabbinic Hebrew, the language of a vast body of exegetical literature written during the subsequent centuries (see ch. 23). A blend of Rabbinic and Biblical Hebrew in its Tiberian garb according to a modern pronunciation became the basis of Israeli Hebrew (“Ivrit”), revived as a vernacular at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. AD and now an official language of the State of Israel (see ch. 24).

Among the *Transjordanian* languages (Beyer 2009), at least *Moabite* is clearly a separate Canaanite idiom. It is best preserved in a 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC royal inscription from Dībān of 34 lines closely resembling Hebrew prose style (KAI 181) which exhibits the definite article *h-*, the object marker *ʔ*, the relative particle *ʔsr*, narrative *wayyiqtol* (but only the “perfect” in ll. 21–29). Especially the latter two might once have been taken over from Hebrew due to its prestige. Some lexical items, too, align Hebrew with Moabite against Ugaritic and Phoenician. Yet the old f.sg. ending */(a)t/*, the Gt-stem and the m.pl.abs. ending */-īm/* set it apart from Hebrew, although they do not necessarily move it closer to Aramaic. Some smaller texts and seals are also associated with Moabite, but display (dialectal?) differences vis-à-vis the Dībān stele, e.g., *ʔš* instead of *ʔsr*. The few 9<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> c. *Ammonite* inscriptions (Aufrecht 1999), by contrast, brim with palaeographical difficulties. The f.sg. ending is */(a)t/*, the m.pl.abs. */-īm/*, the 3m.pl.

“imperfect” ending /-n/, and the relative particle ʾš or š, but the paucity of relevant information makes it impossible to prove or disprove the majority opinion that it is Canaanite. *Edomite*, however, bears so close a resemblance to Hebrew and Moabite that it can hardly be set apart as an own dialect (Vanderhooft 1995), though the idiosyncratic use of the C-stem of  $\sqrt{brk}$  ‘to bless’ may be significant. Scholars do suppose that it is attested in a few brief ostraca and some personal names in seals with the theophoric element Qaws, all roughly from the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> c. BC Transjordanian dialects also underlie the representation of the speech of foreigners in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Jdg 12:6), yet it is difficult to extract any reliable particulars from such literary compositions. A lengthy but enigmatic plaster text from Deir ‘Allā, discovered in 1967, provides evidence for another Transjordanian variety which has been considered to be Aramaic, Canaanite, or a language apart (“Gileadite”). Phonology and morphology exhibit significant Aramaic features, whereas lexicon and style (esp. narrative *wayyiqtol*) resemble Canaanite (Gzella, *in press*). However, not all NWS languages have to be associated with either Canaanite or Aramaic (Huehnergard 1991). This unique literary text with an unknown purpose and history may not represent any spoken dialect at all.

Internal heterogeneity also characterizes the *Aramaic* language group (Beyer 1986 and 2004). Unlike Canaanite, some of whose hallmarks can be traced back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, its roots are unknown. Although but few diagnostic traits apply to all of Aramaic, it is clearly distinct from Canaanite from the outset (Huehnergard 1995) and thus seems to have taken shape some time before the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Several circular developments took place during the 3,000 years of its attested history (Jastrow 2008). Already the earliest texts from the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC (“Old Aramaic”, see ch. 27), royal inscriptions produced by the chancelleries of local city-states, reflect different varieties; however, the treaties from Sfire are relatively uniform, as opposed to the peripheral Gozan-inscription. Because of its light grammatical system, great adaptability, and use among travellers, Aramaic spread across the entire Fertile Crescent from Egypt to Lake Urmia during the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and was used as an international means of communication under the Neo-Assyrian and the Neo-Babylonian Empires, yet still without any recognizable standard. At least Assyrian varieties were so different from Judaeian Hebrew that the two were perceived as mutually non-intelligible (2 Kgs 18:26). When the Achaemenids rose to power, they promoted what appears to be a Babylonian dialect to their chancellery language now called “Official (or Imperial) Aramaic” (cf. ch. 28) and chiefly attested by letters and legal documents found in Egypt; Biblical Aramaic is also akin to this variety. Official Aramaic provided a standardized, international prestige language that eclipsed the continuous development of local varieties. But these eventually came to the surface again after the fall of the Persian Empire; during the Hellenistic and Roman period, they partly turned into written languages in some way influenced by Achaemenid spelling (cf. ch. 30), such as Qumran Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Old Syriac, and Eastern Mesopotamian. Aramaic thus remained the dominant language until the Islamic Conquest. From the so-called “Middle Aramaic” period on, individual features already attested before grew into an identifiable Eastern and a Western branch fully-developed in the stage often called “Late Aramaic”. The Western branch, whose dialect boundaries are much clearer, includes the Palestinian Talmud, Targumim and Midrashim (see ch. 31), inscriptions, poetry, documentary texts, Christian translations from the Greek (“Christian Palestinian”, see ch. 33), and the writings of the Samaritans (see ch. 32) before they switched to Arabic. The Eastern branch, by

contrast, comprises Classical Syriac (the literary and liturgical language of the Christian Middle East until today, surviving in an Eastern and a Western tradition, see ch. 34), the varieties of the Babylonian Talmud (see ch. 36), Mandaic (see ch. 37), and the languages of many magic bowls not easily attributed to any of the preceding. Lost vernaculars from this period seem to be the ancestors of many of the numerous “Neo-Aramaic” languages from Iran, Iraq, and northeastern Syria (“Northeastern Neo-Aramaic”, see ch. 40), from Turkey (“Turoyo”, see ch. 39), and from the Anti-Lebanon (“Western Neo-Aramaic”, see ch. 38), now spoken in diaspora communities all over the world. Also Mandaic, the language of a religious movement commonly associated with the rather vague notion of “gnosticism” has a modern counterpart (“Neo-Mandaic”, see ch. 41).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC, a local language replaced Phoenician as the representational idiom in the city-state of Sam'al (Pardee 2009), but later gave way to Aramaic proper. Like the Deir 'Allā text, with which it shares the un-Aramaic N-stem (at least in what may be a lexical borrowing), its epigraphic witnesses have either been subsumed to Aramaic or treated as an own language close to Canaanite. Some, however, have argued that Sam'alian can be better understood as a distant relative of Aramaic still unaffected by some of the latter's developments (Huehnergard 1991) or shaped by language contact with Canaanite which led to convergence again (Gianto 1995).

### 3. Phonology

Since early NWS has been transmitted either in syllabic cuneiform or in largely consonantal writing systems according to conventions established by generations of scribal training, it is often hard to elucidate its phonetic realities. Two characteristic sound changes are generally accepted as NWS isoglosses (Blau 1978, 35), but they are both very natural and have at least sporadic parallels in other Semitic idioms: first, due to weak labial articulation, word-initial \*/w/ became /y/ (e.g., \* $\sqrt{wrd}$  >  $\sqrt{yrd}$  ‘to come’) excluding the conjunction /wa-/ ‘and’ (where /w/ was supposedly felt as word-medial) and some other lexemes. Second, /n/ regularly assimilates to an immediately following consonant except for /h/ in several cases (such as the suffixed “energetic II” \*/-an-hV/ > /-annV/; on the peculiar change \*/-th-/ > /-tt-/ in Hebrew, see Gzella 2007a, 157f.), and alleged instances of its preservation are secondary. It has been restored in the Hebrew “perfect” of verbs III<sub>n</sub> (excepting  $\sqrt{ntn}$ ) by way of paradigm pressure (e.g., *zāqantā* ‘you are old’; Bauer/Leander 1922, § 151). The same might apply to certain 1sg. “perfects” from the root *ytn* in Ugaritic (e.g., *ynt* ‘I have given’). In the Old Aramaic C-stem participle *mhnht* (KAI 309:2) ‘he who brings down’, the pharyngeal /ħ/ could have stopped assimilation, perhaps due to weak articulation. Under the influence of Babylonian, where geminates underwent nasalization, etymological /n/ often reappears in Official Aramaic (synchronically this is perhaps a purely graphic phenomenon) and in some later Aramaic varieties affected by Achaemenid scribal conventions. Sporadic examples in Biblical Hebrew can be explained along similar lines (Gzella 2007a). The frequent occurrence of degemination in Classical (not Modern) Mandaic, spoken in Babylonia, however, must result from Akkadian substrate pronunciation. Since /n/ sometimes assimilates elsewhere in Semitic, too, and regularly in most of Ancient North Arabian against Classical Arabic and many vernaculars, its diagnostic value as an NWS innovation remains doubtful. Dentals also tend to assimilate (esp. to the fem. /-t-/), but can be preserved in spelling.

Other changes of the 29 etymological consonants, all of which could be geminated once, vary per language. A “long” (“geminate”) consonant (Lipiński 2001, 179 f.) is often treated differently from two consonants in Semitic: e.g., the participle of geminate verbs in Arabic tolerates a long vowel before a geminate (*rāddu*); geminates at the end of a word were simplified in Aramaic, but final consonant clusters were broken up, both at different points. In Ugaritic, \*/s/ and \*/š/ completely merged to /s/ and, as in Canaanite, \*/š/ with \*/s/ to /s/; \*/d/ often shifted to /d/, and at least in a few roots, \*/t/ (conventionally transcribed /z/) merged with \*/g/ (cp. *√nḡr* ‘to guard’ with Hebrew *√nšr* and Aramaic *√ntr*). The Proto-Semitic interdentals \*/t/, \*/d/, and \*/t/ merged with their dental counterparts /t/, /d/, and /t/ in Aramaic by the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC, as did \*/š/ later with \*/l/ to /l/, whereas the shifts \*/t/ > /š/, \*/d/ > /z/, and \*/t/ > /s/ (merging with \*/š/ and \*/s/) had occurred in at least most of Canaanite by the time of the earliest Iron Age attestations: contrast, e.g., *√tbr* ‘to break’ in Ugaritic and 8<sup>th</sup> c. Aramaic (where /t/ is mostly written {š}) with post-8<sup>th</sup> c. Aramaic *√tbr* and Hebrew *√šbr*. They are difficult to render in syllabic cuneiform and vary in the different scribal traditions, but many scholars suppose that these changes were already underway in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. Later, spirantization of the six plosive stops /b,g,d,k,p,t/ (formerly unaspirated: Kutscher 1965, 23–35) in weak articulation in Aramaic and Hebrew, and of some of them in Phoenician, produced fricative allophones (yet spirantization occurs elsewhere in Semitic, too). These were then gradually phonemicized again in later Aramaic, as minimal pairs like Syriac *garḫā* ‘scabies’ and *garbā* ‘scabious’ indicate, and, to a very limited extent, in Post-Biblical Hebrew. Eventually, \*/g/ merged with \*/l/ to /l/ and \*/h/ with \*/h/ to /h/ in Canaanite and Aramaic during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, but they were kept apart in traditional Hebrew pronunciation until the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC (Steiner 2005; cf. Gzella 2009d, 68). The merger of \*/s/ (originally a voiceless fricative lateral) and \*/s/ to /s/ in Aramaic and Hebrew (where /s/ was originally written {š}) and later distinguished from /š/ by a diacritical mark) is less easy to trace (Beyer 1984, 102 f.). Since the Phoenician 22-letter alphabet did not have proper graphemes for all these sounds, some served double-duty for centuries in Hebrew, Aramaic, and perhaps also in Transjordanian fringe dialects. Word-final geminates were later simplified in Aramaic and Hebrew (ca. 200–150 BC according to Beyer 1984, 120–122); laryngeals were gradually reduced in Aramaic (*ibid.*, 122, between 150 BC and 300 AD), partly in Hebrew (Kutscher 1965, 41–50; under Aramaic influence?), and in Punic (Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 28–35). The loss of syllable-final /ʔ/ with compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel began in 14<sup>th</sup>-c. BC Canaanite (Beyer 1984, 104–106). Moreover, /m/ and /n/ interchanged frequently in the history of NWS. The “emphatics”, which were perhaps originally glottalic pressure sounds, underwent velarization in some idioms (on Aramaic, see Beyer 2004, 45 f.), slightly lowering surrounding vowels, but their pronunciation in early NWS is unknown. Palatalization of Proto-Semitic \*/s/ > /š/ and subsequent deaffrication of \*/t/s/ > /s/ are also difficult to pinpoint.

Reflexes of the short vowels \*/ā/, \*/ī/, \*/ū/, the long vowels \*/ā̄/, \*/ī̄/, \*/ū̄/, and the diphthongs \*/aw/ and \*/ay/ are found throughout NWS. Their behaviour in the individual languages has to be reconstructed on the basis of transcriptions in cuneiform, Greek, and Latin, and later Hebrew and Aramaic vocalization traditions. The latter mark quality alone, so not all linguistic stages clearly exhibit phonemic contrasts of vowel length. It is difficult to integrate all this information into a coherent picture, but some common tendencies that crystallize into fairly regular changes do emerge. From

syllabic spellings like *le-e* for the proclitic preposition \*/li-/ in Ugaritic it appears that at least near sonorants, /i/ was already pronounced [e] at that time, as it always was according to later Syriac vocalizations. Phoenician-Punic transcriptions (Οξερβαλος < \*/'ōzir-/ < \*/'ādir-/ 'helper', Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 81 f.) and, for stressed syllables, Tiberian Hebrew show the same phenomenon. Moreover, diphthongs seem to have been monophthongized (\*/aw/ > /ō/, \*/ay/ > /ē/) regularly in the North (Ugaritic, Phoenician, Northern Hebrew) at a very early stage, but only later in Aramaic and Southern Hebrew; Moabite evidence is conflicting. Monophthongization of triphthongs is still inconsistent in Ugaritic, but slowly became regular, with \*/awa,aya/ > /ā/, \*/iyu/ > /ī/ (> /ē/) etc. After ca. 1000 BC, word-final short vowels disappeared in Canaanite and Aramaic, which also happened, not necessarily at the same time, in other Semitic idioms. Due to drift or contact, all NWS languages also show at least some traces of a reduction of short vowels in open syllables. This occurs but sporadically in Ugaritic (cf. syllabic spellings like *ar-zi-ma* /'arzīma/ 'cedars' as opposed to expected *ḥa-ba-li-ma* /ḥabalīma/ 'ropes' or alphabetic ones like *rišt* /ra'šātu/ 'heads' as opposed to *rašt* /ra'ašātu/, Huehnergard <sup>2</sup>2008, 280–282; 304–307). Vowel reduction became regular in Aramaic and caused the complete loss of all short unaccented vowels in open syllables by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD at the latest (e.g., Syriac *kṭab* < \*/katab(a)/ 'he wrote'; see ch. 28.1). Under Aramaic influence, it also affected Hebrew (*yiktū* < \*/yiktubū/ 'they write'). The *schwa* sign in Tiberian pointing indicates the absence of a phonemic vowel; vocalic *schwa* is pronounced in reading traditions as an allophone of zero. Endangered vowels could at times be preserved by lengthening or, rarely, secondary gemination of the following consonant. Short vowels were often reduced to indistinct central vowels in later Punic, a development sometimes attributed to Berber influence. Vowel assimilation occurs in, e.g., Ugaritic (Huehnergard <sup>2</sup>2008, 269–275), Phoenician (Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 93bis), Aramaic (Beyer 2004, 62), and Hebrew (as with *segholates*: \*/dalt-/ > \*/dalət/ > *dēlət* 'door'), but also in other Semitic languages like Assyrian. The frequent lowering of stressed word-final \*/i/ to /ē/ (Brockelmann 1908, 144) may be a hallmark of NWS, but cannot be verified in 2<sup>nd</sup>-millennium BC material. There are several instances of a dissimilation of the vowel sequence \*/a-a/ to /i-a/ and of two (mid-)high back vowels (Brockelmann 1908, § 94r).

Besides these general tendencies, the vowel systems of the individual NWS languages developed their own peculiarities. Normally, /ī/ and /ū/ remain stable. The "Canaanite Shift" of /ā/ > /ō/ in all environments is considered a feature singling out Canaanite from ca. the 15<sup>th</sup> c. BC onwards (Aramaic examples are late, Arabic ones controversial), but it arguably spread gradually and did in any case not affect Ugaritic (Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 71). Exceptions in Tiberian Hebrew (*qattāl* nouns, the "perfect" of hollow roots like *qām* 'he stood', and verbs IIIy like *bānā* 'he built') could be explained as Aramaisms or analogical formations; evidence from Moabite and Ammonite names in cuneiform is conflicting. Within Canaanite, Phoenician exhibits a characteristic change ("Phoenician Shift") \*/ā/ > /o/ in stressed syllables (e.g., λαβον < \*/laban/ 'white' or ναδωq < \*/nadar/ 'he vowed', Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 78). Growing influence of Aramaic after the Babylonian Exile makes it difficult to individuate proper developments of Hebrew: anaptyxis of word-final consonant clusters (eventually leading to "segholates"), simplification of word-final geminates, vowel reduction (but spirantization of a following stop is often kept, as in construct forms like *dibrē* 'words [of]' [< \*/dabaray/] or *malkē* 'kings [of]' [< \*/malakay/], but *birkat* 'blessing [of]' vis-à-vis

*brākā* ‘blessing’), and \*/ī/ > /ā/ before root-final gutturals apply to both (Beyer 2006, 169–171). Synagogal reading traditions, however, preserved a number of genuine Hebrew features, esp. lengthening of short vowels in open pre-tonic syllables where they would have disappeared in Aramaic. With nouns, stressed syllables, too, were lengthened following an extension of pausal pronunciation (but Blau 1968, 36 f. and others suggest that tonic lengthening took place much earlier). The corresponding lengthening grade of \*/ī/ and \*/ū/ was /ē/ and /ō/ respectively, as \*/ī/ was pronounced [ě] and \*/ū/ [ō] (this is sometimes viewed as a change of quality alone, i.e., “backing” or “lowering”, under the stress). In Tiberian Hebrew, diphthongs in closed syllables are often triphthongized when stressed: \*/yayn-/ > *yáyin* ‘wine’, but Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Israelite /yēn/; \*/mawt-/ > *mówēt* ‘death’ (with vowel assimilation \*/a/ > /o/ before /w/ rather than \*\**máwēt*, see Gzella 2006b, 402 f.), but, perhaps due to inter-dialectal or Aramaic influence, \*/yawm-/ > *yōm* ‘day’). Shifts between \*/ā/ and \*/ī/ in closed syllables are scattered across the evidence and their rules debated (Beyer 1984, 140 f.; Lambdin 1985). The loss of unstressed word-final long vowels around 100 BC was confined to Aramaic (Beyer 1984, 122–125).

The syllable structures *CV* and *CVC* are etymological. The loss of short word-final vowels added the pattern *CVCC* in 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium Canaanite and Aramaic. Between the 5<sup>th</sup> c. and 100 BC, word-final consonant clusters were broken up in Aramaic and Hebrew by a helping vowel (Beyer 1984, 112–115) which then turned into a full vowel. Spellings like *αλφ* ‘ox’ (< \*/alp-/) indicate that this did not happen in Phoenician until much later (Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 96). Word-initial consonant clusters, too, tend to be resolved by anaptyxis or a prosthetic syllable (as in the Gt-stem prefix of the “perfect” and imperative). It is uncertain whether the syllable structure *CCVC* has to be excluded for NWS (except for words beginning with a glottal stop, which always takes a vowel), as has often been suggested. Leaving aside forms resulting from later vowel reduction like *ktāb* ‘he wrote’ in vocalized Aramaic, word-initial *CC* is supposedly original for the imperative and in a few other words (Hoberman 1989). Since neither syllabic cuneiform nor Ugaritic alphabetic writing can render such clusters, one does not know whether they were resolved in any systematic way. In vocalized Hebrew and Aramaic texts, “overlong” syllables with a long vowel before a consonant were kept in Aramaic but shortened in Hebrew (as in Arabic). Evidence for the use of a long linking vowel before consonantal affirmatives in “hollow roots” in Ugaritic, if that vowel has indeed been inserted for phonotactic reasons, might suggest that the same rule worked there, too. As often in Semitic, two identical syllables tend to undergo dissimilation or haplology. Stress was originally perhaps not phonemic and varies in the historical languages; the Hebrew Masoretes mark a “pausal”, often lengthened, intonation for sentence-final or isolated words.

## 4. Morphology and morphosyntax

### 4.1. Pronouns

Among the *independent personal pronouns*, which mark the subject in verbless clauses and reinforce it in verbal ones, etymological \*/anāku/ ‘I’ has been preserved in Ugaritic

according to syllabic evidence, but turned into \*/anōkī/ (> 'ānōkī in Tiberian Hebrew) in the whole of Canaanite (by means of dissimilation after the shift \*/ā/ > /ō/ or analogy with the 1sg. suffix?); the likewise etymological variant \*/anā/ became the only form in Aramaic ('nky in Sam'alīan may be a Canaanism). The shorter variant also has a Hebrew reflex \*/anī/ (> 'anī); the vocalization of its cognate 'n in Ugaritic is unknown, but the /ī/ may be secondary in analogy with the longer variant, hence common NWS \*/anā/ is likely also to be the Ugaritic form. Analogy with the 1sg. has expanded the 1pl. form \*/naḥnu/ (< \*/niḥnu/?) 'we' to presumably common Canaanite \*/anaḥnū/ (\*/anū/ > 'anū in later Hebrew, patterned after \*/anī/) and Aramaic \*/anaḥnā/ (with /ā/ as in the 1sg.), whose cognates in Ugaritic, Sam'alīan, and Deir 'Allā are unattested. In the 2sg./pl., \*/n/ assimilated consistently in pronunciation, hence \*/attā/ 'you' (m.sg., < \*/anta/) and \*/attī/ (f.sg., < \*/anti/), which in Classical Hebrew mostly has become 'at(t). With the 2/3pl. \*/attum(ū)/ 'you' (m.pl.) and \*/attin(na)/ (f.pl.), as well as \*/hum(ū)/ 'they' (m.pl.) and \*/hin(na)/ (f.pl.), Hebrew generalized the /i/-vowel of the fem. (2m.pl.: \*/attim/ (> 'attem) > 'attem, losing the final vowel in analogy with the 3m.pl.; by-form /attimmā/ patterned after the 2f.pl. in Qumran; 2f.pl.: \*/attin(nā)/ > 'atten(ā); 3m.pl. \*/him(ū)/ > hem(mā) in analogy with the 3f.pl.: \*/hin(nā)/ > hennā). Most of Aramaic, by contrast, gradually levelled the final /n/ of the fem. (in analogy with the "imperfect" 2/3pl.), but preserved reflexes of the old vowel distinction (cf. the examples in Beyer 1984, 423). Ugaritic also has at least masc. dual forms *atm* (identical to the m.pl. in spelling) and, presumably, *hm*. Ugaritic, like Arabic, has a glide in the 3sg. (*hw*, pronounced /huwa/ according to syllabic spellings, and *hy*, supposedly pointing to /hiya/), whereas Canaanite and Aramaic have a glottal stop \*/hu'a/ 'he' > /hū(a)/ and \*/hi'a/ 'she' > /hī(a)/. It is disputed which one is older, as glottal stops and glides interchange in Semitic. Evidence is conflicting concerning the quantity of the final vowels in independent pronouns (e.g., 'anta in Arabic but 'attā in Hebrew), pronominal suffixes, and certain "perfect" affirmatives, hence they are often marked with the *syllaba anceps* sign in comparative grammars. This phenomenon can be explained in a traditional way by the workings of sound laws, by assuming another vowel quantity (i.e., not fully long, since alleged /ā/ in such cases did not become /ō/ in Hebrew), or by a difference between the phoneme and its realization. Aramaic also has enclitic forms of some independent pronouns. Within NWS, Ugaritic and Phoenician preserve traces of the old oblique pronouns for the 3m./f. (sg. *hwt* /huwati/ and *hyt* /hiyati/, pl. *hmt* \*/humūti/, in Ugaritic also the dual *hmt*, supposedly pronounced /humāti/). In Ugaritic, they express a genitive ('of him/her') or an accusative ('him/her'), whereas in Phoenician, the oblique form has replaced the nominative \*/hum(ū)/ in the pl.

*Pronominal suffixes* occur with nouns in the construct state, or prepositions, and with verbs in order to mark possession or a pronominal object. For the earliest stages of NWS, including Ugaritic, which also has created a first-person dual suffix /-nayā/ 'of the two of us' besides the inherited 2/3m/f ones (all unattested in 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium NWS), straightforward suffixed forms similar as in Classical Arabic can be reconstructed. But Canaanite and Aramaic are affected by many divergences: 1) different syllable structures of suffixed nouns and verbs; 2) the workings of analogy across paradigms; 3) the preservation of older forms protected by the suffixes. Nouns whose construct ends in a consonant generally take a linking vowel in the position of the former case vowel. Phoenician preserved vestiges of the genitive case (Gzella 2009c, 53), Hebrew largely

generalized the accusative /-a/ (the /ē/ sounds in the Tiberian pointing have a different origin), and Aramaic uses a vowel of the same quality as in the suffix. The 1sg. object suffix for verbs (/ -nī/ ‘me’) differs from the one for nouns (/ -ī/ ‘my’). Old Aramaic retains a reflex of the original 1pl. suffix ‘our’ (/ -na/), whereas Canaanite has replaced it by / -nū/ (cf. already *ru-šu-nu* ‘our head’, EA 264:18).

NWS has a *determinative-relative pronoun* \*/dū/ (> /dū/ in Ugaritic; Pennacchietti 1968) which inflects for case and, judging from Ugaritic *dt* as a f.sg. (/dātu/?) and m.pl. (/dūtu/?) plus comparative evidence, for number and gender. Connecting clauses and words, it can also act as a genitive marker. Except for archaisms like /zū/ in Old Byblian or Hebrew poetry (e.g., Ex 15:13.16; Hab 1:11), it has been replaced by the particle \*/ʔašar/ > ʔašer (allegedly related to the noun \*/ʔatar-/ ‘place’) in Classical Hebrew; \*/ša/ > šē in mostly later Hebrew goes back to an old Northern by-form (cf. ʔš and š in Phoenician-Punic and other Canaanite idioms) which has been claimed to derive from \*/ʔašar/ (but see Holmstedt 2007). Aramaic, by contrast, has generalized the original genitive \*/dī/, which would not have been perceived as an oblique form anymore after the collapse of the inflectional case system, later /dī/ (> \*/dī/?) > /d(a)-/. These forms slowly substituted the construct state in later Hebrew and Aramaic, where they also underlie independent possessive pronouns. The *demonstrative pronouns* vary across NWS and defy reconstruction, but always contain the same “deictic” constituents /h/ , /n/, \*/d/ (> /d/ or /z/), /l/, and /k/. For the proximal deixis ‘this’, Ugaritic has *hnd* /hānādū/(?), possibly indeclinable, Hebrew *zē* (m.sg., < \*/dī/) and *zōt* (f.sg., < \*/dāʔ/), Aramaic \*/denā/ (m.sg.) and \*/dā/ (f.sg.). Hebrew can attach the definite article to a demonstrative in order to distinguish between definite noun phrases and equational clauses (cf. *hā-zē* *haz-zē* ‘this man’ as opposed to *zē hā-zē* ‘this is the man’), in all likelihood an innovation (Gzella 2006a, 14 f.). These bases can be expanded by /h-/ , as in many later Aramaic varieties. Hebrew *hallāzē* (m.sg.), *hallēzū* (f.sg.), *hallāz* (gender-neutral sg.), which occur in reported speech and are sometimes associated with medial deixis, may have a different etymology (Huehnergard 2005, 186; maybe a connection with Ugaritic *hnd* and the interchange between /l/ and /n/ is also possible). The corresponding pl. forms contain /l/, as in Hebrew and Aramaic /ʔellē(n)/ ‘they’ (< \*/ʔilī/). Their distal counterparts add /k/ to the base, like Ugaritic *hnk* /hānāka/(?) ‘that’ (m.sg.), *hnkt* /hānākatu/(?) (f.sg.?) or Aramaic /dek/ (m.sg.), /dāk/ (f.sg.), /ʔellēk/ (pl.) and several by-forms. Hebrew, like Phoenician and some Aramaic varieties (e.g., Syriac), anaphorically uses the 3m./f. independent pronoun for distal deixis, Ugaritic perhaps as well (Gzella 2007b, 543–544). The *interrogatives* – besides an interrogative element \*/ay(y)/ – distinguish between animate (Ugaritic *my* /mīya/(?), Hebrew /mī/, Punic *mī*, Aramaic /man/ ‘who?’) and inanimate (Ugaritic *mh* /maha/(?), Hebrew /mā/ [< \*/mah/?], Punic *mu*, Aramaic /mā/ ‘what?’), the latter at times reinforced by a near demonstrative in NWS and elsewhere (e.g., Hebrew *mazzē*, Huehnergard 2005, 186–189). There is no common indefinite, so the word for ‘man’ (etc.) is used instead, but Ugaritic and Phoenician have *mnm* (pronunciation uncertain), Hebrew *mʔūmā* ‘what-ever’.

## 4.2. Nouns

Nouns and adjectives, which regularly agree with nouns, inflect for masc./fem. gender and number (originally sg., dual, and pl., but the dual gradually disappeared and its

vestiges were later construed as pl.). Before ca. 1000 BC, NWS had an inflectional case system and, like Akkadian and Classical Arabic, distinguished between nominative (/u/), genitive (/i/), and accusative (/a/) in the sg. (“triptotic” declension); mimation in the sg. completely disappeared by the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The pl. and dual had a “diptotic” differentiation between the nominative (m.pl. /-ū-/ , fem. /-ātū/; m.dual /-ā-/ , fem. /-at-ā-/) and an oblique case based on the genitive (m.pl. /-ī-/ , fem. /-āti/; m.dual /-ay-/ , fem. /-at-ay-/). The m.pl. case vowels are the long counterparts of the sg. ones except for the accusative; the reason might be that /a/ could not have been extended to the pl. when an older two-case system was expanded, because /ā/ was already the dual marker (Beyer 1984, 79–81). Together with Classical Arabic, Ugaritic exhibits traces of another diptotic system in the sg. consisting of the nominative (/u/) and an oblique case based on the accusative (/a/). Unlike Arabic, this is only well attested for personal names whose base ends in /-ān/ (Huehnergard 2008, 299), but because of the largely consonantal writing, its true frequency cannot be assessed. No satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon has been found so far. The nominative marked the grammatical role of the subject with transitive and stative or fientic intransitive verbs, in verbless clauses the ones subject and predicate; the genitive that of a possessive relationship with the preceding word and with all prepositions (at least some of which originate from nouns); and the accusative that of a direct object, various adverbial notions, and the predicate with certain markers (attested for /yānu/ [Ugaritic /ēna/] ‘there is not’ in Amarna). Amorite names challenge a neat reconstruction according to the standard model of Classical Arabic, since they also seem to attest an “unmarked” case unknown from later Semitic which, together with the form underlying the later accusative, appears to have a much broader, albeit seemingly inconsistent, functional range (Streck 2000, 283–290). The ending /-a/, for example, can mark an undetermined nominal predicate, as in /āba/ ‘he is (a) father’ (sometimes related to the accusative after /yānu/). Vestiges of such an older system may survive in Ugaritic, cf. instances of a zero-ending as in certain divine names (e.g., Dagan) or the expression *h napšk* /hē napšika/ ‘by your living power’, where /hē/ must derive from \*/hay/ (< \*/hayy/, Gzella 2007b, 545) without a case vowel. Supposedly, the oblique case could act as a kind of vocative, at least in the pl. After the loss of case distinctions due to the disappearance of short unstressed word-final vowels around 1000 BC, other means took over the respective functions. A notable example of structural convergence is the rise different though related direct object markers (Hebrew \*/ōt/ [< \*/āt/?] and \*/at/ [attenuated to ’et], as in Moabite; Phoenician ’yt; Western Aramaic yt; Sam’alian wt). Vestiges of morphological case marking survive in bound forms: Phoenician has traces of the genitive ending in suffixed sg. nouns (Friedrich/Röllig 1999, § 234; Gzella 2009c, 53), as evidenced by the spelling of the 3sg. suffix before nominative/accusative nouns (vocalic and thus not indicated) and before genitive nouns (indicated by -y for /-iyū/ , /-iyā/). Sam’alian preserved a distinction between nominative /-ū/ and oblique /-ī/ in the unbound and bound m.pl., hence different forms like *mlkw* (nom.) and *mlky* (obl.) ‘kings (of)’, whereas 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium Canaanite and Aramaic generalized the apparent dual ending \*/-ay/ > /ē/. The /-ā/ in some Aramaic adverbs like /barrā/ ‘outside’ has been explained as a remnant of the accusative by some (Leander 1928, § 47), but as a locative ending by others (Beyer 1984, 444).

In general, NWS languages externally mark pl. and dual. The unbound (*status absolutus*) m.pl. and dual forms preserve vestiges of mimation /-m(a)/ or nunation /-n(a)/,

cf. the Ugaritic m.pl. in /-ū-ma/ (nom.) and /-ī-ma/ (obl.) as opposed to the fem. /-ātu/ (nom.) and /-āti/ (obl.). Mimation (Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew) or nunation (Aramaic, Moabite) varies across sub-families and is absent in Sam'alian, but /m/ and /n/ are prone to secondary change and nasalization. After the collapse of the case system in the sg., the oblique was generalized in the pl. by way of analogy (cf. Spanish *años* 'years' < Latin *annos* [m.pl.acc.]), and the short /a/ of the mimation/nunation likewise disappeared, hence Hebrew masc. /-īm/ (< \*/-īma/), fem. /-ōt/ (< \*/-āti/), or Aramaic masc. /-īn/ (< \*/-īna/), fem. construct /-āt/. The unbound f.pl. in Aramaic has been levelled under the influence of the masc., leading to secondary /-ān/. Fem. abstracts in /-īt/ have the pl. /-iyāt/ (> Hebrew *-iyōt*), which Hebrew extended to those in /-ūt/ (Aramaic /-uwān/, other NWS evidence is lacking). Other strategies of pl. marking reflect the complex semantic relationships between either an individual concrete being or a collective (e.g., a species) in the sg. and several concrete beings in the dual and pl. (Lipiński 2008). Only rarely in NWS do two different words form a paradigmatic relationship in which the one serves as the pl. of the other without external marking, such as Syriac *qṛūā* 'village' and *quryā* 'villages', whereas in Arabic, South Arabian, and (North) Ethiopian the same phenomenon occurs frequently (and thus constitutes, together with the L-stem, one of the two basic arguments for assuming the existence of a "South Semitic" branch, Blau 1978, 29f.). It is an unresolved problem whether such "broken plurals" in NWS reflect the incipient stage of a system that was later generalized in other Semitic languages or are fossilized remainders of an erstwhile common scheme. Other words (iconically?) expand a short sg. base by another syllable before external pl. markers, as in Ugaritic *bt* /bētu/ 'house', pl. *bhtm* /bahatūma/, Phoenician *dl* /dal/ 'door', pl. *dlht* /dal(a)hōt/, Syriac *'ahā* 'sister', pl. (only attested in the emphatic state) *'ahwāṭā*. Seldom, the base is reduplicated, as in Aramaic \*/rabrabīn/ 'great ones' (in Syriac dissimilated to *rawrbūn*) from \*/rabb-/ 'great'. With the monosyllabic noun patterns *qatl*, *qilt*, and *qutl*, as well as with their fem. counterparts ending in /-at/, such an expansion to a bisyllabic pl. base /qVtal-/ before the ending became regular in NWS, cf. Ugaritic *ḥa-ba-li-ma* /ḥabalīma/ 'ropes' (obl.; inconsistencies in Ugaritic may result from secondary and perhaps only incidental vowel reduction), Hebrew *mlākīm* 'kings' (< \*/mVlakīma/) or *mlākōt* 'queens' (< \*/malakātu/), with some exceptions, and very few instances in Aramaic, most of which have disappeared after the loss of short vowels in open syllables (with an analogous adjustment of spirantization to the new syllable structure, Nöldeke 21898, § 93). This double marking distinguishes forms with an internal /a/-vowel from "real" broken pl.s, to which they are sometimes compared, and constitutes an innovation of NWS. The dual is generally formed according to the sg. base, hence /-ā-/ (nom.) and \*/-ay-/ (obl.; > /-ē-/ in, e.g., Ugaritic) plus mimation (in Ugaritic either /-ma/ or /-mi/) or nunation for the masc., the base with fem. ending /-at-ā-/ (nom.) and \*/-at-ay/ (obl.) for the fem. Dual forms were fully productive in Ugaritic, but became more and more confined to the number two, words which naturally come in pairs, and a few others in later Canaanite and Aramaic, where again the oblique ending has been levelled (cf. Hebrew *yādāyim* 'a pair of hands' with triphthongization of a stressed diphthong). Coexisting dual and pl. forms express semantic differences (Bauer/Leander 1922, 518–520).

Among those nouns treated as "feminine" in terms of concord, many are unmarked (e.g., \*/'imm-/ 'mother'), whereas others have an ending \*/-(a)t-/ in the sg. and its lengthened form /-āt-/ in the pl. To all these, the respective case vowel was once added.

Both endings \*/-at/ and \*/-t/ can be reconstructed; the preference seems to be mostly lexical and differed even in closely related idioms (e.g., Biblical Hebrew *šānā* ‘year’ < \*/šānat-/ , but Northern Hebrew, Phoenician, and Moabite /šat(t)/ < \*/šant(-)/). Yet in Aramaic by the time of the first textual witnesses, only /-t-/ occurs with forms which have further endings, including suffixes and affixes, otherwise /-at/ is preferred (Beyer 1984, 95 f.). The latter became /-ā/ in Southern Hebrew and Aramaic (as well as, independently, in some other Semitic languages: Blau 1980) in the absolute state except for some dialectal Hebrew forms (Bauer/Leander 1922, 510 f.) and Aramaic adverbs (see ch. 28.2). Often, however, the alleged fem. ending signals a particular thing (*pace* Brockelmann 1908, 404, it is not necessarily deteriorating) as opposed to the unmarked collective, cf. Hebrew <sup>ʿ</sup>*onīyā* ‘ship’ vis-à-vis <sup>ʿ</sup>*nī* ‘fleet’ (likewise in Ugaritic, Gzella 2007, 533), or, less frequently, the other way round. Some grammatical feminines end in /-ay/ (like Hebrew *gōḇay* ‘locusts’ or the by-forms *Šārā* and *Šāray* ‘Sara’).

The dimension “state”, finally, distinguishes between “unbound” (*status absolutus*) and “bound” (*status constructus*). The latter forms a prosodic unit with the following word, sometimes interrupted by a preposition or a particle, and expresses a genitive relationship. In those NWS languages which have morphological case markers, these are preserved, but the /m/ or /n/ in the m.dual and pl. drop out, as in Ugaritic /maqqaḥā/ ‘tongs (of)’ (nom.). 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium Canaanite and Aramaic (but not Sam’alian) replaced the bound, originally oblique, m.pl. ending \*/-ī-/ by what seems to be the dual form \*/-ay-/ (> /ē/), hence Hebrew *malḵē* ‘kings (of)’ (Beyer 2004, 47), perhaps generalized from paired body parts. Protected by the stress unit with the following word, the fem. ending /-at/ did not change to /-ā/, cf. Hebrew *šānā* ‘year’ (abs., < \*/šānat-/), but *šnat* ‘year of’ (cstr.). A few nouns like \*/ab-/ ‘father’ or \*/aḥ-/ ‘brother’ lengthen the case vowel in the cstr. as in Ugaritic /<sup>ʿ</sup>abū/ ‘father of’, Hebrew <sup>ʿ</sup>*abīkā* ‘your father’. The lengthened forms have been explained as old vocatives (Gzella 2006b, 400). In Aramaic, the postpositive definite article m.sg. \*/-āʾ/ > /-ā/ (with long /ā/, since Aramaic \*/aʾ/ became /ē/), f.sg. /-tā/, m.pl. /-ayyā/ (in Eastern Aramaic replaced by Assyrian /-ē/), f.pl. /-ātā/, is also analyzed as a state (*status emphaticus/determinatus*). It is absent in Sam’alian and of controversial origin, but seems to have arisen together with the prepositive definite article /ha-/ with gemination of the following consonant in Canaanite (Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite; Ancient North Arabian has a similar form *h(n)-*). The latter presumably evolved from the deictic particle \*/han/ which was already on its way to becoming a definite article in Ugaritic (Gzella 2007b, 543). Canaanite /ha-/ originally seems to have been a marker of subordination whose determinative function gradually increased (Gzella 2006a). Despite formal differences, the various manifestations of the definite article in NWS and Arabic began to behave similarly from a certain stage on, perhaps due to areal convergence: they are only attached to the last member of a construct chain and do not occur with suffixed nouns, most personal names, and predicative adjectives. Their particular determinative force may vary across NWS, though. Other morphemes like the terminative *he locale* in Ugaritic and Canaanite (/ʾaršah/ ‘to the earth’) are occasionally treated like case endings in grammars.

*Cardinals* except for ‘one’ and ‘two’ are nouns; those up to ‘ten’ are unmarked with fem. nouns and have the “fem.” ending, originally expressing a *nomen unitatis*, with masc. nouns. This was later, at times already in Ugaritic, replaced by straightforward agreement. ‘Twenty’ is the dual or pl. of ‘ten’; ‘thirty’ to ‘ninety’ are the plurals of ‘three’ to ‘nine’.

### 4.3. Verbs

All NWS verbal systems preserve traces of the same basic type. The *imperative* has been explained as the old nucleus and generally corresponds to the base of the “short imperfect”, i.e., \*/ktub-Ø/ (m.sg.), \*/ktub-ī/ (f.sg.), \*/ktub-ū/ (m.pl.), and \*/ktub-(n)ā/ (f.pl.) in the G-stem, each with the theme vowel of the verbal root between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> radical. This theme vowel is often /u/ or /i/ if the corresponding “perfect” has an /a/ but /a/ with /i/-class “perfects”; yet in many cases, it is unpredictable. Scholars who deny the possibility of word-initial consonant clusters in Semitic assume that the imperative base was originally bisyllabic (\*/kutub/). But divergent forms in languages preserving short vowels in open syllables (e.g., Arabic *uqtul*, Akkadian *kušud*) point to an original base \*/ktub/ (Bravmann 1977, 197–199), whose unstable consonant cluster has been resolved in different ways. The imperative serves for positive injunctions (negated by /ʔal/ and the “short imperfect”), some of which became mere interjections. Its m.sg. can be expanded by the “cohortative ending” \*/-a/.

For the morphosyntax of the “imperfect” or “prefix conjugation” series, one can distinguish between an older and a younger type, each of which has a different distribution of the intersecting semantic categories of tense, aspect, and modality across the available forms. Like Classical Arabic, the older type, represented by the Canaanisms in the Amarna letters and Ugaritic (whose script discloses much relevant information), comprises three functionally, and in part also formally, distinct conjugations. They are created by adding to a base the endings of the imperative for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the pl. also for the 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. (in later Aramaic with \*/-nā/ > /-ān/ in the f.pl.), and preformatives (3m.sg./pl.: /ʔV-/; 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. and 3f.sg./pl.: /tV-/; 3f.pl. /yV-/ in Aramaic but unattested in Phoenician; 1sg.: /ʔV-/; 1pl.: /nV-/; with /y-/ > /l-/ or /n-/ in Eastern Aramaic), whose vowel originally depended on the theme vowel of the “imperfect” base: /a/ with a base in /i/ or /u/, but /i/ with a base in /a/ (“Barth-Ginsberg Law”, Huehnergard 2005, 180 f.). This instance of a more common dissimilatory tendency is regular in Amarna Canaanite and Ugaritic, but at best rarely attested in the Amorite names and only vestigial in vocalized Hebrew and Aramaic, where the prefix vowel /i/ has been generalized except for some types of weak verbs in the G-stem (evidence for earlier Aramaic is conflicting, cf. ch. 28.1). Amarna Canaanite and, at least for the most part, Ugaritic share an anomalous *t*-preformative in the 3m.pl., i.e., /taktubū(na)/, perhaps an analogy triggered by the use of the 3f.sg. \*/taktub(-u)/ with pl. subjects. The “short imperfect” (3m.sg. \*/yaktub-Ø/), often labelled “jussive” and akin to the Akkadian preterite, expresses deontic modality and punctual past (in Ugaritic, the latter is confined to poetry), but some scholars assume a difference in stress between past perfective \*/yáktub/ and deontic \*/yaktúb/ (Lipiński 2001, 344). The “long imperfect” (3m.sg. \*/yaktub-u/, with the long vowels of the 2f.sg. and 3/2pl. expanded by /-nV/) is used for present-future tense, durative or iterative past, circumstantial events, and various nuances of epistemic (sometimes deontic) modality; the /-u/ might be related to the Akkadian marker of subordination. The “subjunctive” (3m.sg. \*/yaktub-a/) acts as a volitive in main clauses and perhaps indicates subordination in some dependent clauses. Two “energetic” forms are often reconstructed on the basis of Classical Arabic as \*/yaktub-anna/ (/ -nna/ after vocalic endings) and \*/yaktub-an/, though the Amarna letters seem to point to \*/yaktub-unna/ (Rainey 2008; analogy with the pl.?). Their function is elusive; like pre-Classical Arabic, the Amarna letters often use them in questions and conditional

clauses, but in Ugaritic, they tend to occur in suffixed forms. Before suffixes, vestiges of the “energies” are preserved in forms without endings in Hebrew (with \*/-an-/ > /-ən-/ in context, Bauer/Leander 1922, § 48r), but gradually generalized in Aramaic (with \*/-an-/ > /-en-/, Beyer 1984, 111 f.), replacing the suffixed “long imperfect”.

Following the loss of the unstressed word-final short vowels, most of these formal distinctions disappeared in Iron Age NWS, although the one between “short” and “long imperfect” is preserved in certain weak verbs in Hebrew and earlier Aramaic. Since the merger in the sg. made a coexistence of “short” \*/yaktubū/ and “long” /yaktubūna/ in the pl. obsolete, Hebrew levelled the old “short” form (e.g., Hebrew *yīktbū* in the 3m.pl.; vestiges of the old ending \*/-ūna/ survive in the *nun paragomicum*: Gzella 2007, 161 f.). The individual NWS idioms found their own means to compensate for the resulting mergers by word order constraints allocating previously distinct conjugations to different positions or the appearance of new conjugations due to grammaticalization. Hebrew literary prose firmly linked the freestanding “short imperfect”, vestiges of which are preserved in Early Poetry, with \*/wa-/ ‘and’, thereby producing an innovative category *wayyiqtol* (the gemination of the preformative consonant indicates that this was felt as one single form) for chains of punctual past events in narrative; it was assigned the clause-initial position. Contrary to the normal “imperfect” *yiqtol* (< \*/yaqtulu/), deontic *yiqtol* (< \*/yaqtul-Ø/, “jussive”) also occupies the clause-initial position. In later Hebrew, the “short imperfect” disappeared. Perhaps due to contact-induced convergence, *wayyiqtol* also occurs in Moabite, yet not in Phoenician, which had its own high-status language. Phoenician lost the preterite “short imperfect”, but used the absolute infinitive as a 1<sup>st</sup>-person narrative past form. Neither does Aramaic dispose of an original narrative “short imperfect” (possible instances in, e.g., the Tel-Dan-inscription can be interpreted as borrowings from Hebrew or as “long imperfects” used as historical presents); in the course of time, it also lost the jussive. This process was accompanied by a gradual spread of the participle as a present-future form encroaching on various domains of the “long imperfect” which more and more retreated to the realm of modality (Gzella 2004). Contact with Aramaic reinforced the verbalization of the participle in post-exilic Hebrew. The subjunctive has left possible traces only in the Hebrew “cohortative” ending in /-ā/ (yet some scholars explain it as a pausal form of the “energetic” \*/-an/).

The “perfect” or “suffix conjugation” (3m.sg. \*/kataba/ for active verbs) expresses different types of past tense or completed action. Its origin from a predicative verbal adjective in a historical stage preceding NWS still appears in verbs denoting timeless qualities or mental states (e.g., \*/kabida/ ‘he is heavy’; another class for permanent states, like \*/qaṭuna/ ‘he is small’, is rare), some of which were later reanalyzed as active-transitive (e.g., <sup>ʔ</sup>*hb* ‘to love’). Affirmatives with unknown original vowel quantities mark distinctions of person, number, and gender (1sg.: levelled from older \*/-ku/ to \*/-tu/ [> /-tī/ in Canaanite, /-t/ in Aramaic], as in Arabic; 2m.sg. \*/-ta/; 2f.sg. \*/-ti/ [later > /-t/ in Classical Hebrew]; 3m.sg. /-Ø/; 3f.sg. \*/-at/ [> /-ā/ in Hebrew, excepting suffixed forms]; 1pl. \*/-nu/ [> /-nā/ in Aramaic]; 2m.pl. \*/-tumu/; 2f.pl. \*/-tinna/; 3m.pl. \*/-ū/; 3f.pl. \*/-ā/ [merging with the masc. in Hebrew and some Aramaic varieties]). In Ugaritic poetry, as in Biblical Hebrew prose, it often marks the beginning, less frequently the end of a narrative sequence. The “perfect” also expresses various modal nuances and, in pre-Christian stages of NWS, performatives. Non-past usages, including gnomic expressions and future predictions, have also been explained as metaphorical

extensions of the past tense function. With the *w-qāṭal* or “consecutive perfect”, Hebrew prose created a counterpart to *wayyiqṭol* for deontic modality, future tense, and past iterativity. Presumably, it evolved from an older apodosis construction already attested in the Amarna letters (Moran 1961).

The active *participle* *\*kātīb-/* (for sound fientic roots) inflects like a noun, but became increasingly verbalized in Aramaic, where it has been extended to stative verbs, supposedly via fientic intransitive roots, and in Hebrew. The latter two often use “periphrastic” constructions with the participle, originally stative in meaning, of a main verb combined with either the “perfect” or the “imperfect” of the verb ‘to be’ for explicitly marking durativity or iterativity in the past resp. the future. The forms of the passive participle, by contrast, differ even between closely related idioms and have been generalized from distinct verbal adjectives: Hebrew has the *Tiefenform* *\*katūb/* (*\*kutab/* seems secondary, cf. Bauer/Leander 1922, 287), whereas Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic have *\*kaṭīb/*; both occur in Amorite names. Particularly in Aramaic, some forms take on an active meaning (e.g., Syriac *ʿīn* < *\*ʿaʿīn/* ‘loaded with’ = ‘carrying’). Under Iranian influence, Aramaic also developed a resultative, and later general past tense, active construction (Gzella 2004, 184–194). It radically changed alignment patterns in some Neo-Aramaic languages.

Productive *verbal nouns* in NWS follow different patterns. Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew have regular reflexes of *\*katāb-/* (“infinitive absolute”; Gzella 2010c). The same pattern occurs in some Aramaic varieties, but to a lesser extent. This form is often used adverbially or paronomastically (“to die a death”), creates temporal and purpose clauses with prepositions, or replaces a finite verb, mostly an imperative or a “perfect” (Gai 1982). Together with a 1sg. independent pronoun, the latter usage for past narrative is a characteristic trait of Phoenician. With prepositions and suffixes, Hebrew and Phoenician have a by-form *\*k(u)tub/* (“infinitive construct”) alleviating the functional load of *kātōb* < *\*katāb-/*. A few Old Aramaic texts and Samʿalian preserve a form without prefix (*\*ktub/*?) persisting until Achaemenid times in the fossilized quotative marker *lēmār/* ‘saying’. Most Aramaic languages, by contrast, employ a basic pattern *\*/maktab/* (> */miktab/* in later varieties; Fassberg 2007). All this indicates a somewhat loose association of verbal nouns with specific paradigms in early Semitic.

The phonetic structure of “weak” or “irregular” roots leads to divergences from sound verbs. Some phenomena are archaic retentions, others secondary modifications which differ per language; a decision is often difficult to make. Verbs *Iy*, most of which were originally *Iw*, generally drop the initial /y/ in the imperative and the “imperfect” (e.g., *\*ṭīb-/* and *\*yaṭīb-/* from *√yṭb* ‘to sit’) and, at least in Ugaritic and Canaanite, replace the infinitive by a fem. verbal *qilt*-noun based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> radicals (*\*ṭībt-/*). Owing to the assimilation of /n/ in the “imperfect”, many verbs *In* form their imperative and infinitive accordingly. It is often assumed that both classes have evolved from biradical roots. NWS also exhibits assimilation of /l/ in the “imperfect” of *√lqh* ‘to take’; its imperative and infinitive resemble those of verbs *In*. Some Old Aramaic texts spell out the /l/ but always have the imperative *qh* (Beyer 1984, 618); Aramaic also has *\*/-sl-/* > */-ss-/* in forms of the root *√slq* ‘to ascend’ and *\*/-zl-/* > */-zz-/* in *√zl* ‘to go’. In verbs *IIūī* (“hollow roots”), the original vowel appears in the imperative, infinitive, and “imperfect” (*\*yaqūm-/*, *\*yašīm-/*; reduced to /u/ and /i/ in the short forms), but the “perfect” base indicates semantic distinctions: fientic verbs inflect like *\*/qāma/*

‘he stood’ (/ā/, not \*/ō/, in Tiberian Hebrew suggests either Aramaic influence or secondary lengthening of a levelled allomorph with /ā/) or \*/mīta/ ‘he died’, stative ones like \*/būša/ ‘he was ashamed’. They take different vowel quantities and/or qualities in forms with consonantal affirmatives, cf. Amarna Canaanite *nu-uh-ti* ‘I have come to rest’ (EA 147:56), Hebrew *qamī* ‘I stood’, or Aramaic /qāmī/ (Huehnergard 2005, 176-178). The situation in Ugaritic and other epigraphic languages is unknown. For phonotactic reasons, Ugaritic and, in the C and N stems, Hebrew at times insert an \*/ā/-vowel before consonantal affirmatives, as appears from spellings like *btt* /bitātu/ ‘I spent the night’ or *h<sup>a</sup>qīmōlī* ‘I performed’ (Gzella 2010a, 63 f). The Canaanite G-stem participle of “hollow roots” corresponds to the “perfect” base, but its Aramaic equivalent inflects like a sound verb with a medial glide (\*/qāyīm-/ > /qāyem-/ ‘standing’, in some varieties > /qā‘em/). Verbs III<sub>w</sub> joined the class III<sub>y</sub> (Huehnergard 2005, 179 f.); forms like *atwt* /‘atawat/ (pf.) ‘she came’ and *tity* /ta‘tīyū/ (sh.impf.) ‘they came’ (< /<sup>l</sup>tw/y) show that this merger was already underway in Ugaritic, though vestiges lingered on in remote pockets (e.g., Moabite *y’nw* ‘he oppressed’ [KAI 181:5]). Contraction turned verbs III<sub>y</sub> into III<sub>ī</sub> (in Aramaic later merging with most verbs III’), a process beginning in Ugaritic, but (historical?) spelling causes inconsistencies; Old Byblian reflects an intermediate stage with preservation of forms III<sub>y</sub> in the “perfect” (Gzella 2009a). The base vowel /i/ has been largely generalized in the “perfect” in Hebrew. Ugaritic and Canaanite lack a reflex of the third radical in the “short imperfect” (\*/yabniy/ > \*/yabn(i)/ > Hebrew *yībēn* [with anaptyxis], but \*/yabniyu/ > \*/yabnī/ > Hebrew *yībēnē*), but Old Aramaic distinguishes between “short” *thwy* ‘may she be’ (KAI 222A:25) and “long” *thwh* ‘he will be’ (KAI 223A:4). Hebrew and Phoenician mostly have inf.cstr. forms III<sub>y</sub> ending in /-ōt/. Verbs *mediae geminatae* (II = III) show many inconsistencies: some forms behave like sound roots with a vowel between the second and third radicals, as in Amarna Canaanite 3m.sg. “imperfect” (+suffix 1sg.) *yi-ih-na-nu-ni* (EA 137:81, < /hnn ‘to show favour’; cf. Am 5:15) or Hebrew 3m.sg. “perfect” *sābab* (< /sbb ‘to turn’); others, like Ugaritic 3m.sg. “imperfect” *ysb* /ya-sub(b)/ and “perfect” *sb* /sabba/, Hebrew 1sg. *sabbōlī*, Phoenician 3m.sg. *qb* /qabb/ (< /qbb ‘to curse’; also stative verbs in Hebrew like /tmm), or Aramaic 3m.sg. /‘all/ > /‘al/ (< /‘ll ‘to enter’), have a long second radical. Both types can be reconstructed for NWS (Huehnergard 2005, 171–176).

Derivational *verbal stems* as opposed to the unmarked G(round)-stem express modifications of *Aktionsart* and voice (Gzella 2009b). The D(oubling)-stem (3m.sg. “perfect” \*/kattib-/ [> /kittib/ in Canaanite], “imperfect” \*/yakattib-/, participle \*/mukattib-/, characterized by a lengthened middle root consonant, conveys plurality (high transitivity verbs) or factitivity (low transitivity verbs). The C(ausative)-stem, which denotes causativity or an accomplishment, originally had a sibilant formative only preserved in Ugaritic (\*/šaktib-/, \*/yVšaktib-/, \*/mušaktib-/); it shifted to /h-/ in Canaanite (with \*/haktib-/ > /hiktib-/ in the “perfect”; in Phoenician further to /yiktib/) and Aramaic, in Aramaic later to /‘-/ (Bravmann 1977, 200–205). Intervocalic /h/ was soon syncopeated in the “imperfect” (\*/yVhaktib-/ > \*/yaktib/). The detransitivizing N-stem has a medio-passive meaning whose nuance differs per verb and is prefixed by /n-/ (\*/naktab-/, \*/yinkatib/ > \*/yikkatib/, \*/naktab-/, \*/na-/ shifted to /ni-/ in Hebrew); Aramaic lost the N-stem altogether. By means of a pre- or infix /t/ (differing per language), the G, D, and C stems acquired reflexive-reciprocal and, in the case of the C and D stems, also medio-passive counterparts. The Ct was presumably already moribund in

Ugaritic (most examples are instances of the root  $\sqrt{hwy}$ ). Infixation after a word-initial first radical led to anaptyxis with /i-/; as often happens, infixes turned into prefixes except for some archaic remainders. Aramaic \*/it-/ may be original or have developed from \*/hit-/, which, as in Hebrew, would have been borrowed from the C-stem (the few examples of a prefix \*/hit-/ in pre-Biblical Aramaic could also be hypercorrect spellings). A metathesis of the prefixed /t/ and a root-initial sibilant with partial assimilation is very common in NWS, although there are some exceptions. Ugaritic and Aramaic have a stable *t*-series, but Aramaic replaced the old Ct \*/ištaktab-/ by \*/i't'aktab/ > /ittaktab/. Gt and Ct dropped out in Hebrew except for some archaic place names and vestiges (esp. of  $\sqrt{pqd}$  'to muster': Jdg 20:15.17; 21:9); the Gt is attested in Moabite and Old Byblian, but not in later Phoenician. Unproductive forms were preserved or reintroduced as lexicalized borrowings. The infinitives vary in the individual languages. A state preceding NWS introduced "internal" passives to the G, D, and C stems with vocalic apophony (e.g., /kutiba/ vis-à-vis /kataba/ for the G-stem). Their low degree of markedness made them vulnerable: except for the passive participle, Aramaic lost them by the end of the first millennium, Hebrew lost at least the G-passive excluding some very common forms; there are no certain Phoenician examples. Many hollow roots and II = III replace their D-stem by allomorph patterns (3m.sg. /qōlel/ in Hebrew, partly /qawlel/ in Aramaic; the vocalization of their counterparts in Ugaritic and Phoenician is unknown). The few similar forms with sound roots in Hebrew are often viewed as remainders of a common L-stem and compared to the "third stem" in Arabic or I/4 in Ethiopic (a South Semitic isogloss according to others), but the Hebrew examples seem to act as instantaneous by-forms without a common meaning (Gzella 2010b). Several verbs migrated from G to a derived stem in the individual languages, sometimes excepting the participle.

## 5. Syntax

The statistically most frequent, though not necessarily unmarked, word order in many older NWS languages is VSO, possessor-possessed, and noun-adjective; fronting occurs for pragmatic reasons (Gianto 1990, 1–7). Clause structure in Aramaic became more flexible due to Akkadian and Persian influence, both of which often have SOV; this may have promoted the characteristic use of proleptic suffixes. Gender and number agreement, with attributive adjectives also definiteness, of Subject and Predicate can be overridden (e.g., sg. verbs, at times invariably in the 3m., often precede compound subjects; certain pl. subjects sporadically take f.sg. predicates: Levi 1987). Relative clauses are very often introduced by a marker, esp. with a definite antecedent, but always behave like main clauses. Circumstantial and consecutive clauses can be paratactic. Various constructions can express conditional statements (Gzella 2004, 281–286). Nominal clauses often follow the order Subject-Predicate and are equational ('A is B'), locative (with prepositions), or existential ('there is [not]'); the 3sg./pl. independent personal pronoun increasingly serves as a copula, but only inflects in Neo-Aramaic (Khan 2006).

## 6. Lexicon

The lexicon is easily affected by borrowing and cannot serve as a criterion for classification on its own, as numerous non-Semitic influences in the history of NWS demonstrate. But several common lexemes regularly used in one language are marginal or absent in another. Shared semantic shifts, too, bear on subgrouping, because individual words may survive in one particular language simply by chance. Register-specific distinctions also have to be taken into account, no less than the poetic tradition that links Ugaritic with Hebrew, and perhaps with other Canaanite languages. Comparative frameworks have often been applied for elucidating little-known functions of prepositions and particles in Hebrew poetry (Althann 1997, 5–24). Noteworthy differences remain: Ugaritic has no /min/ ‘from’; in prose and direct speech in poetry, the standard verbal root for ‘to say’ is  $\sqrt{rgm}$  (rare or with a different meaning in other languages, cf. Akkadian *ragāmu* ‘to cry’, Arabic *rağama* ‘to curse, to conjecture’, and supposedly also Aramaic  $\sqrt{trgm}$  ‘to translate’, on which cf. Lipiński 2001, 226); some basic lexemes are shared with Hebrew as opposed to other Semitic languages (e.g., *gg* ‘roof’; *tlhn* ‘table’; *hln* ‘window’; *yšn* ‘old’; *dqn* < \**dqn* ‘old age’, cognates of the same word meaning ‘beard’ elsewhere in Semitic; *grš* ‘to expel’, also in Moabite; Ginsberg 1970, 103), others with Phoenician (e.g.,  $\sqrt{ytn}$  ‘to give’ against Hebrew  $\sqrt{ntn}$ ; *hṛš* ‘gold’, poetic in Hebrew; *bd* < *byd* ‘in the hand of’). Phoenician lacks the negative particle \*/lā/ and normally uses /bal/ (rare/poetic in Ugaritic and in Hebrew; perhaps related to the optative particle in later Aramaic varieties), but has /milk/ ‘king’ against Aramaic and vocalized Hebrew /malk/; as in Ugaritic, ‘ox’ means /alp/ (Aramaic /tawr/), only found in a few passages in Hebrew. The Semitic root  $\sqrt{kwn}$  serves as the verb ‘to be’ in Ugaritic and Phoenician, but means ‘to be firm’ in Hebrew and Aramaic, as it does in Akkadian, whereas Hebrew has  $\sqrt{hyy}$  and Aramaic the by-form  $\sqrt{hwy}$ . Aramaic peculiarities are \*/ħad/ ‘one’;  $\sqrt{ll}$  ‘to enter’ (= Arabic  $\sqrt{ğll}$ , rare and poetic in Ugaritic and in Hebrew);  $\sqrt{mlk}$  ‘to advise’ (as in Akkadian; elsewhere: ‘to be king’);  $\sqrt{ty}$  ‘to come’ (poetic in Ugaritic and, seldom, in Hebrew); and the *nisbe* /-āy/ (Canaanite \*/-iy/ > /-ī/). Other, spontaneous, divergences can be explained phonetically: Ugaritic \*/šamš-/ > /šapš-/ ‘sun’; Old Aramaic \*/napš-/ > /nabš/ ‘vital power’; common Aramaic \*/n/ > /r/ in \*/bVr/ ‘son’ and \*/tarēn/ ‘two’. Aramaic later developed a non-reconstructible noun pattern *qātōl* serving as a substantive to the participle.

## 7. Conclusion

It is hard to define NWS in genetic or geographic terms, since significant features are too few, too ambiguous, and too unevenly spread across the data in order to allow for a completely consistent subclassification or a dialectal map. The difficulties involved in tracing the change of the linguistic situation between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages and hence the exact background of the 1<sup>st</sup>-millennium languages are part and parcel of the problem. One neither knows when NWS begins nor when it stops. Yet the value of this slippery concept does not only lie in spotting weak isoglosses, despite the fact that there is some unity in the linguistic diversity. “NWS Philology” will continue to contribute to a more nuanced description of Hebrew by explaining

instances of variation, such as the conventions of Early Hebrew Poetry and its underlying *Dichtersprache*, or the use of dialectal by-forms. The same applies to idioms that have to be reconstructed from epigraphic fragments. NWS languages also share important structural similarities with Arabic and can thus contribute to long-term diachronic-typological perspectives on the development of constituent parts of the grammar, such as changes in the verbal system, their causes, and the reactions they trigger. From such a point of view, the emergence of the nominal and verbal systems in Phoenician, Hebrew, and Aramaic constitute different responses to similar basic conditions caused by the collapse of an older stage of development. Analogous processes can be observed in later phases, esp. in Neo-Aramaic or in Arabic vernaculars, even though they did not lead to identical results. Finally, it would be worthwhile to investigate the possibilities of a more dynamic stance and study Syria-Palestine as a linguistic area, not necessarily a dialect continuum only, with extensive contact despite fragmented topography and intersecting scribal traditions that promoted convergence. Hence, the material in question could also contribute to the recent debate about the value of positing areal phenomena as opposed to individuating individual instances of borrowing. The evolution of literary traditions, their historical circumstances, and the impact of social factors could rationalize for the spread of innovations. And so the hunt for the real NWS goes on.

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