## Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science

Manuels de linguistique et des sciences de communication

Mitbegründet von Gerold Ungeheuer (†) Mitherausgegeben 1985–2001 von Hugo Steger

Herausgegeben von / Edited by / Edités par Herbert Ernst Wiegand

Band 36

# The Semitic Languages

An International Handbook

Edited by
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In collaboration with
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ISBN 978-3-11-018613-0 e-ISBN 978-3-11-025158-6 ISSN 1861-5090

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Semitic languages : an international handbook / edited by Stefan Weninger ; in collaboration with Geoffrey Khan, Michael P. Streck, Janet C. E. Watson.

p. cm. – (Handbooks of linguistics and communication science; 36) Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-11-018613-0 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Semitic languages – History – Handbooks, manuals, etc.

2. Semitic languages - Grammar - Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Weninger, Stefan. II. Khan, Geoffrey. III. Streck, Michael P.

IV. Watson, Janet C. E. PJ3014.S46 2012

492-dc23

2011042304

#### Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

© 2011 Walter de Gruvter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/Boston

Typesetting: META Systems GmbH, Wustermark Printing: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen

Cover design: Martin Zech, Bremen

∞ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

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### **Abstract**

Amorite is the oldest Northwest Semitic language known, attested in thousands of names and loanwords in cuneiform texts from about 2500 BCE to 1200 BCE. The central areas where Amorite was spoken are the Middle Euphrates valley and the Syrian steppe. The linguistic fragments allow a limited reconstruction of the phonology and morphology of the language.

#### 1. Introduction

## 1.1. History of the Amorites

Amorites occur in Mesopotamian cuneiform texts from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millenium BCE onwards under the names *Mardu* in Sumerian or *Amurrû* in Akkadian. Already in the texts from Ebla they are associated with the area of the Middle Euphrates and the Syrian steppe. At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millenium BCE they infiltrated Babylonia and founded ruling dynasties in numerous city states. During the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millenium BCE, the Amorites of Babylonia were absorbed by the Mesopotamian population and eventually disappeared from the cuneiform sources. By contrast, at the same time, the Amorites of Syria are amply attested in the cuneiform archives from Mari and other cities. These archives especially show that the Amorites had tribal structures and were often sheep-grazing semi-nomads, at least in the Middle Euphrates region and the Syrian steppe. In Syria, Amorites are attested until about 1200 BCE. Shortly afterwards, we meet the first Aramaeans in roughly the same region. For summaries of the history and culture of the Amorites see Kupper (1957), Luke (1965), Buccellati (1966), Matthews (1978), Edzard (1987), Anbar (1991), Whiting (1995), Streck (2000, 24–76, 2001, 2002a, 2004a, 2004b).

## 1.2. What is the "Amorite" language?

This question can be answered with a modern and an ancient definition.

In the modern definition adopted here, the term "Amorite" designates the language of all names and loan words in Akkadian and Sumerian cuneiform texts from the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millenium BCE until about 1200 BCE that are Semitic but not Akkadian. To the degree that these linguistic fragments allow a more precise analysis, all of them belong

to the Northwest Semitic branch; no other Semitic branches are clearly attested. The question whether "Amorite" in this broad definition consists of different Northwest Semitic languages or dialects is almost irrelevant for several reasons: a) The possibility of recognizing different languages or even dialects is severely limited on the basis of names and loan words alone; b) In the 2<sup>nd</sup> millenium BCE Northwest Semitic might rather have consisted of a dialect cluster than of different languages which developed only later. In this connection it must be stressed that Amorite does not show traits which would support an unequivocal classification as Canaanite or Aramaean. c) The area where Amorite is attested is not larger than the area occupied by Akkadian and smaller than the area later occupied by Aramaean: the relatively well-defined core area encompasses the Middle Euphrates valley and the Syrian steppe, whereas Babylonia and Northwest Syria already constitute the periphery of the Amorite language area. For attempts to classify Amorite see Streck (2000, 80–82, 131–134, with previous literature) and Knudsen (2004). For the area occupied by Amorite see Streck (2004a), based on an ethno-linguistic analysis of about 17800 names; the criticism of Charpin/ Ziegler (2007, 72 n. 37), based on the single name Yaśma'-hadda, is unfounded; see the methodological remarks in Streck (2004a, 318-320, esp. 319) on the irrelevance of single names.

The term "Amorite language" is also attested in Akkadian cuneiform texts and, from a Babylonian point of view, defines a language in contrast to languages called "Sumerian", "Akkadian", "Subarian" (probably Hurrian) and "Elamite" — languages which are all well defined. We do not know whether the ancient definition of Amorite and our modern one are completely congruent. However, since in the Mari texts Amorite is mentioned side by side with Akkadian and Subarian, each corresponding to the three main languages known from personal names, i.e., Northwest Semitic, Akkadian and Hurrian, it is probable that what the Babylonians called "Amorite" and our modern definition of the language at least overlap to a greater extent. For attestations of "Amorite language" in cuneiform texts see Streck (2000, 76–80) and Charpin/Ziegler (2007).

#### 1.3. Sources

Amorite in the modern sense defined above is attested by roughly 90 certain loan words and about 7000 different names (mostly personal, rarely geographical names) which roughly correspond to 11600 words of text. Not a single Amorite text is known. For loanwords see Streck (2000, 82–128) and Knudsen (2004). The largest collection of names is still Gelb (1980); names from this collection are quoted below by the running number of the index. Names of women are marked by "(F)". For an analysis of Amorite names see Streck (2000) with a review of the previous literature ib. 131–134; Mugnaioni (2000) is outdated. Knudsen (2004) offers a "comparative statement" on the Amorite vocabulary. For the size of the material compared to other ancient text corpora see Streck 2011.

## 2. Phonology

Vowel phonemes are /a/, /i/, /u/,  $/\bar{a}/$ ,  $/\bar{u}/$ , with [e] as an allophone of /a/ and /i/ (contra Mugnaioni (2000, 59) no proof of  $/\bar{o}/$ ). Consonantal phonemes are /b/, /p/, /m/, /w/, /d/,

/š/ (= "/t/", pronounced[t]; Mugnaioni ib. 60 confuses traditional transcription and phoneme), /d/, /t/, /t/ (pronounced [t']?), /n/, /r/, /l/, /ś/ (merger of Proto-Semitic \*/ś/, \*/ś/, pronounced [s]?, contra Mugnaioni ib. 60 no trace of two independent phonemes), /z/ (pronounced [dz]), /s/ (pronounced [ts]), /s/ (perhaps merger of Proto-Semitic \*/z/, \*/s/ and \*/d/, pronounced [ts']?; or still distinct phonemes not distinguishable in cuneiform, see Streck (2000, 229 f.), but with incorrect etymology of Y\$, and Knudsen (2004, 319 f.), /y/, /g/, /k/, /q/ (pronounced [k']?), /ġ/?, /h/, /h/, /h/, //. The diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ are preserved in the majority of cases. See Streck (2000, 151–256) for Amorite phonology as exhibited by names and ib. 128 for Amorite phonological traits in loan words.

## 3. Morphology

#### 3.1. Pronouns

Personal pronouns: Suffix gen. 1. sg. /ī/: 'Ammī-ṣaduq 1903 "My paternal uncle is just"; after vowel /ya/: Liya-[s]itru 4361 "The protection is for me". 2. sg. m. /ka/: Laka-'el 4274 "(The) god is for you". 1. pl. /na/: Lana-Hadda 4305 "Hadda is for us". A gen./ acc. suffix 3. sg. m. /hu/, f. /ha/ most probably does not exist (Golinets 2010). Independent nom. 3. sg. m. /śū/: Śū-mālika 5586 "He is counsellor". F. /sī/: Śī-rāma 5521 "She is lofty".

Determinative pronoun /du/: Du-adnim 6630 "He of pleasure".

#### 3.2. Nouns

Case: Nom. sg. /u/ and gen. sg. /i/ in the status rectus. Many nouns in names do not have any case vowel (0-case = status absolutus). The vowel /a/ is never attested for the acc. object, but: a) Often after a long consonant: Hadda "(name of the weather god)". b) Often with the element 'ila "god". c) Rarely with other name elements, e.g. ditāna "aurochs(?)". For references for the case vowels (including /0/) see Streck (2000, 264– 280). The distribution of the /a/-vowel proves that it is most probably a variant of the status absolutus which is otherwise vowelless; for other, unlikely earlier interpretations see Streck (2000, 283-290). Mugnaioni (2000, 62) repeats an alleged predicative function of /a/, although it is clear that /a/ has different functions. According to Knudsen (2002, 151) /a/ would be "a particular marker of name final position", although he admits (p. 150) that /a/ also occurs - as a predicative - in word initial position and the ending /0/ basically has the same distribution; this makes it more probable that the choice between /0/ and /a/ is at least partly phonologically conditioned. Historically, this /a/ might be a remnant of an old absolutus-marked nominative system and identical with the /a/ of the acc. (Streck 2000, 288-290 with previous literature; note that Streck twice incorrectly uses "absolutive" instead of "absolutus"). However, as was shown by Waltisberg (2002), this can not be adduced as evidence for an old ergative system of Semitic. This suggestion is not based on the absence of an object construction in the Amorite onomasticon, as suspected by Knudsen (2002, 151), but on the predicative

function of the acc.-ending in Classical Arabic in certain syntactic positions and traces of the same function in Cushitic and Berber as well as on the quotative function of /a/ in Eblaite, Old Akkadian and Ancient Egyptian (see the literature in Streck 2000, 288–290).

State: Besides the status rectus and the status absolutus, the status constructus is frequently attested in personal names. It mostly preserves the case vowels: 'Abdu-'anat 1844 "Slave of 'Anat". /u/ of the nominative often becomes /i/ before /y/ (pace Tropper 2001, 743): 'Abdi-yarah 613 "Slave of Yarah". After a short open syllable /u/ may be deleted: Mut(u)-biśir 4846, 4810 "Man from Biśir". See Streck (2000, 291–306).

Gender: The fem. noun has the endings /(a)t/, in pausa also /a/, see Streck (2000, 312–317).

Number: For the dual perhaps see the geographical name *Dumtā/ēn* (Streck 2000, 306) "Two towers". The pl. is not attested in names (Streck 2000, 306–308; Knudsen 2002, 152 is still "undecided"). Loanwords, however, prove a broken plural of QaTL-nouns (Streck 2000, 127, and Knudsen 2004, 325 f.): *şamarātu* (a type of sheep), *raba-bātu* "ten thousand".

Noun patterns: see Streck (2000, 319–356). Note that the noun patterns maQTiL and meQTiL are not participles of an H-stem (ib. 336–339, contra Mugnaioni 2000, 63).

#### 3.3. Verbs

#### 3.3.1. Inflection and derivation

Tab. 19.1: Derivation and inflection of the Amorite verb

Paradigm:					
C	G-stem	Gt-stem	D-stem	S-stem(?)	
Preterite					
3. sg. m.	yaQTvL	yaQtaTaL	yaQaTTiL	_	
3. sg. f.	taQTvL	taQtaTaL	_	_	
1. sg. c.	'aQTvL	'aQtaTaL	_	_	
Precative					
3. sg. m.	laQTvL	_	laQaTTiL	_	
Imperative					
2. sg. m.	QiTaL	QitTaL	_	_	
Participle, active	QāTiLum	_	muQaTTiLum	_	
Participle, passive	QaTūLum	_	_	_	
Stative					
3. sg. m.	QaTvL	_	_	_	
3. sg. f.	QaTLa	_	_	_	
Verbal adjective					
sg. m.	QaT(v)Lum	QataLTum	Qa/uTTuLum	saQTaLum(?)	
sg. f.	QaT(v)Latum	QataLTatum	_	saQTaLatum(?)	

Personal affixes: 3. sg. m.: *Yantin-yirah* 2988 "Yi/arah has given". 3. sg. f.: '*Annu-taśma*' 837 (F) "'Annu has heard". 1. sg. c.: '*Ašūb-la-'el* 535 "I have turned to the god".

Preterite: Dynamic-transitive verb: *Yaśma*'-*Hadda* 3110 "Hadda has heard". Dynamic-intransitive verb: *Yaśruq-'el* 2813 "The god has shone". Stative verb: *Yaṣduq-'el* 3087 "The god has proved to be just".

Precative: Lamlik-'el 4228 "Let the god counsel". Imperative: Šūb-'ila 5956 "Turn to face, o god!".

Participle: Active: 'Ammu-rāpi' 1911 "The paternal uncle is a healing one". Passive: Natūnum 5014 "Given".

Stative: 3. sg. m.: 'Abī-yatar 96 "My father is excellent". 3. sg. f.: 'Annu-yatra (F) 816 "Annu is excellent". For an analysis of these and other forms as stative similiar to the Akkadian stative (i.e., predicative 0-case of the adjective) see Streck (2000, 282 and 309) (which escaped the notice of Knudsen 2002, 149 and 151).

Verbal adjective: Sg. m.: 'Aminum 421 "True". Sg. f.: Kabida (F) "Heavy".

Gt-stem: Preterite: 3. sg. m.: *Yantaqim* 2980 "He has been avenged". 3. sg. f.: *Ta'tamar* 5970 "She has been seen". 1. sg.: *'Ammîštamar* 1895 < \**'Ammī-aštamar* "I have praised my paternal uncle". Imperative: *Hitlal-'akka* 2265 "Praise Akka!". Verbal adjective: Sg. m.: *Bataḥrum* 1148 "Chosen". Sg. f.: *Bataḥra* (F) "Chosen".

D-stem: Preterite: 3. sg. m.: Yakīn-hadda 3284 "Hadda has made firm"(?) (cf. Akkadian ukīn); but note the name Yakīn-/Yakūn-ú-ru-ba-(am) (unexplained) Florilegium Marianum 2 p. 93 no. 52: 4; 53: 3; p. 94 no. 54: 3; ARM 23 p. 626, which rather points to dialectal variants. 'Ibaśśir 2397 < \*Yabaśśir (cf. Akk. bussurum, Hebr. biššar etc.) "He has brought the good". The prefix /ya/ for D-stem 3. sg. m. is probably also attested in Ugaritic, see Streck (2002b, 190). Precative: Lakīn-haddu 4278 "Let Haddu make firm"(?). For the verbal adjective see Streck (2000, 332 f.).

S-stem: Verbal adjective: Sg. m.: Śaḥbaru(?) ARM 16/1, 175 "Ally". Sg. f.: Śaḥbaratum (F) (?) T.210 "Ally" (hardly a quadrilitteral animal name, as proposed by Durand 1998, 499 f.). Saklalu ARM 22 p. 592 "Perfect(ly made)(?)"; cf. Yaklal-nār ARM 22 p. 601 "Nār has proved to be perfect".

Note that a H-causative, in view of Ugaritic, is neither expected nor clearly attested in Amorite (see Streck 2000, 336 f., contra much of the previous literature including Gelb 1980, but also the recent contributions of Mugnaioni 2000, 63; Knudsen 2004, 321 on the loanword *naḥālum*): names with stem-vowel /i/ are often to be analyzed as G-or D-stem. Cf. *Ia-te-ir-e-da* 3549, which stands for G preterite *Yaytir-yidda* "Hadda has proved to be excellent" compared with *Yatar-hadda* 3542 "Hadda is excellent" with a G stative of the same root, and *Ia-ki-in-*dIŠKUR 3284, which seems to be analyzed as D preterite *Yakīn-hadda* "Hadda has made firm" compared with *Yakūn-hadda* 3335 "Hadda has proved to be firm" with a G preterite of the same root.

A present tense of Akk. type (yaQaTTvL), assumed by von Soden (1985), is not clearly attested. For some of the names alternative interpretations are possible: 'Ibaśśir is a D-stem. Ia-ha-at-ti-DINGIR 3242 does not contain any verb, but a noun:  $Yahatt\bar{t}$ -' $el < *Yahadt\bar{t}$ -"The god is my uniqueness". The other names quoted by von Soden are still unclear; in no case has the root of the name elements in question been determined.

The existence of a perfect of the West Semitic type (*QaTaL*) has often been assumed (see again recently Mugnaioni 2000, 63). However, many of the name elements in question must be analyzed differently: as a stative G, e.g., '*Abī-yatar* 96 "My father is excellent"; as a participle G of a verb mediae W/Y, e.g.: Šāb-el 5779 "The god is a

turning one"; as a participle G of a verb III-', e.g., Śumi-rāpâ 5601 < \*-rāpi'a "Offspring of the healing one"; as a noun, e.g., Malak-ʾilī 4474 "My god is king" (cf. Malaku-ʾil 4475, which clearly proves a noun malaku), or Yaśartī-ʾel 3446 "The god is my justice". Given that QaTaL penetrates the West Semitic onomastica on a larger scale only in the first mill. BC (Streck 1998, 132), it cannot be expected frequently in Amorite, if at all.

#### 3.3.2. Strong and weak verbs

Strong verb: For *yaśma* and *śima* see 3.3.1, above. 'Ammī-ṣaduq 1903 "My paternal uncle is just".

Paradigm:				
-	Preterite	Imperative	Participle	Stative
Strong	yaśmaʻ	śimaʻ	ʻāḍir	ṣaduq
I-,	ya'ūś	_	_	_
II-,	yar'ib	_	_	_
III-,	yarpa'	_	rāpi'	_
I-n	yantin	_	nāqim	_
I-y	iṣī	_		_
	yaytir	_	_	yatar
II-w/y	yašūb	šūb	šāb	kīn
III-y/w	yabnī	_	bānī	_
II-geminatae	yaḥun(n)	ḥun(n)	_	ḥanna

Tab. 19.2: Paradigm of strong and weak verbs

I-', II-', III-': Ya'ūś-'el 3578 "The god has given as a present". Yar'ib-'el 3060 "The god has repayed". Yarpa'-hadda 3071 "Hadda has healed". The spelling Ha-am-mu-ra-bi-ih for 'Ammu-rāpi' "The paternal uncle is a healing one" makes it probable that syllable closing /'/ is often preserved (Streck 2000, 235; Knudsen 2004, 319 seems to distinguish between pre-consonantal /'/ and word-final /'/, for which I see no base).

I-n: *Yantin-yirah* 3129 "Yarah has given", also with assimilation of /n/ to the following consonant: *Yattin-yirah* 2988. *Nāqimum* 4991 (NQM "to avenge", hypocoristic name).

I-y: In Amorite, word initial \*/w/ becomes /y/. This proves that Amorite belongs to Northwest Semitic. Reconstruction of the preterite is difficult; perhaps we must distinguish two types, as in Akkadian (cf. dynamic *uṣī* as against stative/adjectival *ītir*): '*Iṣī-śalim* 2610 "The friendly one has appeared" and *Yaytir-yidda* 3549 "Hadda has proved to be excellent".

II-w/y: *Yašūb-lîm* 3513 "The tribe has turned to face". *Šūb-'ila* 5956 "Turn to face, o god!". Participles have the typical Northwest Semitic (Streck 2000, 127; Knudsen 2004, 326) form QāL: *Šāb-el* 5779 "The god is one who turns to face". *Kīna-'ilī* 4075 "My god is firm".

III-y/w: *Yabnī-dagan* 2810 "Dagan has created". *Bānī-mêl* < \*-*ma-'el* 1129 "The god is the creating one".

II-geminate: Yahun(n)-'el 3267 "The god has proved to be gracious". Hun(n)-šulgi 2344 "Be gracious, o Šulgi!". Hanna-hadda 1935 "Gracious is Hadda".

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