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from Syriac**

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Modern Aramaic Dialects and the Deviation from Syriac

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1. ‘How’ and ‘like’ (*prep.*) in Aramaic languages

When I come across a passage of Peshitta, such as is quoted below, some time after reading other Aramaic texts, say, one of Targums, a feeling never fails to occur to me that this is a Syriac text.

ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ ᐱᕈᕋᓂ
 “now just as the weeds are gathered and burned in fire, so will it be at the
 end of this world (Matt. 13:40)”

It is neither the Syriac script nor the literary style of the Gospel that incites such a feeling, but it is the two words used in the verse that bring this feeling back to me, namely, ܠܗܘܢܐ ‘how’¹⁾ and ܠܗܘܢܐ ‘thus, so’.

About the *-nā* element in ܢܐ ‘this’, ܢܝܢ ‘which’ and ܢܝܠ ‘what’, Nöldeke (p. 47) and Brockelmann (p. 19, also in *Grundriss* p.135) explain thus: *hādənā > hānā. *dənā* ‘this (*m. sg.*)’²⁾ was one of the demonstrative pronouns in the preceding period of Aramaic (Biblical Aramaic for example; cf. Rosenthal, p. 20). With this in view, we may be allowed to explain the common *-anā* element in these words.

$$^{\circ}aykanā \text{ 'how'} < *^{\circ}ay-ka-dənā \text{ 'what like this'}$$

hākanā ‘thus’ < **hā-ka-dənā* ‘lo, like this’

Now you are asked to have a look at the table below. The table shows the pairs of ‘how’ and ‘like’ (*prep.*) in the Aramaic languages all through almost three thousand

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1) In the quotation above, *‘aykanā* is used as a compound conjunction with *də-* ‘just as’. In this paper, words in italics stand for the phonetic form, while those in the roman type mean either the transliteration or the reconstructed form, except in the table below. Therefore, Modern Aramaic words are mostly in italics with no script in use (except in Urmi that often employs the Nestorian Syriac script today). I am most grateful to the opinion of the referee which helped me to make some points clearer.

2) Some basic abbreviations in linguistic studies are used. Likewise, some of the works are cited in abbreviated forms, for which please refer to the *References*. As to the abbreviations in the quotation, please refer to SL. To this group, we can add ‘today’ also: *yawmā dānā* > *yawmānā*.

years of Aramaic history.

Table³ of ‘like’ and ‘how?’ in Aramaic

Languages and Dialects	‘like’ (<i>prep.</i>)	‘how?’
Old Aramaic	k-; 482	ʔyk; 45
Egyptian Aramaic	k-; 85	ʔyk; 59
Biblical Aramaic	kə-; 34	hēk; 38 ⁴⁾
Onkelos Targum	kə-, kəwāt; 226-7	ʔēk(dēn) ‘how (then)?’; 220
Jewish Palestinian Aramaic	kə-; 249a	h(y)k [*hēk]; 163b
Old Syriac	ʔyk; 253 line 27 ⁵⁾	ʔyknʔ; 253 line 24 ⁶⁾
Syriac	ʔa(y)k ⁷⁾ , ʔakwāt; 296, 102	ʔayakanā; 100
Babylonian Aramaic	kī, kə-; 569a	hēkē(n); 377a ⁸⁾
Mandaic	aiak, kd, akuat; 236	haidin, haizin; 244
Modern Aramaic ⁹⁾ : Maʿlūla	ex(t), xwōt-; 384-5	ex(t); 395
Ṭūrōyo	xīd-; 561	aidārbo ¹²⁾ ; 30
Mlaḥso	dax ¹¹⁾ ; 62	mágo; 183
Hertevin ¹⁰⁾	ḥen; 103	daḥ/deḥi; 35
Bohtan	xən; 98	dax; 80
Zaxo	ʔix, muxwāt, etc.; 95a	dix/dax; 142a
Urmi	əx; 99	dəxij; 98
Modern Mandaic	hemke; 80	kem(mā); 228

3) As to the bibliographical information for the data, see *References*. The number accompanying data shows the page in the work referred to. The language data are in the roman type despite what is mentioned in footnote 1.

4) In the text, the word is *hēk dī* (Qere; Daniel 2:43) ‘just as’ (written hʔ kdy). It is certain that this *hēk* is used as in Syriac *ʔayakanā da-* ‘just as’ (see footnote 1). We also have *kə-mā* ‘how!’ (Rosenthal, 40).

5) Attested only in a conjunction phrase *ʔyk d-* ‘just as < like that ...’ (loc. cit.). Seeing that the translation of Peshitta text of Old Testament (OT) goes back to circa 2nd century AD (Brock, p. 20), and that the Peshitta text antedates the Old Syriac attestation (see the next footnote), we can safely assume that these words were pronounced as in Syriac. These are the first usage in their proper meaning from OT Peshitta: *ܠܝܚܝܬܝܢ ܠܝܚܝܬܝܢ* ‘like our image (Gen. 1:26)’; *ܝܚܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܚܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܚܝܬܝܢ* ‘and how did you say, ‘She is my sister.’? (Gen 26:9)’.

6) The two words are used in the same ‘Legal Document recording the Sale of a Debt (dated 240 CE)’ luckily together with **hākanā* ‘so, thus’ (lines 20 and 27). *ʔyk* and *hknʔ* are also found in ‘Sale of a Slave by an Edessan Woman (243 CE)’ from Dura-Europos. Moreover, we find a shortened **hākan* also in the latter text (line 10).

7) The word is written *ʔyk* in the historical spelling but pronounced *ʔak*. See also footnote 15.

8) Sokoloff (p. 377a) also thinks of a similar process for *ܝܚܝܬܝܢ* *hēkē(n)* ‘how’ < *ܝܚܝܬܝܢ* **hēk-dēn*, i.e., dropping of *d-* in the demonstrative.

9) Among the Modern Aramaic dialects, those are chosen which are better known and have important linguistic traits in the dialectological study. The *d-* element in four dialects in ‘how?’ (Hertevin, Bohtan, Zaxo and Urmi) is originally a mark of subordination but in the Modern dialects it is often used for adverbial expressions. As to *d-* in *dax* ‘like’ in Mlaḥso, see section 3 *ult*.

10) In this dialect, *ḥ* parallels *x* in others.

11) See section 3 *ult*.

12) See footnote 23.

Based on the data, it will not be difficult to postulate that the two words, when Aramaic began to differentiate itself from other sister languages, had *ka- ‘like’ and *ʾay-ka ‘what like?’ respectively¹³⁾. Moreover, the table tells us many things: 1) ‘how’ is akin to ‘like’; 2) as time goes on, both were gradually rebuilt or transformed but almost always with *k* or its related sound as their core; 3) each Modern Aramaic dialect also reformed the pair in a way that suggests an interesting isogloss.

What is more important here is a very conspicuous situation in the pair of Syriac, including that of Old Syriac. It is quite different from others in two points: a) ʾak (written ʾyk) switched from ‘how’ to ‘like’¹⁴⁾; b) this forced ‘how’ in Syriac to refresh its form and produced ʾayk-anā with a new suffix¹⁵⁾. This form as well as the replacement of the pair is quite distinct from other pairs in Aramaic languages¹⁶⁾. What is still more astonishing is the fact that none of the Modern Aramaic dialects has inherited this Syriac ʾaykanā.

2. Cases of ܐܝܟ ‘how’ in Syriac writings

In spite of Nöldeke’s remark about ܐܝܟ “originally an interrogative [‘how’] but no longer used as such” (see footnote 14), we now know three¹⁷⁾ passages in which ܐܝܟ is used in the sense of ‘how?’ recorded in the painstaking dictionary (SL, p. 33b) based on the data of Brockelmann’s Latin edition (p. 14b). It seems as if he had placed them for us in the jewel case. At first glance, these appear to be in authentic Syriac and the phrase used is a well-known ܐܝܟ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ (most typically ‘just as, because’¹⁸⁾) at that. The compilers (Brockelmann and Sokoloff), however, were keen enough to find the slightest smell tinged with disharmony of the phrase in the context as compared with its

13) *ka- is also a good choice for the form, but the vowel quality is not the subject of this discussion.

14) See the preceding periods in the table (from Old Aramaic up to Jewish Palestinian Aramaic) when ʾyk and the cognate forms represent ‘how’. But now in Syriac ʾyk means ‘like’ and the original *ka- ‘like’ is not employed as such. About this, Nöldeke simply says, ‘originally an interrogative but no longer used as such’ (§364 A, p. 296), and Brockelmann explains: ‘the comparison particle *ka- [‘like’] with a helping vowel [i.e., ʾa + ka- > ʾak, sometimes called Prosthetic Alaf] and the interrogative *ʾayk collapsed into ܐܝܟ ʾak’ (§164 Anm., pp. 80-81: translated with [] added by Y.T.). ʾakwāl ܐܝܟܝܢܐ in the table is a variant form to be used with a personal suffix.

15) See section 1 and footnote 7. To secure stable distinction against ʾaykanā (the new ‘how’), the new ʾyk ‘like’ needed to be pronounced ʾak skipping y, but leaving it in the historical spelling.

16) The nearest form is the Babylonian Aramaic *hēkē(n)*, for which please refer to footnote 8. Nonetheless, it retains the old *ka- ‘like’ (*kī* and *kā*).

17) Out of the four listed in SL, the following should be removed since it is ‘just as’: ܐܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ... ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ “(the words of John the evangelist) ... and saying thus: I [much] rejoiced [when] brethren came and testified [to] your truth [indeed like that] you walk in the truth” (SAL1 182:3; SL, p. 33b). Compare this with its source: ܐܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܟܝܢܐ “for I greatly rejoiced that brethren came and testified about your truth as you walk in the truth (3 Jn. 1:3)”. Since Syriac words corresponding to the bracket [] differ from the Biblical phrase, this Biblical citation (?) came out of a relaxed atmosphere.

18) Of this phrase, ܐܝܟ *man* is a loan from Greek *μέν* and means approximately ‘indeed’ with nothing to do with the homonym ‘who’.

ordinary usage, and caught hold of ‘how’ in disguise¹⁹⁾. Such a use of ܗܘܐ is in no way consistent with Syriac which Nöldeke thought of.

(1)

ܗܘܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܝܬܐ “how is it, indeed, that it is proper for him, who is such as²⁰⁾ this, that he go away, indeed, from the headship of deacons?” (SAL1 34:20; SL, p. 33b). [How about desposing such a man from his current position?]

(2)

ܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ “... and these (*m./f.*) of the rest, by whose (*f., pl.*) power [hands] we might recognize indeed how it is proper that we should manage godly words with judgement and complete the service of these” (SAL1 37:8; SL, p. 33b). [We must know how it is proper to manage the godly words to secure smoother service in these matters.]

(3)

ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ ܕܡܬܠܝܢ “but it (*f.*, a place name²¹⁾) was called baptism. How is it, indeed, that they were standing in it (*f.*) and washing off diseases? (The answer is:) after the moving of the water.” (Jšddev2 136:17; SL, p. 33b). [How do they stand in it and wash off?]

The first two come from the same work, and according to the original publication, the work is a translation from Greek made in 669 AD, and copied in the 8th century. The last one comes from another work written about 850 AD. Since these dates fit well in the decaying period of Syriac, with Islam leading the cultural scene also, the reasons of these ‘how’ appearing in Syriac guise must derive from this historical atmosphere.

So long as these usages are deviations from Syriac in Nöldeke’s conception, ‘how’ in ܗܘܐ came only from the vernacular of the persons who unawares wrote them. It is presumed that in their vernacular Aramaic, which can by no means be called Syriac in such later periods, *ayk was definitely ‘how’ in their everyday life. The canonical pressure of Peshitta upon everyday Aramaic went on diminishing even in writing, until the latter intruded into the written language.

19) We interpret the three words in ܗܘܐ ܕܗܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܬܐ separately, seeing that the sentence requires ‘how’ and that its usual meaning ‘just as, because’ does not fit the context. In [] is given a rendering in a frank style after the literal one.

20) Here ܗܘܐ ‘he who’ + ܗܘܐ ‘such’.

21) Namely, Beth Hesda (John 5:2) in Jerusalem.

3. Between ‘Syriac’ and Modern Aramaic dialects

It is out of question here whether Nöldeke knew this or not, since it was just because of such linguistic phenomena that he strictly confined himself to ‘the best sources within reach’²²⁾ (Preface, p. vii). Be it so to him, however, this supplies us with very important information. As we have seen above, Syriac took an independent choice for ‘how’ and it exercised a very powerful influence over the vast area of Aramaic-speaking Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, we find no reflection of Syriac ʿaykanā in Modern Aramaic languages. On the contrary, most of them have an element *k* or *k̄* that goes back to *kə- or *ʿak̄ (< *ʿakə- < *kə-, see footnote 14). It is indeed a wonder what will be the convincing explanation for this.

The simplest explanation is this: none of the ancestors of the communities of Modern Aramaic dialect was a native speaker of Syriac, probably except Ṭūrōyo and Mlaḥso (see next below). The language of the Edessa district, the birthplace of Syriac, is now Turkish and Kurdish, and as the result of the retreat of Christian communities into remote areas, Syriac disappeared in the area except in monasteries. Indeed we know that Ṭūrōyo is a relatively faithful descendent of Syriac, but ironically enough it lost ‘how’ of etymologically Aramaic origin (now *aidārbo*²³⁾). The case of Mlaḥso goes even further, which has quite a new pair of ‘how’ and ‘like’. In the new ‘how’ *māgo*, we can trace Syriac etymology²⁴⁾ which has, however, nothing to do with *ʿayk, or ʿaykanā. On top of it, the new ‘like’ *dax* is nothing but ‘how?’ in others (see Table). Ṭūrōyo and Mlaḥso are situated in Anatolian Kuridistan relatively near to Edessa. Their pair of ‘like’ and ‘how’ shows some sort of instability like that of Syriac. It may be accounted for when we think of the geographical elements, that is, they have either suffered from the strong influence from Syriac, or their ancestor Aramaic was much the same as Syriac.

4. Syriac studies with Modern Aramaic in view — beyond Nöldeke

Moreover, in the light of a long history of Aramaic languages, this phenomenon can offer us more than that. It is evident from this that *ʿayk ‘how’ has long lived in the communities where people spoke Aramaic of their own until now, be it a non-standard vernacular. As seen in section 1 *infra*, the oldest ʿyk (‘how’ in Old Aramaic) is made up of *ʿay + *ka ‘what like’ but Syriac seems to have had some sort of inconvenience in differentiating ‘how’ and ‘like’. This led the dialect in the vicinity of Edessa (Old Syriac) to rebuild a new pair. The prestigious language of Peshitta (Syriac) had a powerful influence on the majority of Christians in Mesopotamia, and yet *ʿyk ‘how’ lived

22) This means to him that the reliable Syriac texts are those written before 7 C: “The golden age of Syriac reaches to the 7th century” (Introduction, p. XXXII).

23) *ai* (interrogative element) + *dārbo* (< *darb* ‘way’ in Anatolian Arabic < دَرْبٌ written Arabic) ‘(in) what way’.

24) According to the source, this comes from Syriac *mā* ‘what’ + *gawnā* ‘color, sort’ (loc. cit.).

through to this day on the lips of those who spoke Aramaic without being written down for a long time.

Nowadays, thanks to various efforts by scholars, we know far better about Modern Aramaic than in the days when missionaries found it spoken. However, after the period when the interest of Nöldeke stops, there is a very long period of lack in linguistic data, namely, what kind of Aramaic they were speaking until living dialects became known. In this sense, the above three passages offer us invaluable information to answer this, though only in part, and it is comparable to that of Early Arabic²⁵⁾ and Middle Arabic²⁶⁾ studies which taught us the real Arabic (not Literary or Classical) just as they were written, and which accelerated the historical study of Arabic to almost renew it. Deviations and anomalies in Syriac are what Nöldeke kept away, but provide us with such a blessing as ܝܚܝܝܬ discussed here.

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25) A work full of surprise and excitement that depicts tottering Arabic as people wrote, by Simon Hopkins, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic*, OUP, Oxford, 1984.

26) A big contribution made by Joshua Blau, for which, among many others, see *Studies in Middle Arabic and its Judaeo-Arabic Variety*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1988.

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