

THE POSITION OF ARABIC WITHIN THE SEMITIC DIALECT CONTINUUM*

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Dedicated to Prof. Chaim Rabin

As it is well known, several different genetic classifications of the Semitic languages exist and are subject to dispute so that some linguists even deny a possibility of a more or less reliable genetic classification¹ of this group and consider such a classification as a kind of a "nice play". This rather serious divergence of opinions must have its source both in facts i.e. in the Semitic languages themselves and in the method which has been applied so far. In this paper it is claimed that the very fact that isoglosses combining Arabic with other Semitic languages are so contradictory i.e. pointing both to the North West and to the South is a proof that West Semitic languages constitute a dialect continuum in which the Arabic dialect group has an intermediate position between the North West Semitic and South Arabian. Certainly the idea of a dialect continuum has not been unknown to semitists but not all necessary conclusions have been drawn from it so far. An important premise is that in spite of the fact that Proto-Arabic dialects (Lihyanite, Thamudic, Safaitic etc.) and other pre-classical Arabic dialects (e.g. ancient West Arabian dialect cluster, Eastern Arabic, Himyaritic) are little known, they should nevertheless be taken into consideration in the genealogical classification² and we should also bear in mind that retentions that can be found in Middle and Modern Arabic dialects may provide us with some clues as well. So far usually only Classical Arabic has been taken into consideration though Chaim Rabin has already considered Ancient West Arabian dialects as "a link between North West Semitic and South West Semitic" (1951:2). It is indeed possible that there were transitional dialects between Arabic and North West Semitic and between Arabic and South Arabian like there are transitional dialects e.g. at the Dutch-German and Polish-Slovak border.

The fact that the close relationship of the ancient Semitic languages may impede a genetic classification based both on common innovations or/and on common retentions was not unknown to scholars already in the past century. It is useful to go back to the acknowledged "Altmeister" of comparative semitics i.e. to Theodor Nöldeke who said in 1911 (p. 620) that: "It is not very easy to settle what is the precise connection between the various Semitic languages, considered individually. In this matter one may easily be led to hasty conclusions by isolated peculiarities in vocabulary or grammar. Each of the older Semitic languages occasionally agrees in grammatical

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¹ Hecker (1982:8) says: "Besaß schon das Ursemitische Dialekte, dann ist eine genealogische Gliederung nur wenig sinnvoll. Tatsächlich erfolgt die Einteilung unter gleichzeitiger Berücksichtigung historischer Gesichtspunkte". Most probably Hecker had only a genealogical tree in mind.

² Dolgopolskiy, forthcoming, speaks even about "Arabic languages".

points with some other to which in most respects it bears no very close resemblance, while dialects much more nearly related to it are found to exhibit different formations. Each Semitic tongue also possesses features peculiar to itself." ³ Nöldeke (1911:621 cf. 1899) considered the division of the Semitic languages into a northern and a southern group (the latter composed of North Arabic, "Sabean", Modern South Arabian and Ethiopian Semitic) as justified by facts and certain. His main argument was the existence of internal plurals and of the third class verbal form *qāʾala* only, as he thought, in South Semitic so that a clear division was allegedly possible. He nevertheless acknowledged a possibility that "intermediate dialects may once have existed, perhaps such as were in use among tribes who came into contact sometimes with the agricultural population of the north and sometimes with the nomads of the south".

Since the history of the classification of the Semitic languages has already been presented among others by Hetzron (1974), Goldenberg (1977) and Voigt (1987), I shall deal here only with opinions about the genetic classification of the Semitic languages since 1974, i.e. since the appearance of Hetzron's brilliant article in which he separated North Arabic from South Arabian and Ethiosemitic and classified it as one of the branches of "Central Semitic" parallel to Canaanite and Aramaic, then (1976 and forthcoming) together with Canaanite as an "Arabo-Canaanite" branch. Hetzron's classification has been approved by Goldenberg (1977) and it has been developed by Voigt (1987:15) who has separated Epigraphic South Arabian from both Modern South Arabian and Ethiosemitic and classified it as a southwest branch of "Central Semitic" parallel to Northwest Semitic (which he subdivided into "Ugaritic, ElAmarna") and Hetzron's "Central Semitic" composed of Aramaic and Canaanite-Arabic. Hetzron's classification has been criticized by Blau (1978) in an important article which has remained unknown both to another critic of Hetzron's hypothesis, i.e. to Diem (1980) and to Voigt (1987). Blau has concentrated mainly on the criticism of the alleged isoglosses connecting Arabic directly with Canaanite and Aramaic while Diem has emphasised isoglosses that allegedly link North Arabic only with southern languages. Another hypothesis concerning the genetic classification of Arabic has been presented in several versions by Garbini (finally in 1984:112) who classifies Arabic within North West Semitic and for whom the language of Amorrite names is a kind of pre-written Arabic ("una specie di arabo ante litteram"). Unfortunately, this hypothesis by the great Italian semitist is based on rather scanty evidence (e.g. on our very limited knowledge of the Amorritic of which Garbini himself scarcely gives any concrete examples) and in general it raises more questions than it answers. Especially daring and far reaching is his hypothesis about an "amorritization" not only of North Arabic but also of South Arabian and even Ethiopic! Since most of its crucial elements cannot be verified I am unable to discuss it in this paper. Finally, we have to mention Diakonoff (1988 going back to the first 1965 version, 1985) who classifies Arabic itself as a Southern-Central or South-Western subbranch opposed, among others, to Northern-Central or North-West subbranch and to Southern-Peripheral or Southern subbranch composed only of Epigraphic and

³ This is a translation of his 1899 text which may go back to the original first edition which I could not check.

Modern South Arabian while Ethiosemitic stands alone. Since Diakonoff does not specify his arguments in favour of this classification, it cannot be discussed here.

Let us now turn to the discussion of particular isoglosses.

1. Hetzron's (1974; 1975; 1976:106) main isogloss dividing West Semitic into South Semitic (composed of Ethiosemitic and a South Arabian branch) and Central Semitic is the "adoption of Jussive + *u* for the nonpast" i.e. the alleged creation of *yaqtulu* which he considers to be an innovation within this subgroup.⁴ Here Hetzron tacitly takes for granted that Epigraphic South Arabian did not have *yaqtulu*. This assumption has been criticized with a good reason by Blau (1978:26-9) who emphasises that an alleged absence of *yaqtulu* in Epigraphic South Arabian is quite improbable. Of course the lack of vocalization and gemination sign in the South Arabian script makes a reconstruction of the ESA verbal system risky and actually the whole problem of the classification of ESA is considerably obscured in this way but the fact is that the existence of *yaqtulu* in ESA has never been seriously questioned by specialists. Among several arguments in favour of *yaqtulu* in ESA, one of the most interesting is the existence first of all in Qatabanic of prefix-conjugation forms with prefixed *b-*, i.e. the so-called *b-imperfect* (cf. Höfner 1943:78-81, Beeston 1984:19, 64, 61). The syntactic functions of this *b-imperfect* correspond largely to that of *yaqtulu*. At least since Kampffmeyer (1913), Glaser (1901) and Nöldeke (1904:64-5) this ESA *b-imperfect* has been compared with the *b-imperfect* of the Middle Arabic and of Modern Arabic Dialects which is recorded for the first time in Christian Arabic texts in the ninth century A.D. (see Blau 1967:149, 1981:121-2) but could exist already before. Though the problem requires further research, the probability that there was *yaqtulu* in ESA is very considerable and if in fact the *b-imperfect* of ESA and of Arabic dialects is actually related, then we have another isogloss linking North Arabic with South Arabian (i.e. at least some dialects of both North and South). Of course, it can be argued that this *b-imperfect* isogloss, if correct, may be interpreted as due to contact and interference but then such a "borrowing" hypothesis would require the normal verification.⁵

⁴ It is possible that West Semitic which retains *yaqtulu* (cf. fn 5) simply continues that dialect or those dialects of Proto-Hamito-Semitic which had not introduced the new Present going back to the intensive form with gemination while Akkadian like Berber and perhaps Beja continues those dialects which have introduced it. Therefore it is probably not correct to speak about the loss of **iparras* in Proto-West Semitic and about *yaqtulu* as an innovation of this branch. Likewise it is perhaps not correct to speak about West Semitic *qatala* which is certainly related to the Akkadian Stative and Berber 'verbes de qualité' pattern as an innovation. It is actually a retention since it probably is related also to the Egyptian pseudoparticiples (cf. among others II-P. Müller 1984).

⁵ On the other hand, it has to be emphasised that Hetzron's view (1976:105, actually expressed already by Bergsträsser) that *yaqtulu* "may have been based on the Jussive stem, with the addition of an 'indicativizer' *-u/-nV*: an original 'he is so that he would do', 'he is to do' becoming 'he does/he will do'" is very risky. It does not explain the origin of *-u/-nV* while a development of the "Imperfect" from a Jussive is quite without a parallel in comparative-historical linguistics. Most probably *yaqtulu* is a retention of the West Semitic since, as indicated e.g. by Kurylowicz (1973:53-4), it existed as a heritage from Proto-Semitic also in Proto-Akkadian where it survives as Relative *iprusu* (called also, with all due reservations, "Subjunctive") which has been shifted to secondary functions by *iparras*. On the shift of *iprusu* cf. Blau 1978:26. Dolgopolskiy, forthcoming, seems to follow Voigt (1987:17), when he says that *yaqtulu* has developed from modus relativus *iprus*. The main weakness of this hypothesis is that normally verbal

2. Hetzron's second isogloss i.e. the generalization of *-tV* second person suffixes in the Perfect separates his South Semitic from Central West Semitic (including Arabo-Canaanite) is quite strong though Blau (1978:31) says about the process of the generalization of *-tV* in the North West and of *-kV* in the South that "since the chances in each direction were fifty percent, the chances of independent development are extraordinarily high, so that it must not be used for genetic grouping". Personally I disagree with Blau when he insists on alleged independent developments. Since alleged "independent developments" by definition (i.e. a priori) cannot be verified i.e. distinguished from shared (or "dependent") developments of the original inherited elements the use of the concept of "independent innovation" as a scientific tool is none.

In connection with the isogloss of Perfect suffixes *-tV* versus *-kV* another question must be raised. This is the question whether the neighbouring dialects of Arabic and South Arabian did not form a transitional area in which some dialects of North Arabic could have *-kV* in the Perfect and may be even some South Arabian dialects could have *-tV*. It has been emphasized by Goldenberg (1977:478) that there is a variation of *-k-* and *-t-* e.g. in Neo-Assyrian where statives in *-āka* (2nd masc. sing.), *-āki* (2nd fem. sing.) and *-ākunu* (2nd masc. plur.) occur instead of the regular *-āta*, *-āti*, *-ātunu* and in Samaritan Aramaic we have a variation *-k/-t* and *-kon/-ton* in ultimate perfect forms. As it is known, second person forms have been recorded only in very few cases in Epigraphic South Arabian and the only ending that is attested so far is *-k*. On the other hand, in the ancient ("Himyaritic") and a part of the modern Yemenite dialects of Arabic (Rabin 1951:51-2, Goldenberg 1977:478, n.81, Behnstedt 1985) we have *-kV*. It has been usually taken for granted that this is due to a South Arabian substratum but this hypothesis has never been studied in detail and it remains only a hypothesis (cf. Diem 1979 while e.g. Rabin [1951:25-6] says that with the exception of Himyaritic the pre-Arab i.e. South Arabian substrate was very slight in Arabic-speaking districts). Another hypothesis is that at least in some Yemenite dialects of Arabic forms like *kun-ku*, *kun-ka* "I was, you were etc." are not simply due to the South Arabian substratum but are cases of survival of the forms used in transitional dialects, i.e. those dialects in the dialect continuum which had both some North Arabic and South Arabian traits.⁶ Actually both the influence of substratum and

forms limited to dependent clauses like Akkadian *iprusu* go back to original main clauses forms but another process, i.e. a shift from dependent clauses to main clauses is unknown to me. Nevertheless even if we could accept the hypothesis that Akkadian *iprusu* is original and that its use as Imperfect in West Semitic is an innovation, this would mean only that there was a shift of a function but not a real morphological innovation. It is very interesting that within the so called "prefix conjugation" in East Cushitic we have actually three categories: Present, Past and Subjunctive which is similar to what we have in Arabic (*yaqtulu/yaqul/yaqtula*). In every discussion also Berber should be taken into consideration.

⁶ Rabin (1951:51-2) said: "Actually, the *-ku* of the first person, being the oldest ascertainable Semitic form, must have existed in the parent language of Arabic as well, and its preservation in Himyaritic may be due to the archaic character of that language, which thus would have become separated from the rest of the Arabic area before the *-ku* suffix became replaced by *-tu*. But *-ka* and the plur. *-kun* are certainly secondary developments peculiar to South Arabian and Ethiopic. We do not know at which place precisely the analogical substitution originated, but like most linguistic changes it must have spread from somewhere. The focus must have been in South Arabia, where, as we have seen, South Arabians and Arabs lived intermingled from ancient times ... The *-ka*, *-kun* suffixes in South Arabian and Himyaritic

survival of transitional dialects are not mutually exclusive. I have to emphasize that this hypothesis about the existence of transitional dialects is only a hypothesis which must be studied in detail and verified.

3. Hetzron's third isogloss, namely the "generalization of the same vowel for verbal prefixes in one verb" (1976:94) misses one point: apart from Epigraphic South Arabian in which vowels remain unknown, all other branches have generalized the prefix vowel and *all* of them did it in a *different* way. Therefore the value of the "generalization" as an isogloss is practically void. Here Hetzron does not even mention the situation in the Modern Arabic dialects some of which, at least, may continue the situation of the prehistoric period.

4. Hetzron classifies Arabic together with Canaanite as "Arabo-Canaanite" on the basis of only one alleged innovation, i.e. the adoption of *-na/nā* as the feminine plural ending in verbs as against *-ā* (Akkadian and Ethiopian) and *-ān* (Aramaic). Blau (1978:32) says: "There is, in my mind, no doubt whatsoever that Arabic and Hebrew reflect independent parallel development. Hetzron himself saw the reasons for the Hebrew and Arabic innovation: it was necessitated by the homonymy with the dual ending, and was based on the ending of the corresponding independent pronouns". Hetzron's explanation that the alleged innovation of Arabic and Hebrew was probably necessitated by the homonymy with the dual ending is rather opaque: it takes for granted that at first there had been a homonymy which later had to be resolved. Actually the opposite assumption, namely that there was no homonymy between the dual and plural, is much simpler and natural. Already Goldenberg (1977:477) was against the hypothesis about this ending as an innovation and considered it, following Nöldeke, to be primitive.⁷ Voigt (1980:88) first argued for the Proto-Semitic origin of this ending using the same argument about the necessity to avoid the homonymy but in 1987 he changed his opinion saying: "Now I think Hetzron is right in considering the *-nā* element as an innovation necessitated by the homonymy of the feminine and dual endings ... Contrary to Hetzron, I regard this innovation as an earlier development, which can therefore not contribute to a classification of Central Semitic". He (1987:7) assumes that the occurrence of the *-n* element in Old Aramaic invalidates Hetzron's hypothesis about its Arabo-Canaanite innovation and proves that this ending "does already belong to the Central Semitic proto-language". He (1987:13-5) points out that there is *-n* (**-Vn* or **-nV* ? A.Z.) in the third person feminine plural also in Epigraphic South Arabian (cf. Beeston 1984:15 and W.W. Müller 1976:61) and on this basis he classifies Epigraphic South Arabian within "Central West Semitic" separating it from South Semitic which remains composed only of Modern South Arabian and Ethiop-Semitic. In my opinion this isogloss (like the ending of the *modus energicus*) indicates only that there is a dialect continuum involving North West Semitic, North Arabic and South Arabian including Modern South Arabian (cf. 3rd fem. plur. *t-kath-an* in Mehri) but this continuum goes further to the south since other South Arabian and Ethiopic isoglosses are numerous

may thus be evidence of a Yemenite "Sprachgemeinschaft" rather than of loan."

⁷ Voigt (1987:11, n.15) argues against Goldenberg (and Nöldeke!) that "the paradigm of the proto-language as reconstructed by Goldenberg has a disadvantage in that it allows consonant-initial endings". Unfortunately the argument for this preference has not been specified.

enough (cf. Moscati 1959, Gruntfest 1974, D. Cohen 1988:125). Voigt (1987:15) emphasises only "the strong links that hold between Modern South Arabian and Ethiopic languages" referring to classical studies of the subject but provides no concrete evidence for the alleged gap (cf. Diakonoff's opinion mentioned above) between Epigraphic South Arabian on the one hand and Ethiosemitic with Modern South Arabian on the other. He does not mention e.g. the second person morpheme *-k-* in the Perfect of Epigraphic South Arabian, Modern South Arabian and Ethiosemitic. Finally, it should be emphasised that *-na* occurs in the plural forms of verbs of other Hamito-Semitic languages. E.g. in Cushitic, see Beja *té-dif-na* "you (pl.) go", *te-kátim-na* "you (pl.) arrive" though there is no more gender distinction in the plural. Further research is needed but without it we should be careful when using this morpheme exclusively for the classification of Semitic.

Let us now turn to another, actually rather old, hypothesis about the classification of Arabic within "South Semitic" together with South Arabian and Ethiosemitic repeated e.g. by D. Cohen (1988), cf. Moscati et al. 1964:13. This hypothesis has been considered as more probable by Diem (1980) in his polemics with Hetzron (1974 and 1976).

1. Internal plural has been usually considered (e.g. by Diem 1980) as a decisive isogloss separating North Arabic, South Arabian and Ethiosemitic from the "northern" languages. Most of the discussion of this isogloss ignored the widespread use of internal plurals in Berber, Cushitic and Chadic, the situation in Egyptian (there are some internal plurals in Coptic) being obscured by the vowelless script. There can be no doubt that internal plurals are not only Proto-Semitic but also that the great number of different internal plural as such in Arabic (probably also in Epigraphic South Arabian), Modern South Arabian (D. Cohen 1988:128) and Ethiopic (*ibid.*) is not a secondary development at least in its great majority since Berber (especially Tuareg) and to somewhat less extent Cushitic have also a great variety of internal plural forms. It has been claimed several times that it is only the principle of internal plural forms that is common to Hamito-Semitic and that only very few internal plural forms (first of all the so called "internal *-a-* plurals") common to the different branches of Hamito-Semitic have been discovered. The answer is that very little research has been done so far and especially in view of the lack of research into regular vowel correspondences between e.g. Berber and Semitic very few common forms can be identified. In any case it has to be emphasised that the hypothesis that only Arabic and possibly South Arabian together with North Ethiosemitic developed a very differentiated system of internal plurals as an innovation has never been proven (cf. Goldenberg 1977:474) and it hardly can be proven in view of the evidence of Berber, Cushitic and Chadic. In any case, internal plural existed at least in the prehistoric stage of Hebrew⁸ so that as an isogloss it combines Arabic not only with

⁸ There is a hypothesis that Hebrew nomina segolata, which in the historical period can be interpreted as a case of umlaut (but not ablaut), actually represent original prehistoric forms with ablaut i.e. internal plurals. In connection with this I want to emphasise that in my opinion probably only a part of the segolata goes back to original internal plurals and a part is due to a secondary umlaut. There have been, probably, two parallel processes that have merged: a retention of the original internal plurals to which regular plural endings have been added and an innovation in the regular plural forms in which

South Arabian⁹ and with Ethiosemitic in which it has been retained but also with North West Semitic. It is not surprising, as assumed by Diem (1980:70-1) that we find no trace of internal plural in Akkadian. On the one hand, such a complete loss was possible even after the separation of Proto-Semitic dialect continuum from Proto-Hamito-Semitic and after the separation of Akkadian itself. On the other hand, it is also possible, that Akkadian (and perhaps also some North West Semitic dialects other than Hebrew) continued these dialects of Proto-Hamito-Semitic in which internal plural was less frequent. I want to emphasise that proto-languages, like all other languages, had to be composed of different closely related dialects (also forming dialect continua; cf. fn 4) so that a reconstruction of one, very regular and symmetric proto-language may be sometimes useful as a linguistic experiment nevertheless it is very unnatural.

2. *Qātala* and *taqātala* derived stems have also been considered (see Nöldeke: 1904, Fleisch 1944:423) as decisive isoglosses separating North West from South West¹⁰ even though Fleisch himself was well aware of the existence of *qātala* in North West Semitic. On Hebrew, cf. Goldenberg (1977:475). The most important fact is that this is not a South Semitic innovation since it is found also in Beja though this has been missed by Fleisch (1944:442-3). In this very archaic Cushitic language we have a reciprocal form of the strong, i.e. prefix conjugated, verbs which uses *-ā-* together with the prefix *(a)m(o)-*. This latter prefix corresponds to the Semitic *n-* as well as Berber *mV/nV-* and has a passive and a reflexive meaning. E.g. *gid* "to throw" and *amó-gā-d-na* "to throw at each other", *dir* "to kill" and *amó-dār-na* "to kill each other" (Roper 1928:73). That in Beja actually two methods of forming derived stems have been accumulated has its own internal logic: there are both passive/reflexive and reciprocal morphemes since in a reciprocal form we have two agents who are at the same time patients.

3. Already Nöldeke (1911:621, going back to the earlier version in German) argued that *-a-* between the second and the third radical consonant in active perfect forms was an isogloss combining Arabic with Ethiopic. Goldenberg (1977:475) rightly emphasises that this fact "ought not to have been ignored". This isogloss alone, however, is not sufficient to separate Arabic altogether from North West Semitic since we do not know the real vocalization of several North West Semitic languages and on the other hand it is not clear whether all dialects of Old Arabic had only this vocalisation of all perfects since the situation in a number of Modern Arabic dialects is different and it is possible that this does reflect a very old Arabic dialect differentiation.

4. Internal passive has been considered as an isogloss connecting Arabic including Thamudic (van den Branden 1950:43) and Lihyanite (Caskel 1954:66-7) where it has been reconstructed, with North West Semitic e.g. by Rabin (1960:562) and Moscati et al. (1964:123-4). Yet it has been finally acknowledged by specialists on Epigraphic

there appeared a secondary umlaut triggered by the regular plural ending, by the stress shift and by analogy with internal plurals which acquired regular endings.

⁹ Garbini's statement (1984:112) that Epigraphic South Arabian influenced the development of internal plurals in North Arabic is practically without an evidence.

¹⁰ Beeston (1984:12) suggests the existence of *qātala* in Sabaic.

South Arabian (Prof. W.W. Müller's personal letter of 6 August 1991) that it existed in Sabaic. It survives also in Modern South Arabian (Cohen 1988:130).

5. Garbini (1984:107) considers the elimination of the third person pronominal morpheme *s-* by *h-* as an innovation of North West Semitic and of Arabic. The situation in ESA and Modern South Arabian where we have both of these morphemes (see the comparative table by D. Cohen 1988:128) proves that this isogloss reaches further to the south linking North Arabic also with South Arabian.

6. The prefixes of causative are *h-* and *s-* in Epigraphic South Arabian (the former in Sabaic and the latter in other languages or dialects) while in Arabic we have *-s-* only as a part of a compound prefix *-st-* (like in Modern South Arabic and in Ethiosemitic not to mention North West Semitic and Akkadian) but otherwise *'a-* while in Thamudic and in Lihyanite we have also *h-* (van den Branden 1950:34; Caskel 1954:64). Obviously these isoglosses link Arabic both with the North and with the South.

7. Another element has to be mentioned since it has been used as an argument for a North West connection of Arabic, namely the definite article (Rabin 1960:562). As it is well known, the so-called Proto-Arabic dialects have a definite article *han-** in which *n-* is usually preserved before laryngeals e.g. in Lihyanite and elsewhere it was probably assimilated to the first consonant resulting in its gemination like in Hebrew (see W.W. Müller 1982:18, 21, 24, 26). There are also some traces of *'al-* (so in late Lihyanite, Caskel 1954:68). The definite article **han-* (cf. Mayer Lambert 1972:79 for Hebrew) has its cognates not only in North West Semitic (Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, Edomite and Ammonite at least) but also in Modern South Arabian where we find *h(a)/h(a)-/a-/a* in Mehri and Harsusi as well as *e-/i/ya* in Šheri (Johnstone 1970:306 but cf. Johnstone 1960:85; cf. also Pennachietti 1969). It is possible that the development of the **han-/al-* (the latter variant being "ancient North-East Arabian" according to Beeston 1981:185) prefixed definite article was partially an areal development. If, however, it could be simply a common heritage of a part of West Semitic, this would support the hypothesis about the dialect continuum and about Arabic enchainment both with North West Semitic and South Semitic. That it is probably a later development is indicated by the fact that the internal reconstruction of Arabic (Kurylowicz 1973:131-3, cf. the original version in 1950) shows that originally the nunation had the function of the definite article¹¹ like suffixed *-n* in Sabaic.¹² In Hadramitic it is, however, *-hn* (cf. D. Cohen 1988:125; Rabin 1951:36). This could be a case of suffixation of *hn-* which is prefixed in other languages mentioned above, a feature which is reminiscent of Aramaic (and Rumanian!) where

¹¹ It is astonishing that Garbini (1984:152) says, without mentioning Kurylowicz, that we are still waiting for somebody to explain why *-n* has a function of status determinatus in ESA but a function of status indeterminatus in Arabic.

¹² It has to be emphasised, however, that Kurylowicz (1973:134) supported the view that the South Arabian "nunation of the determined state" stemmed from an old "individualizing" or "singulative" suffix *-dn-* attested in Akkadian and also in Arabic *ins-dn-u-n* (cf. *ins-u-n*). He admitted that "the South Arabian nunation is to a certain extent the functional successor of the Semitic nunation (mimation)" (ibid.). If this hypothesis is true, this would justify positing a hypothesis about Arabic and South Arabian relation since *-dn* may be interpreted as suffixed article **han/an* while the suffixation of the article could be due to contact.

the definite article is suffixed. Thus *-n* as a definite article which allegedly occurs also in the oldest Lihyanite inscriptions (Caskel 1954:68) is an Arabic-ESA isogloss which is, obviously, not sufficient to connect Arabic only with Epigraphic South Arabic and to disconnect it from North West Semitic.

The very little known Himyaritic as scantily recorded by Mediaeval Arab writers had still another variant of the *han-/al-* article, i.e. *'am/'an* (Rabin 1951:34-6, 50, 205; Beeston 1981:184-5) which was considered as "Common West Arabian" by Rabin (1951) and was also found in the Ṭayyī' and in the mediaeval Yemenite dialects. This article survives in some Modern Arabic dialects of Yemen (see Behnstedt 1985:64, 16 where we find *am*, *m-*, *im-* and even *b-/ab-*) and in some Central Sudanese Be-duin dialects (Rabin 1951:35 with a reference to Kampffmeyer).

Other alleged isoglosses (e.g. the development of feminine *-at* into *-ah*, cf. Blau 1978:33-4) are practically irrelevant. In particular irrelevant are the alleged phonetic isoglosses, i.e. the phonetic realization of Proto-Semitic */*p/* as [f] in Arabic, Modern South Arabian and Ethiosemitic, the realization of Proto-Semitic */*g/* as [ǧ] (here it has to be emphasised that in several dialects of Arabic we still have [g] which is not an innovation!) and of the Proto-Semitic "emphatics" as pharyngalized or velarized in Arabic but as glottalized ejectives in Ethiosemitic and Modern South Arabian. Since there has been no phonemic opposition between [p] and [f], [g] and [ǧ] and between glottalization and pharyngalization/velarization in Proto-Semitic, different phonetic realizations could coexist as free and facultative variants like e.g. [g], [ǧ], [ʒ] etc. variants of the same phoneme coexist in Modern Arabic so that the use of free variants (normally not indicated in the script!) has no value for a genetic classification unless a subsequent phoneme split takes place.

Finally I can only mention Garbini's (1984:109) idea that final *-m* in the second and the third person masculine plural of the independent and suffixed pronouns as well as in the endings of the Perfect is an isogloss connecting Arabic with North West Semitic. It is surprising that Ethiopic e.g. *antannmu*, *-kannmū*, Mehri *hēm*, *atēm*, *-han*, *-kan*, Šheri *šum*, *tum*, *-kum* (though in Soqotri there is *-həti*, *-kəti*, and even Šheri has *-hun* for the third person masculine plural) are not mentioned there.

It is not by chance that no discussion of the very old controversy about genealogical tree and wave theory has been undertaken here. It is well known that both theories are to a certain degree simplifications and that genealogical tree is usually a better representation of the prehistory of the genetic development when the languages in question are already quite distant whereas it is difficult to use in the case of very closely related languages. In this paper the emphasis has been put not on theory but on facts which show that in the Semitic dialect chain Arabic has a position between North West and South Semitic as it was claimed by Chaim Rabin already in 1960 (p. 562, cf. a somewhat changed opinion in 1963, especially p. 107) though this has been done on the basis of different arguments.¹³ Let us recall also that

¹³ Rabin (1960:562). Diem (1980:83) says that because of the uncertain character of several factors perhaps it would have been better to withdraw on a purely descriptive position and to speak about an intermediate linguistic position of Arabic ("sprachliche Zwischenstellung des Arabischen") or to follow Diakonoff and to consider Arabic at least provisionally as a separate group. I want to emphasise that I differ from Diem when I speak about Arabic between North West Semitic and South Arabian in the dialect chain because my solution is based mostly on isoglosses shared by all the three groups in the

Polotsky (1964) rather supported the old idea expressed already by Hommel that "any subdivision with the Western branch ("North-West", "South-West") was not only irrelevant and superfluous but misleading". There is no contradiction between geographic position of Arabic and its position in the dialect chain. The final result is largely a return to the traditional classification.

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