A REEVALUATION OF THE SEMITIC DIRECT OBJECT MARKERS[*]

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This paper aims to clarify the relationship between the superficially similar direct object markers attested in Modern South Arabian, Ge'ez, Arabic, Aramaic, Samalian, Hebrew, and Phoenician. I argue that the direct object markers in Aramaic and the Canaanite languages derive from a single innovative form, which I reconstruct as *ʾ*ayāt-*. I further claim that the remaining forms are unrelated.

Although verbal objects were originally marked with the accusative case in Semitic, several languages developed independent morphemes to mark the object of a transitive verb, which in some cases functioned alongside the accusative case.[1] Scholars have long debated the relationship between the similar-looking Modern South Arabian, Ge'ez, Arabic, Aramaic, Samalian, Hebrew, and Phoenician direct object markers. Many favor a maximal interpretation linking most, if not all, such forms despite clear phonological differences.[2] In this paper, I will take a more minimalistic approach. I argue that the direct object markers in Aramaic and the Canaanite languages derive from

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[1] The accusative case could coexist with the direct object marker in certain Semitic languages like Ge'ez and Arabic because they did not fulfill the same function. The accusative case marked verbal objects without distinction and could also assume adverbial functions, while the direct object markers marked pronominal objects and, in some cases, definite noun phrases. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the Semitic direct object markers developed to replace an ailing or defunct case system. P. Bekins, *Transitivity and Object Marking in Biblical Hebrew* (HSS 64; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), pp. 203–204, provides a good summary of the distinctive features of direct object markers.

[2] For the sake of brevity, I will refer to previous studies as necessary rather than providing a detailed literature review. For a summary of scholarship up to 2005, see A. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization* (HSS 57; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), pp. 117–121. All of the scholars cited by Rubin assume that most of the Semitic direct object markers are related and provide their own explanations to account for the phonological differences between them as do J. Blau, עיונים בבלשנות עברית (Studies in Hebrew linguistics; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), pp. 27, 82 n. 27; A. Dolgopolsky, "On the Origin of the Hebrew *Nota Accusativi* ʾ*et* ~ ʾ*ɛt* and the t-Accusative in Akkadian, Agaw and Saho," in *Afroasiatica Tergestina: Papers from the 9th Italian Meeting of Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic) Linguistics, Trieste, April 23–24, 1998* (ed. M. Lamberti and L. Tonelli; Padua: Unipress, 1999), pp. 43–46; D. Wilmsen, "More on the Arabic Object Marker *iyyā*: Implications for the Origin of the Semitic *Notae Accusativi*," *FO* 50 (2013): 67; and P. Bekins, *Transitivity and Object Marking*, p. 38. H. H. Hardy, "Whence Come Direct Object Markers in Northwest Semitic," *JSS* 61 (2016): 313–315. Only P. Noorlander, "Sam'alian in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: A Historical-Comparative Approach," *Or* 81 (2012): 225–226, suggests the possibility of independent innovation across the different branches of Semitic.

a single innovative form, which I reconstruct as *ʾayāt*. The remaining forms are all unrelated.

1. THE ARAMAIC AND CANAANITE EVIDENCE

A direct object marker in *ʾyt* or *yt* occurs in many Aramaic dialects.[3] In Old Aramaic, it takes the form *ʾyt* and introduces both independent nouns (Sefire II C 5) and pronominal suffixes (Sefire III 11).[4] In later dialects of Aramaic, the *aleph* of *ʾyt* was lost due to aphaeresis, an inconsistent but fairly widespread sound change in this branch of Semitic.[5] The full form *ʾyt*, however, appears to have survived in Qumran Aramaic[6] in secondary usage as a demonstrative in accordance with Kuryłowicz's fourth law of analogy.[7] Later dialects mostly restricted the usage of the direct object marker; some use it before suffixes, others before definite nouns.[8]

The vocalization of the Old Aramaic direct object marker can be reconstructed using data from several sources. In Peshitta Syriac and Targumic Aramaic, the short form *yt* is realized as *yāṯ,* which corresponds to the second syllable of the earlier form. The quality of the initial syllable, on the other hand, can be inferred from comparative Aramaic and Semitic evidence. In most cases of *aleph* aphaeresis in Aramaic, the offending *aleph* preceded an *a* vowel (e.g., Proto-Aramaic *ʾaḥad* 'one' > *ḥad*).[9] Furthermore, the nominal pattern *qatāl* is far more common among the Semitic languages than the patterns *qitāl* and *qutāl*.[10] Therefore, I tentatively vocalize Old Aramaic *ʾyt* as *ʾayāt*.

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[3] See A. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, p. 102, for the full distribution.

[4] A further example of the full form *ʾyt* occurs in Imperial Aramaic in broken context (Asshur Letter 6). V. Hug, *Altaramäische Grammatik des Texte des 7. und 6. Jh.s. v. Chr* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1993), p. 102.

[5] The motivating factor for *aleph* aphaeresis in Aramaic seems to have been the absence of stress, and, as a proclitic particle, *ʾyt* certainly fits this criterion.

[6] *wbʾyth bym[mʾ* 'on that same day' (4QEnastr d 1 iii:4). Compare the similar expressions with *yt* in Christian Palestinian and Samaritan Aramaic: Christian Palestinian Aramaic *bywmʾ yth* 'on that very day' (1 Sam 6:15, *apud* C. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des christlich-palästinisch-Aramäischen. Teil 1: Schriftlehre, Lautlehre, Formenlehre* [Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1991], p. 72) and Samaritan Aramaic *byth ywmh* 'on that day' (Deut 31:17, *apud* R. Macuch, *Grammatik des samaritanischen Aramäisch* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982], p. 135). H. Drawnel, *The* Aramaic Astronomical Book *(4Q208–4Q211) from Qumran: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 419, and the other scholars whom he cites all read this form as *wbʾwth*, but the scribe who wrote the text did not distinguish between *wāw* and *yôd* in his handwriting. I read this form as *wbʾyth* since *wbʾwth* does not produce a native Aramaic word but rather a Hebraicized form of *ʾāt* 'sign' or the Hebrew direct object marker, while the construction *wbʾyth bym[mʾ* has good parallels in other Aramaic dialects.

[7] J. Kuryłowicz, "La nature des process dits 'analogique,'" *Acta Linguistica* 5 (1945–1949): 30.

[8] A. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, p. 102.

[9] In any case, the *aleph* had to be followed by a short vowel, otherwise aphaeresis would not have occurred.

[10] J. Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns* (HSS 52; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 223, 229.

A similar looking direct object marker, ʾyt, occurs in Phoenician beginning in the eighth century B.C.E. (KAI 26:3). Over time, this form underwent phonological reduction to ʾt in certain dialects (such as Byblian, KAI 10:3, 7), although the full form survived until the Neo-Punic period in other dialects (KAI 62:1).[11] The Phoenician direct object marker introduces independent nouns almost exclusively. Only in two cases, both in Punic, does it carry a pronominal suffix (CIS I 580.3; CIS I 6001.1/2).[12]

The vocalization of the Phoenician direct object markers ʾyt and ʾt is hard to ascertain, but there are clues. The y of ʾyt in early inscriptions must be consonantal because Phoenician orthography did not employ vowel letters until the Punic period. Furthermore, ʾyt was probably bi-syllabic ʾvyvt, since diphthongs contracted in Phoenician, which fits the reconstruction of Aramaic ʾyt as *ʾayāt. The shortened form ʾt is rendered oθ in a Neo-Punic inscription in Greek script from Wasta, Syria (KAI 174:5) reflecting *ʾayāt > *ʾayōt > *ʾôt > *ʾût > ʾut.[13] Two further transcriptions of ʾt appear in Plautus' *Poenulus*: yth (940B) and et (930, 945).[14] Fox suggests that yth reflects an earlier Greek transcription vθ from Plautus's lost Greek source, which in turn, reflects Phoenician üt or it from *ut.[15] But he has skipped a step in the transmission of *Poenulus*. As Gratwick points out, Latin orthography at the time of Plautus lacked both y and th.[16] In their place, Plautus would have used u and t. Thus, yth reflects earlier Latin ut, which would have sounded like Greek oθ, the form found in KAI 174:5.[17] The form et proves more problematic. On the surface, it resembles the Hebrew pre-nominal form of the direct object marker ʾet̠ (see ~~its~~ discussion below). Elsewhere in *Poenulus*, however, etymological *ō is rendered e (e.g., *ʾanōkī > anec in 947/937. 949. 995; *qanōt > caneth in 932). Friedrich, Röllig, and Amadasi Guzzo suggest that these transcriptions

[11] J. Friedrich, W. Röllig, and M. G. Amadasi Guzzo, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik* (3rd ed.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1999), p. 184.

[12] C. R. Krahmalkov, *A Phoenician-Punic Grammar* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 285.

[13] For this sequence of sound changes, see J. Fox, "A Sequence of Vowel Shifts in Phoenician and Other Languages," *JNES* 55 (1996): 37.

[14] The different forms probably come from two different dialects of Punic: one consulted by Plautus in the third century B.C.E. while writing *Poenulus*; the other consulted by a later editor in the early imperial period in order to fix a badly corrupted text: A. S. Gratwick, "Hanno's Punic Speech in the Poenulus of Plautus," *Hermes* 99 (1971): 37.

[15] J. Fox, "A Sequence of Vowel Shifts," p. 42.

[16] A. S. Gratwick, "Hanno's Punic Speech," pp. 36–40.

[17] Latin u renders Greek o in several Greek loanwords into Latin, such as πορφύρα 'purple cloth' > *purpura* and κόμμι 'gum' > *gummi*. See E. H. Sturtevant, *The Pronunciation of Greek and Latin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), pp. 117–118; W. S. Allen, *Vox Latina: A Guide to the Pronunciation of Classical Latin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 49 n. 2.

reflect a later rounding of etymological *ō* to *ü*.[18] Whatever the underlying pho-nological process, we can reconcile *oθ*, *yth*, and *et* with the other Phoenician and Aramaic evidence. The shortened forms ʾ*ut* and ʾ*üt* can plausibly derive from **ʾayāt*, which became **ʾayōt* with the operation of the Canaanite shift and then **ʾōt > *ʾût > ʾut > ʾüt*.

The Hebrew direct object marker exhibits a suppletive paradigm. Before nouns and the 2 m. pl. and 3 f. pl. suffixes it takes the form ʾ*et-*, but before the remaining suffixes it takes the form ʾ*ōt-* (table 1). This distribution is attested in all of the Hebrew vocalization traditions (see table 1 below).[19] Praetorius, followed by Gesenius, Bauer and Leander, and Blau, posited a phonological explanation for this distribution: **ʾāt > ʾat* when unaccented, and then ʾ*at >* ʾ*et* (like *yadken > yedken* in Ezek 13:21).[20] While Praetorius' argument explains the Hebrew forms, it does not fit the comparative evidence.[21] For his explanation to be correct, **ʾayāt* must contract to **ʾāt* before the operation of the Canaanite shift in Proto-Canaanite. Otherwise **ʾayāt* would become **ʾayōt > ʾōt*, which would not reduce to ʾ*at* when unaccented. Yet, the Phoenician form remains uncontracted in its earliest attestations, which means **ʾayāt* had not yet contracted in proto-Canaanite. Apart from this, there is no regular phonological process that would transmute **ʾayāt* into ʾ*et*.[22] Because of this, I suggest that ʾ*ōt-* and ʾ*et* come from separate morphemes: ʾ*ōt-* is a reflex of the proto-Canaanite direct object marker **ʾayāt* with a regular con-traction of the triphthong (cf. the infinitive absolute of ŚYM 'to put': **śayām > śôm*), while ʾ*et* derives from the inherited Proto-Semitic preposition **ʾitt-* 'with'. In Proto-Hebrew, ʾ*itt-* infiltrated the paradigm, displacing ʾ*ōt* before nouns, due to an analogy in the verbal syntax of these particles. Certain verbs, such as *nilḥam* 'to fight' and *dibbēr* 'to speak', can govern both ʾ*ōt-* and ʾ*itt-* with minimal difference:

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[18] J. Friedrich, W. Röllig, and M. G. Amadasi Guzzo, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik*, pp. 46–47, contra J. Fox, "A Sequence of Vowel Shifts," pp. 41–43.

[19] A few exceptions to this division appear throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezek 23:47; Josh 23:15), on which see below.

[20] F. Praetorius, "Zur hebräischen und aramäischen Grammatik," *ZDMG* 55 (1901): 369–370; GKC, pp. 300–301; H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1927), p. 641; J. Blau, *Studies in Hebrew Linguistics*, pp. 27, 44 n. 12.

[21] Praetorius's explanation works if the Hebrew and Phoenician direct object markers are unrelated.

[22] Grammaticalization provides a convenient label for such irregular phonological reductions, but it does not explain the mechanisms of such a change. For a lengthy critique of grammaticalization, see B. D. Joseph, "Grammaticalization: A General Critique," in *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization* (ed. H. Narrog and B. Heine; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 193–205.

nillāḥămâ ʾôtām
>   Let us fight them (1 Kgs 20:25)

nillāḥēm ʾittām
>   Let us fight with them (1 Kgs 20:23)[23]

way-yĕdabbēr mōšê wĕ-ʾelʿāzār hak-kōhēn ʾōtām
>   And Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke to them (Num 26:3)[24]

way-yĕdabbēr ʾittām
>   And he spoke with them (Gen 23:8)

Over time, speakers of Hebrew generalized *ʾet* as the pre-nominal form of the direct object marker on the basis of verbs like *nilḥam* and *dibbēr*. They then transferred the nucleus of the pre-nominal form to the 2 m. pl. and 3 f. pl. suffix forms due to vowel harmony: for example, *ʾôtkem > ʾetkem* under the influence of the pronominal variant *ʾet*.[25] The forms *ʾôthen* (Ezek 23:47), *ʾôtkem* (Josh 23:15), and *ʾôthem* (Ezek 23:45) represent relics of the earlier paradigm. Alternative 3 f. pl. forms, like *ʾôtān* (Ezek 16:54; Ezek 34:23 in Babylonian manuscripts; regularly in Mishnaic Hebrew) and *ʾôtānâ* (Exod 25:26; Ezek 34:21), did not undergo vowel harmony because the suffix did not contain an *i* vowel, the conditioning factor for this change.

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[23] These examples come from the same story, suggesting that *nilḥam ʾitt-* and *nilḥam ʾôt-* were both acceptable even within historical Hebrew. Theoretically, *nillāḥămâ ʾôtām* could represent a late substitution of *ʾôt-* for *ʾitt-* as in Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Second Isaiah. But *nilḥam* governs *ʾôt-* in Josh 10:25 and Isa 37:9, neither of which is considered a late text.

[24] See also Gen 21:2: *lam-môʿēd ʾăšer dibber ʾōtô ʾĕlōhîm* 'at the time God spoke to him'. The verbs *yārad* 'to go down' (2 Kgs 1:15 vs. 1 Sam 26:6) and *lāqaḥ* 'to take' (2 Kgs 3:26 vs. Exod 17:5) can also govern both *ʾōt-* and *ʾitt-* with minimal difference.

[25] Compare the similar process that accounts for the linking vowels before object and possessive pronouns which tend to mirror the vowel of the suffix, for example, *malkahā > malkāh* 'her king', *malkuhū > malkô* 'his king', etc.

Table 1: The realization of the direct object marker in different Hebrew vocalization traditions

Vocalization Tradition	Before Nouns	Before Suffixes
Masoretic	ʾet	ʾôt-
Babylonian[26]	ʾet	ʾôt-
Samaritan[27]	it	ūt-
Hexapla[28]	εθ	ωθ-
Mishnaic[29]	ʾet	ʾôt-

The Canaanite languages Moabite (KAI 181:5) and Edomite (Horvat Uzza, line 3) also use *ʾt* as a direct object marker, but the vocalization of these forms cannot—unsurprisingly—be ascertained.[30] Nevertheless, their consonantal skeletons could conceivably derive from **ʾayāt*, just like Hebrew *ʾôt-* and Phoenician *ʾt*.[31] At the same time, Ammonite, the language of the Deir Alla inscriptions, and Amarna Canaanite do not attest independent direct object markers. Ammonite and the language of the Deir Alla inscriptions are poorly attested, so the absence of any such marker is probably an accident of preservation. Verbal objects in Amarna Canaanite are marked using Akkadian morphology and syntax, which lack an independent direct object marker.[32] As it stands, **ʾayāt* can explain all of the Canaanite and Aramaic forms of the direct object marker (with the exception of the Hebrew pre-nominal form) without positing ad-hoc sound changes. Originally, this form would have introduced both independent nouns and prenominal suffixes, as in Old Aramaic and Hebrew as well as vestigially in Phoenician, but later its distribution became restricted in different daughter languages.[33]

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[26] P. Kahle, *Masoreten des Ostens: Die ältesten punktierten Handschriften des Alten Testaments und der Targume* (Hildesheim: G. Ohlms, 1966), p. 199.

[27] Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *A Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew: Based on the Recitation of the Law in Comparison with the Tiberian and Other Jewish Traditions* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), p. 319.

[28] E. Brønno, *Studien über hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus: Auf Grundlage der Mercatischen Fragmente der zweiten Kolumne der Hexapla des Origenes* (Leipzig: Wiesbaden, 1943), p. 215.

[29] M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 42.

[30] D. S. Vanderhooft, "The Edomite Dialect and Script: A Review of the Evidence," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (ed. D. V. Edelman; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 156.

[31] For the classification of Moabite, Edomite, Ammonite, and the language of the Deir Alla inscriptions as Canaanite, see N. Pat-El and A. M. Wilson-Wright, "The Features of Canaanite: A Reevaluation," *ZDMG* 166 (2016): 41–55.

[32] A. F. Rainey, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by Scribes from Canaan* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1:165.

[33] Since **ʾayāt* is a semantically empty morpheme, its etymology proves murky, and so I will refrain from suggesting a concrete derivation for it. The most that can be said is that **ʾayāt* comes from a grammaticalized nominal form of the root *ʾYT*.

2. DIRECT OBJECT MARKERS IN OTHER SEMITIC LANGUAGES

So far I have shown that the direct object marker *ʾayāt* constitutes a shared feature linking Aramaic and Canaanite, but it remains to be seen whether it is an innovative one. Several Semitic languages outside of Aramaic and Canaanite employ direct object markers, including Ge'ez, Modern South Arabian, Classical Arabic, and Samalian (table 2), which could be cognate with Aramaic and Canaanite *ʾayāt*. As I will show, however, these forms cannot be related to *ʾayāt* due to their phonology.

Table 2: Semitic direct object markers in comparative perspective

Language	Direct Object Marker
Aramaic / Canaanite	*ʾayāt-
Ge'ez	kiyā-
Modern South Arabian	ta-
Classical Arabic	ʾiyyā-
Samalian and Zinjirli	wt

The Ge'ez direct object marker *kiyā-* (< *kīyā-*) only occurs before pronominal suffixes. Normally, Ge'ez *k* does not correspond to the glottal stop in the Central Semitic languages, so Brockelmann, followed by Tropper, suggests that it derives from the Arabic form *ʾiyyā-* with the addition of a demonstrative element *k-*.[34] But he does not adduce comparative evidence for a preposed demonstrative *k-*. Several demonstratives throughout Semitic do contain *k*, but it is always suffixed to another demonstrative form as in Biblical Aramaic *ʾillēk* 'those' and Classical Arabic *tilka* 'that' (f.).[35] Wright, on the other hand, suggests a weakening of *kīyā* to *hīyā* and then *ʾiyyā*, but this explanation relies on a series of ad-hoc sound changes.[36] Thus, Ge'ez *kiyā-* is unlikely to be cognate with any of the other forms.

The Modern South Arabian languages exhibit a direct object marker *ta-* that is used before pronominal suffixes: *wəzəmk tə-h* 'I gave him'.[37] This form, too, is unlikely to be cognate with the Aramaic and Canaanite direct object

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[34] C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (2 vols.; Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1908–1913), 1:313–314; J. Tropper, *Altätiopisch: Grammatik des Ge'ez mit Übungstexten und Glossar* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), p. 46 n. 59.

[35] R. Hasselbach, "Demonstratives in Semitic," *JAOS* 127 (2007): 1.

[36] W. Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), p. 112.

[37] A. Rubin, *The Mehri Language of Oman* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 41; J. C. E. Watson, *The Structure of Mehri* (Semitica Viva 52; Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), pp. 69–70.

marker. It only shares a single consonant with *ʾayāt*, which does not provide a secure basis for genetic relatedness.[38]

Classical Arabic uses the direct object marker *ʾiyyā* before pronominal suffixes: *ʾiyyā-ka* 'you' (m. s. direct object).[39] Wright, Brockelmann, and Blau suggest that the Northwest Semitic forms of the direct object marker derive from *ʾiyyā* with the addition of a final feminine *–t*.[40] Yet, Classical Arabic *ʾiyyā* cannot be cognate to Hebrew *ʾôt* and Aramaic *ʾyt* / *yāṯ* for three reasons. First, *ʾiyyā-t* would not contract to *ʾôt* in Hebrew since geminated glides are retained intervocalically in that language (e.g., *li-qayyim* 'to fulfill' > *lĕ-qayyēm* Ezek 13:6; *dayyan* 'judge' > *dayyān* 1 Sam 24:16; *ʾiyyāb* PN > *ʾiyyôb* cf. Babylonian *ayyābum*). Second, *ʾiyyā-t* would not undergo aphaeresis as it does in all Aramaic dialects after Old Aramaic, since the loss of the *ʾaleph* and its vowel would leave a word initial consonant cluster. Third, and most importantly, *ʾiyyā-* comes from a different root than *ʾayāt-*. As Testen has argued, Classical Arabic *ʾiyyā* probably comes from earlier *ʾiyyay*.[41] It is a *qittal* noun from the root √ʾYY, whereas *ʾayāt* is probably a *qatāl* noun from the root √ʾYT, as I have argued above.

Another direct object marker, *wt*, is attested in Samalian (KAI 214:28) and the recently discovered Zinjirli inscription.[42] Brockelmann, Barth, Testen, Lipiński, and Wilmsen have all suggested that this form is related to the Canaanite and Aramaic direct object markers.[43] It is easy to see why. The glides *w* and *y* frequently alternate in the Semitic languages as the result of assimilation to a neighboring vowel (e.g., *li-qawwim* 'to fulfill' > *li-qayyim* > *lĕ-qayyēm* Ezek 13:6). Thus, one could theoretically reconstruct *ʾiwāt > *ʾiyāt > yāṯ*, *ʾôt*, etc. But there is no reason for hypothesizing the loss of an

[38] For the difficulty of establishing a genetic relationship between morphemes on the basis of a single shared consonant, see D. Ringe, "How Hard Is It to Match CVC-Roots?" *Transactions of the Philological Society* 97 (1999): 220.

[39] A. Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 107, has found a single instance of this morpheme in Safaitic, where it takes the consonantal form Y. Because it shares only a single consonant with Aramaic/Canaanite *ʾayāt* and no vowels for certain, it is likewise unlikely to be cognate. I would like to thank Ahmad Al-Jallad for sharing the pre-publication manuscript of his Safaitic grammar with me.

[40] W. Wright, *Lectures*, p. 112; C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss*, pp. 313–314; J. Blau, *Studies in Hebrew Linguistics*, p. 82 n. 27.

[41] D. Testen, "Morphological Observations on the Stems of the Semitic 'Nota Accusativi,'" *AfO* 44/45 (1997/1998): 217–218.

[42] D. Pardee, "A New Aramaic Inscription from Zincirli," *BASOR* 356 (2009): 59.

[43] C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss*, pp. 314–315; J. Barth, *Die Pronominalbildung in den semitischen Sprachen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), p. 95; D. Testen, "Morphological Observations," p. 219; E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (2nd ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), p. 518; D. Wilmsen, "More on the Arabic Object Marker *iyyā*: Implications for the Origin of the Semitic *Notae Accusativi*," *FO* 50 (2013): 72–73.

initial *aleph* in the Samalian and Zinjirli forms since *aleph* is always retained word initially in Samalian and there is no evidence for the vocalization of *wt*.[44] Furthermore, this reconstruction requires the original form to be vocalized *ʾiwāt*, and there is some evidence that the initial vowel of Aramaic and Canaanite *ʾyt* was an *a* (see above).

Instead, I suggest that *wt* derives from the preposition *lĕwāṯ* 'toward', which is attested throughout Aramaic.[45] Initially, the dative preposition *liwāt* was repurposed as a direct object marker before animate nouns.[46] Speakers then reanalyzed *liwāt* as the preposition *li-* followed by a separate direct object marker *wāt*. Once this happened, *wāt* could function independently as a direct object marker. A similar process of reanalysis probably produced the compound preposition *kĕ-wāṯ* 'like, as' attested in Qumran Aramaic, Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac, and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, where the preposition *ləwāṯ-* is also attested.

The other Semitic direct object markers cannot be related to the Aramaic and Canaanite direct object marker. But they are, with the possible exception of the enigmatic Modern South Arabian *ta-*, unrelated to each other as well. Their phonological forms differ too much, and therefore they must have been innovated independently in different branches fairly recently.

3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Superficially similar direct object markers are attested in Modern South Arabian, Geʾez, Arabic, Aramaic, Samalian, Hebrew, and Phoenician, but their mutual relationship is the subject of debate. In this paper, I have argued that only the Aramaic and Canaanite markers are genetically related. They descend from the form *ʾayāt*, while the remaining direct object markers appear to be independent innovations. As such, the Aramaic and Canaanite direct object marker constitutes a shared morpho-syntactic innovation and therefore, could be used to refine the sub-grouping of the Northwest Semitic languages.

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[44] J. Tropper, *Die Inschriften von Zincirli: Neue Edition und vergleichende Grammatik des phönizischen, sam'alischen und aramäischen Textkorpus* (ALASP; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1993), pp. 183–184.

[45] A. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, p. 94, calls WT a "prepositional base," which could be compounded with other prepositions like *li-* and *ka-*. But *lĕwāt* most likely derives from the verb √LWY 'to accompany', so the *l* is probably a root consonant. Likewise, P. Noorlander, "Sam'alian in Its Northwest Semitic Setting," pp. 225–226, suggests that *wāt* serves as an "extension" in the compound prepositions *lĕwāt* and *kĕwāt*.

[46] See A. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization*, pp. 110–111, for examples of this process.