

NOTES AND COMMUNICATIONS

VESTIGES OF *TANWĪN -UN* AND THE CASE ENDING *-U* AS ATTESTED IN YEMENITE JUDEO-ARABIC TEXTS FROM THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Although in classical Arabic all short vowels, as a rule, are preserved, *a* is more persistent than *i/u*: in prose, pausal *-in/-un* are elided, yet *-an* shifts to *-ā*. In many modern Arabic dialects too (dubbed by J. Cantineau *différentiel*) *a* tends to be sustained in phonetic environments in which *i/u* are elided. This is, it seems, the reason that in the Bedouin dialects of northern Arabia and the Syrian-Iraqi desert it is the historical *tanwīn -an*, rather than *-in/-un*, that is preserved, especially when preceding an indefinite attribute; even phonetic *-in* has, it seems, to be derived from original *-an*.¹ The same applies to medieval Judeo-Arabic 'n (spelt as a separate word) in this position.²

In the Yemenite Tihāma, it is on the contrary *-un* that is, it seems, preserved with indefinite nouns in Wādī Mawr,³ and *-u* in other parts of it.⁴ Since this *-u* is apparently restricted to indefinite nouns,⁵ whereas definite nouns have zero ending, it has, historically, to be interpreted as stemming from *-un*, while original *-u* after definite nouns has been elided. This preservation of *tanwīn -un* is so far only known from the Yemen and is, accordingly, of considerable interest for Arabic dialectology, calling for additional information.

Such information may be supplied by Yemenite Judeo-Arabic texts of the seventeenth century. In contradistinction to all other known Judeo-Arabic texts exhibiting *-an* (also spelt *-in*; as a rule, when preceding an indefinite attribute, written as a separate word; v. above), Yemenite texts, as far as I know (and not counting classical and pseudo-classical spellings with final *alif* to mark 'classical' *-an*), have *tanwīn -un* almost exclusively. The deed MS Sassoon 1055c of the second half of the seventeenth century from Ṣan'a (thus yet another place attesting to *-un*) has,⁶ p. 151, 12–15: *qad aba'tu ilayhi jumlat hiṣṣatī . . . bay'an* ⁷ . . . *thābitan akīdan . . . bittun* (= classical *battan*) *batlan nāfidhan qat'iyyan* 'I have sold him my whole share . . ., a fit, well established, . . . final, irrevocable, effective and decisive . . . sale'; here, as a rule, classical spelling with *-an* (spelt *-ā*) is used, yet *bittun* is spelt in a vulgar way with *-un*.

Since adverbials are apt to preserve *tanwīn*, it being understood as an adverbial ending, even when it has already disappeared in other cases,⁸ the preservation of *tanwīn -un* in the adverbial *bittun* 'finally' does not attest to its subsistence in indefinite nouns in general. It demonstrates, however, that in the seventeenth century in the dialect of Ṣan'a,⁹ in contradistinction to all known dialects outside the Yemen, *tanwīn -un* was more persistent than *-an* (and *-in*).

¹ For further details v. J. Blau, *The emergence and linguistic background of Judaeo-Arabic* (2nd ed.), Jerusalem 1981, 188, 247.

² cf. Blau, op. cit., 174 ff. In the vocalized Judeo-Arabic texts from the twelfth/thirteenth century, T-S Arabic Box 18 (1) 113, this 'n is vocalized 'in, yet, in all likelihood, derives from historical *an*. Cf. also 'yn, to be pronounced *in*, in the same function, Blau, *ibid.*, 247.

³ V. J. Greenman, *ZAL*, III, 1979, 47 ff.

⁴ V. W. Diem, *Skizzen jemenitischer Dialekte*, Beirut, 1973, 66–7, with additional literature. Cf. also W. Fischer–O. Jastrow, *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte*, Wiesbaden, 1980, 120–21.

⁵ But see below.

⁶ I quote from S. D. Goitein, *Hatemanim* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem, 1983.

⁷ Here and in the following *-an* transcribes final *alif*, spelt in accordance with classical Arabic.

⁸ V. Blau, op. cit., 170; *idem*, *Hebrew Annual Review*, III, 10, 1979.

⁹ Or, at least, in the dialect of the scribe of the document.

I have also found important vestiges of *tanwīn -un* in the poems of the greatest of the Yemenite Jewish poets, Rabbi Shalom Shabazi (1619–80, southern Yemen).¹⁰ However, the analysis of poetic usage is a much more complex matter since poetic language is more intricate, fed as it is by various traditions, including the classical influence. Nevertheless, even in my admittedly rather restricted reading, the use of *tanwīn -un* (without any case distinction) at the cost of *-an/-in* stands out. I have not noted any cases of *-in* and only two of *-an* spelt with *-n* (rather than with *alif* as in classical Arabic): Seri-Tobi, 32a, 2, *xulūqan kethīra* ‘many people’; ¹¹ v. further Bacher ¹² *xayran*. In all other cases invariably *tanwīn -un* is used. It is especially frequent preceding an indefinite attribute (where outside Yemen *tanwīn -an* is utilized, v. above): Seri-Tobi, 30a, 15, ‘*ilmun mustefādī*’ ‘a profitable knowledge’; 32a, 5, *biqūtun yesīra* ‘by scanty food’; 32a, 7, *bi‘aqlun menīra* ‘with brilliant intellect’; 32b, 12, *fī nuṭqun ḥāsīn* ‘by superior utterance’; Bacher (p. 69, n. 7) cites an additional four cases. Similarly, just as *-an* (also spelt *-in*, v. above) is preserved outside Yemen,¹³ *-un* is retained in the first of two parallel expressions connected by ‘and’; Bacher (p. 69, n. 6) adduces four examples; however, I have also noted one occurrence of *-un* at the end of a hemistich: Seri-Tobi, 13b, 11, *lidayf muwāfidun* ‘to an arriving guest’.¹⁴ Because of the poetic diction, it is impossible to decide whether in speech *-un* was still optional general usage, including final position, or had become restricted to the interior of a syntagmeme, viz. preceding an indefinite attribute or a parallel noun. The frequency of the latter makes, *prima facie*, the second supposition more likely.

Thus Yemenite Judeo-Arabic texts from the seventeenth century attest to *-un*—to the exclusion of *-an/-in*—having been a much more widespread feature than it is today, perhaps even a general Yemenite dialectal characteristic.

At this juncture the question arises whether the preservation of *-u* was limited to the *tanwīn*, i.e. to indefinite nouns, or was retained optionally after definite nouns as well. Diem, op. cit. (p. 67, n. 3) cites one example from Tihāma of *-u* after definite nouns, but has some misgivings because of the possibility of classical influence. And, indeed, the occurrence of *-ū* with definite nouns in the rhyme of Shabazi’s poems (Seri-Tobi, 10a, –2 to –1, *we‘ant almstexārū . . . weni‘mathū texuss ḏhū alistiḅārū* ‘and you have the choice . . . and His grace is only for the persevering’; three other instances are cited by Bacher, p. 69, nn. 1–3) may well reflect poetical linguistic tradition, also stemming from classical Arabic. And, in fact, the endings *-ā* and *-ī* are well attested in the rhymes of Shabazi’s poems with both definite and indefinite nouns, v. Bacher (p. 68, nn. 4–6); and further, Seri-Tobi, p. 14b, –4, *likul ḥā‘irī* ‘to every (one who is) perplexed’; 14b, –3, *a‘ūd shākiri* ‘I repeat my thanks’; 29b, 8, *yabqā lī nedīmā* ‘he will be my drinking company’; 30a, 15, ‘*ilmun mustefādī*’ ‘a profitable knowledge’; 30a, 16; 30b, 24, *fī taḥqīq ‘ilmā* ‘by studying knowledge’; 32a, 1, *hām alfeqīrā* ‘the poor one has become despicable’; 32a, 3, *wetabqā ḥāqīrā* ‘and she becomes despised’; 32a, 6, *ant alqedīrā* ‘You are the Omnipotent’.¹⁵

¹⁰ Citations are taken from the introduction to S. Seri-Y. Tobi, *Shirim ḥadashim leRabbi Shalom Shabazi* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem, 1976, 7–37.

¹¹ Preceding an indefinite attribute, v. above and below.

¹² W. Bacher, *Die hebräische und arabische Poesie der Juden Jemens*, Strassburg, 1910, p. 69, n. 6.

¹³ V. Blau, *The emergence and linguistic background of Judaeo-Arabic*, p. 174, n. 1; p. 195, n. 2.

¹⁴ Bacher, op. cit., p. 69, n. 5 cites two instances without special syntactic conditioning.

¹⁵ *-ī* is added also to Hebrew nouns, v. Bacher, op. cit., p. 67, nn. 2–3.

Nevertheless, I have noted *-u* with definite noun in a seventeenth-century deed from Şan'a, related to the deed mentioned above: Goitein, op. cit., 157, 7, *aba'tu ilayhā bihā jumlat alhişşatu(!) alladhī lī fī -lbayt* 'I have sold to her for it my share in the house' (and cf. also the occurrence of *-u* in the construct at Goitein, 151, 19, *'arşatu(!) hādhihi -lhişşa* 'the courtyard of this share'). On the background of the preservation of *-un* with indefinite nouns the assumption of the retention of *-u* with definite ones is, therefore, a quite likely supposition.

In modern Yemenite dialects the final *u* of the perfect first person singular is often preserved, almost always in the *k*-dialects and exceptionally in the *t*-dialects.¹⁶ It stands to reason that this preservation of the final *-u* is related to the preservation of *-u* in definite nouns and of *-un* in indefinite ones, as attested in Judeo-Arabic texts from the seventeenth century and, in vestiges, in modern Yemenite dialects.

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¹⁶ V. Diem, op. cit., e.g. pp. 27, 95, and especially Fischer-Jastrow, op. cit., 120.

RHETORICA SEMITICA

Although any lingering doubts about the lexical value of the Semitic particle *bal* ought by now to have been dispelled by the observations of Labuschagne¹ and Aartun,² a few further remarks on the problems involved in contextual analysis might not be altogether superfluous. While this particular instance of etymological overkill is not included there, the several pitfalls encountered in the practice respectively of comparative philology and textual emendation are meticulously documented in Barr's monograph on methodology.³ And the dangers of 'pan-Ugaritism' have been signalled more than once.⁴ The purport of these caveats is clear: textual problems will not always (or even often) be solved by reference to cognates. Occasional solutions may be lexical, seldom morphological, and even more rarely syntactic, since 'meaning' is, in the final analysis, a product of context.

Now, though it is admittedly tempting to deal with the general question of a Canaanite language/literature, my remarks here will be limited to the syntactic function of the particle *bal* in a few poetic passages.

An early attempt to read the negative as asseverative was Ps. 16 : 2

אמרת ליהוה אדני אתה טובתי בל-עליך

i.e. 'my happiness is on/in you', instead of, say, 'you are my happiness, nothing above/other than you'.⁵ Since the effect is here negligible, it might well seem that if the proposal had merit it would lie in the appeal to a cognate, namely, Ugaritic *bl*. The method is familiar, its assumptions more than merely questionable. There is in Ugaritic (or Phoenician) no instance of *bl* requiring

¹ C. J. Labuschagne, 'Ugaritic *BLT* and *BILTI* in Is. X 4', *VT*, xiv, 1964, 97-9.

² K. Aartun, *Die Partikeln des Ugaritischen*, I, AOAT 21/1, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974, 26-7.

³ J. Barr, *Comparative philology and the text of the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1968, especially, perhaps, 76-124.

⁴ e.g. G. R. Driver, *JSS*, x, 1965, 112-17 (reviewing M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic philology*); M. H. Pope, *JSS*, xi, 1966, 228-41 (reviewing J. Gray, *The legacy of Canaan*); J. C. De Moor and P. Van Der Lugt, *BO*, xxxi, 1974, 3-26 (reviewing L. R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra parallels*, I); Y. Avishur, 'Should a Ugaritic text be corrected on the basis of a Biblical text?', *VT*, xxxi, 1981, 218-20 (CTA 16 : I : 26-28 and Jer. 8 : 23).

⁵ R. T. O'Callaghan, 'Echoes of Canaanite literature in the Psalms', *VT*, iv, 1954, 166-7, followed by Gray, *Legacy*, 277.