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An International Handbook

Edited by

Stefan Weninger

In collaboration with

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## 17. Akkadian and Aramaic Language Contact

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### Abstract

*During the first millenium BC, Aramaic (AR) gradually spread over the entire Ancient Near East and came into contact with Akkadian (AK), the native language of Mesopotamia. The article investigates the historical situation of this contact and describes the interferences of AR in AK and vice versa.*

### 1. The historical situation

#### 1.1. Introduction

During the first millenium BC, the AR language and script gradually spread over the entire Ancient Near East and came into contact with AK (Babylonian and Assyrian, see ch. 14) and cuneiform writing, the native language and script of Mesopotamia. Cuneiform texts provide much information on this contact between both languages and scripts. For older literature see Garelli 1987, Greenfield 1987, Tadmor 1987, Tadmor 1991.

#### 1.2. The term “Aramaic language” in cuneiform

Cuneiform texts only rarely mention the AR language explicitly. A letter, probably dating to 710 BC, written by the Assyrian king Sargon II. to Šin-iddina from Ur in southern Babylonia quotes the following request by the latter: “If it is acceptable to the king, let me write and send my messages to the king on Aram[aic] parchment sheets” (*ina libbi šipri Arm[āja lu]spirma*). However, the king replies: “Why would you not write and send me messages in Akkadian? (*ina šipirti Akkadattu*). Really, the messages which you write in it must be drawn up in this very manner – this is a fixed regulation” (Dietrich 2003, no. 2: 15–22; for previous literature see Streck 2001a, 90 n. 3). If restored correctly, this letter seems to confirm that around 700 BC, the political administration of the Assyrian empire still preferred cuneiform Babylonian, although a person from Babylonia deemed alphabetic AR a feasible alternative for sending messages.

A letter from the 8th century BC reports that an AR sealed document (*kanīku Armītu*) from Tyre was sent to the Assyrian king in Kalḫu; the scribe himself quotes the contents of the document by translating it into Assyrian (Saggs 2001, 154f. ND 2686: 3). A letter from the time of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) in-

forms the king that the silver quota of certain shepherds had been written “on an Assyrian document (and) on an Aramaic document” (*ina libbi nibzi Aššurāya ina libbi nibzi Armāya*) (Luukko/Van Buylaere 2002, no. 16, 63, 13f.). Another letter whose date is disputed (either the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> or the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC) refers to an “Aramaic letter” (*egirtu Armētu*) that had been delivered by an Assyrian scribe to the sender” (Luukko/Van Buylaere 2002, no. 99: 10’).

### 1.3. Aramaic scribes

Neo-Assyrian documents sometimes mention AR scribes (<sup>lu</sup>A.BA *Armāya*, see Radner 1997, 83, with n. 434). Though the logogram <sup>lu</sup>A.BA is read *tupšarru*, literally “tablet writer”, in Neo-Assyrian it most probably originally means “*a-ba-man*”, i.e., writer of the alphabet (see for a discussion of the reading and original meaning of the logogram Radner 1997, 80–82). Neo-Babylonian documents distinguish between the scribe writing AK in cuneiform (*tupšarru*) and the scribe writing AR in alphabetic script (*sepīru*) (see for references the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary S 225f. and T 151–162; for *tupšarus* and *sepīrus* within the administration of the Šamaš temple in Sippar see Bongenaar 1997, 56–98; for the AR names of many of these *sepīrus* see Streck 2001b, 114–117).

### 1.4. Bi- or multilingual texts

A bilingual Assyrian–AR inscription was found in Tell Faḫarīya (Abou-Assaf/Bordreuil/Millard 1982). The Bisutūn-inscription of Darius I. was not only written in Old Persian and Elamite but also in Babylonian and Aramaic; for the question of the priority of either language see the remarks by Greenfield 1987, 475f.

### 1.5. Clay epigraphs

Cuneiform tablets sometimes bear AR epigraphs: see Fales 1986 and Hug 1993 for Assyrian tablets and Oelsner 2006 for Babylonian tablets.

### 1.6. Ownership marks

A Neo-Babylonian (Strassmaier 1890, no. 143: 8) document dating to 528 BC tells of a slave whose arm was marked “in Akkadian (and) Aramaic” (*Akkadattu Aḫlamatti*). Neo-Babylonian ownership marks on slaves and animals sometimes consist of AR letter names (Jursa/Weszeli 2000; Jursa 2005).

### 1.7. Aramaic in cuneiform

The AR alphabet written in cuneiform on a Neo-Babylonian school tablet also testifies to the contact between AK and AR (Finkel 1998; Geller 1997–2000, 144–146; Cross/

Huehnergard 2003). The same is true of the AR incantation in cuneiform (Geller 1997–2000, 127–145).

Numerous AR names in AK cuneiform texts attest to the presence of Aramaeans in Mesopotamia during the first millennium BC (Streck 1998). However, Greenfield 1987, 471 has stressed the fact that the overwhelming majority of names is still AK.

## 1.8. Pictorial representations

The co-existence of both languages is also documented by Neo-Assyrian reliefs beginning with those of Tiglath-pileser III. (744–727 BC). They portray two scribes in the act of writing while on a campaign: The Assyrian scribe is holding a stylus and a clay tablet or wax-coated wooden board, the AR scribe is holding a pen and parchment or papyrus (see Streck 2001a, 79 for a photograph and *ib.*, p. 90 n. 2 for literature). Obviously, the royal chancellery kept records not only in Assyrian but also in Aramaic.

## 1.9. The nature of Akkadian-AR language contact

In conclusion, cuneiform texts and Assyrian reliefs present much information on the contact between AR and AK, alphabetic script and cuneiform. However, it is difficult to assess how far-reaching this contact was. The often repeated simple view that Neo-Assyrian was heavily influenced by Aramaean and Neo- and even more Late Babylonian were only written languages any more whereas Aramaean was the vernacular is neither supported by the above mentioned evidence nor by the linguistic facts themselves since Neo-Assyrian as well as Neo- and Late Babylonian show relatively few and mostly only lexical influences from AR (see for Neo- and Late-Babylonian Streck 1995, xxiii f.; Hackl 2007, 149f.).

Certainly the picture is complicated, and one has to distinguish between regions, periods and different situations of language use. In the Assyrian empire AR was spoken in the Syrian west, but in the Assyrian heartland many people, at least in the cities, still spoke Assyrian. The royal chancellery had to use both languages. Also in Babylonia, the traditional Babylonian population in the old cities still spoke Babylonian for many centuries after the arrival of the Aramaeans and used it widely for recording day-to-day activities. On the other hand, the countryside was dominated by Aramaean and “Kaldean” tribes –the latter also most probably spoke Aramaic). Their language, however, although certainly learned by many scribes and other people in the cities as well, had little influence on the Babylonian language.

## 2. Aramaic interferences in Akkadian

### 2.1. Cuneiform orthography

The cuneiform orthography of Neo-Assyrian and Neo- and Late Babylonian is influenced by AR alphabetic writing; see Streck 2001a and ch. 14.9.2.

## 2.2. Lexical loans

### 2.2.1. Introduction

AR lexical loans into AK have been treated by von Soden 1966, 1968, 1977 and Abraham/Sokoloff in press. Whereas von Soden registered some 280 possible loans, Abraham/Sokoloff, in an overly pessimistic review of von Soden's list, want to reduce the number to slightly more than 40 certain and roughly the same number of uncertain loans. Loans not mentioned in this list are known from new texts. Most of the loans are attested less than five times.

### 2.2.2. Types

Different types of lexical loans can be distinguished: a) Loan words, e.g. *raqû/re'û* "to wish" Kessler 1991 no. 89: 6; Jursa 1999, 191 BM 42508+: 14'(?), < AR RQY/R'Y < \*RDY. b) loan translations, e.g., *eber nāri* "far bank (of the Euphrates, Syria)" < AR 'bar nahrā; Abraham/Sokoloff think that, on the contrary, the AR expression is a loan translation from AK. c) Loan translations, e.g., *ana* as nota accusativi corresponding to the use of AR *la*.

### 2.2.3. Semantic Fields

The loans belong to different semantic fields (only certain loans attested more than five times are mentioned in the following paragraph):

- a) Animals: *gadû* "male kid" < AR *gadyā*; Abraham/Sokoloff think of a cognate, but the word is attested only in Neo-Babylonian and therefore is most probably a loan. *hadiru* "pen" < AR 'aldrā, certainly not ḤTR as Abraham/Sokoloff think.
- b) Objects: *darīku* "(container with) pressed dates" < AR DRK, against Abraham/Sokoloff also "to press", see for Mandaic Drower/Macuch 1963, 114; cf. also Biblical and Middle Hebrew DRK "to press wine", e.g. Dalman 1938, 105; the word is attested only in Neo-Babylonian and has no AK etymon. *hallatu* "a kind of basket" < AR ḤLT; since only known from Neo-Babylonian and well attested in Aramaic, against Abraham/Sokoloff most probably a loan.
- c) Trade: *māḥāt* "1/12 shekel" < AR *mā'ā*; last treatment by Powell 1987–1990, 512.
- d) Writing: *sēpiru* (not \**sepīru*) "scribe writing Aramaic" and other derivations of SPR.
- e) Designations for persons: *ḥaylu*, *ḥi'yalu* "a kind of military force" < AR *ḥayl*; against Abraham/Sokoloff a certain loan; the different spellings of the word render the diphthong, see below. *kiništu* "priesthood" < AR *k'ništā*.
- f) Remarkably, several verbs are borrowed from AR (the same is true for Amorite loans in Old Babylonian, see Streck 2000, 126 § 1.101): *radāpu* "to pursue" < AR RDP; Abraham/Sokoloff argue for a genuine Akkadian word, but since it is attested only in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian it is most probably a loan. *sēdu* "to support" < AR S'D. *segû* "to roam, wander" < AR SGY; according to Abra-

ham/Sokoloff possibly a loan from AK into Aramaic, the AK word is, however, only attested in Neo-Babylonian and therefore most probably a loan. *šelû* “to neglect” < AR ŠLY; only attested in Neo-Babylonian and therefore, against Abraham/Sokoloff, most probably a loan. *ibinna* “give!” < AR *hib* “give!” + AK *inna* “give me!”.

- g) Deverbal nouns not mentioned above: *ḥarārā*(?) “objection” < AR ‘RR or ḤRR; see for the latter Abraham/Sokoloff. *têqtu* (thus probably instead of \**te’iqtu*) “injury” < AR ‘WQ; Abraham/Sokoloff point out that, while the root is well attested in Aramaic, the noun pattern is not. However, the word is only known from Neo-Babylonian, has no AK etymology and is therefore most probably a loan.
- h) Particles: *kimā* (not \**kima*’) “how much” < AR *kēma* etc.

#### 2.2.4. Phonology

Loans are sometimes phonologically integrated by applying Geer’s law. If this law is not applied, this is a clear indication of a loan: compare, e.g., *qettā’u*, spelled *qé-et-ta-u*, “chopper” with *qattāyu*, spelled *qá-at-ta-a-a* Pinches 1982, no. 426: 3 or *qá-ta-a-[a]* Kataja/Whiting 1995, no. 69 r. 20 (cf. Jursa 1995, 189 with n. 378; Bongenaar 1997, 395), and *qātē*, spelled *qa-te-el*. Against Abraham/Sokoloff, *QaTTāL* is attested with this root in Aramaic, see *qattā’ā* “Holzhacker” Dalman 1938, 359, “chopper, hewer” Jastrow 1996, 1346.

/ʕ/, a consonant not known in AK, is rarely treated according to AK phonological rules, i.e., disappears causing *Umlaut* from *a* to *e*: *sēdu* “to support” < AR S’D. More often, it is preserved, clearly indicating a loan, and is differently spelled in cuneiform: a) Ḥ: *māḥat* “1/12 shekel” < AR *mā’ā. ḥiṣarū* “tithe” Joannès 1989, 257 L 4720: 3 < ? ‘SR, see Jursa 1999, 104 n. 440. b) ’: *ak-ta-ra-a*’ “I bowed down” < AR KR’. c) Without indication: *qettā’u* (*qé-et-ta-u*) “chopper” < AR QT’, see above. *a-ra* “land” < AR ’ar’ā; against Abraham/Sokoloff, it is quite normal that West-Semitic /ʕ/ is not written in cuneiform.

The diphthong /ay/ is preserved in *ḥaylu*, *ḥi’yalu* “a kind of military force” < AR *ḥayl*, written *ḥa-a-a-la*, *ḥi-ia(-a)-lu*, *ḥi-a-lu-*, *ḥi-ʔa-la-*.

#### 2.2.5. Morphology

Some nouns may be borrowed in the AR status emphaticus in *-ā*, see, e.g., *ḥarārā* (always spelled *ḥa-ra-ra*, *ḥar-ra-ra*) “objection” (see 2.2.3., above) and *arā* (*a-ra*) “land” (see 2.2.4., above). The cuneiform orthography is, however, ambiguous (Streck in press), and written *a* may be purely orthographic. Other nouns are surely integrated into the AK inflectional system and show the AK case vowels such as *gadū* “kid”.

The AR plural in *-ayyā* > *-ija* is rarely used, sometimes, but not exclusively with AR loans (see Streck in press chapter 6), e.g., *ḥābija* (*ḥa-bi-ia*) “jars” < AR ḤB’ Ólafsson/Pedersén 2001, 111 no. 21: 3.

Borrowed verbs are always fully integrated into the AK inflectional system and form the AK tenses and verbal stems, e.g., perfect *artedip* “I pursued” < AR RDP, *ušasgū* “they let him go” < AR SGY.



### 2.3. Grammatical loans

On the whole, grammatical Aramaisms are rare. For the AR nominal plural *-ajjā* > *-ijā* see 2.2.5 (Morphology). In positive main clauses of letters, the Late Babylonian preterite *iprus* has the meaning “let him decide”, an inner-AK development possibly also influenced by the AR short imperfect (Streck 1995, 246 f.). The use of *ša* to introduce substantival clauses is possibly influenced by AR *dī/zī* (Hackl 2007, 59). For further possible, mainly syntactic Aramaisms see von Soden 1995, 299f. §§ 192, 193.

## 3. Akkadian interferences in Aramaic

### 3.1. Introduction

Since the textual material from early AR is relatively sparse, AK influences on the AR dialects of this period are difficult to describe. However, later dialects such as Syriac and Mandaic offer numerous examples for Akkadianisms.

### 3.2. Lexical loans

Kaufman 1974, 160, the most comprehensive study to date, lists 362 AK loanwords in the various AR dialects (for Mandaic see also Dietrich 1967). The following semantic fields are represented (the numbers in brackets refer to the total number of loans in these fields):

- a) Political-legal terminology (55), e.g., *ḥwbl'* (Syriac) “interest” < AK *ḥubullu*.
- b) Professions (55), e.g., *'škp'* (Syriac etc.) “leather worker” < AK *aškāpu*.
- c) Architecture (50), e.g., *tytwr'* (Babylonian Talmudic) “bridge” < AK *titurru*.
- d) Religious (16), e.g., *n'ndby'* “offering” < AK *nindabû*.
- e) Astronomy (6), e.g., *zyqp'* “a type of constellation” < AK *ziqpu*.
- f) Topographical features (31), e.g., *tp'* (Syriac) “canal” < AK *atappu*.
- g) Scribal terminology (13), e.g., *gyr'* (Mandaic) “document” < AK *giṭtu*.
- h) Tools and utensils (33), e.g., *swmbylt'* (Mandaic) “ladder” < AK *simmiltu*.
- i) Other items from the material culture (41), e.g., *klk'* (Syriac) “raft” < AK *kalakku*.
- j) General vocabulary (62), e.g., *nphr* (Behistun) “total” < AK *napharu*.

### 3.3. Grammatical loans

For possible grammatical influences see the discussion in Kaufman 1974, 116–136. For example, the AR genitive construction *brh zy/dy X* “the son of X” appears to have been influenced at least in part by the common Neo-Babylonian construction *mārūšu ša X* “the son of X”.

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