



The Verbal Root *ntn* Replacing *yhb* ‘to give’ in the Imperfect. A Case Study in Early Christian Palestinian Aramaic Manuscripts

La raíz verbal *ntn* reemplazando a *yhb* ‘dar’ en el imperfectivo. Un caso de estudio en manuscritos arameos cristiano-palestinoses

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Abstract: The local Aramaic dialect of the Judean Desert with Jerusalem in the centre was turned into a written literary dialect for the translations of biblical, liturgical, and other religious literature from Greek ‘Vorlagen’ at the end of the 4th century AD. This was presumably initiated during the episcopate of Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386 AD). Despite being a rather artificial language some dialectic residues remained in some of the early manuscripts. For example, the replacement verb *ntn* for *yhb* in the imperfect instead of borrowed *ntl* from Syriac, which is the common deployed one in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, is one of them. New attestations come from early manuscripts recently identified in this dialect at the Monastery of St Catherine on Mt Sinai.

Resumen: El dialecto arameo del desierto de Judea con Jerusalén en el centro se transformó en un dialecto literario escrito para las traducciones bíblicas, litúrgicas y otros textos religiosos con una *vorlage* griega a finales del siglo IV d. C. Esto se inició posiblemente durante el episcopado de Cirilo de Jerusalén (m. 386 d. C.). En lugar de convertirse en una lengua artificial algunos dialectos residuales permanecieron en algunos manuscritos primitivos. Por ejemplo, el verbo sustituto *ntn* para *yhb* en el imperfecto en lugar del verbo prestado *ntl* del siríaco, que es el más común en el arameo cristiano palestino, es uno de ellos. Nuevas evidencias provienen de manuscritos antiguos recientemente identificados en este dialecto en el Monasterio de Santa Catalina en el Monte Sinaí.

Keywords: Christian Palestinian Aramaic; *ntn*; Manuscripts; Monastery of St Catherine; Western Aramaic.

Palabras clave: Arameo cristiano palestino; *ntn*; Manuscritos; Monasterio de Santa Catalina; Arameo occidental.

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Background of *ntn* and *ntl*

Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) tends to have some rather peculiar lexemes, which cannot be traced in the related Western Aramaic (Samaritan and Galilean Aramaic) or any other Aramaic dialects. This often causes doubts for the reader of palimpsests. In former times they were claimed as “incorrect” words, but in the meantime they have been proven to be correct despite their isolated attestations in this Late Antique Aramaic dialect.¹ One of the peculiar items in use is **ntl* ‘to give’.² Although Aramaic *ntn* is a good Aramaic lexeme and known to have been used as replacement verb for *yhb* in the Imperfect in Middle and Late Aramaic, it was substituted in CPA like in Syriac by the variant *ntl*. This alternative lexeme was surely introduced together with the Syriac *Estrangela* characters with another take-over the adverbial ending -’yt, which is employed abundantly and regularly in this dialect. In Palestinian Jewish Aramaic it can only be found in טבאית. All the other Syriac relics or influences are restricted to the late Gospel Lectionary A (1030 AD)³ and do not affect the language employed in the early manuscripts and even later ones.

Christian Palestinian Aramaic was established as a written format of the local dialect in Judaea and its neighbourhood for the lower clergy and local Christian community, because it did not have a written tradition. The initiator(s) opted here for the modification of the Syriac *Estrangela* characters to distinguish it from the Jewish and Samaritan scripts for their written Christian texts. With the creation of a “new” script they imported some Syriac grammatical morphemes. Christian Palestinian Aramaic, however, remained a translation language without the production of its own new texts. It is an artificial literary language created for the purpose of translating religious texts.⁴ This says hardly anything about the actual idiom spoken in the geographical area of Judaea, Sinai, and Transjordan.

¹ Some lexemes were discussed in Christa Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*. Teil 1: *Schriftlehre, Lautlehre, Formenlehre* «Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik» 6 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), p. 6, and some more in Christa Müller-Kessler, “On the Spellings of the Lexical Items *b’š*, *b’šwn*, and *mšb’wn*, and Other Peculiar Lexemes in Christian Palestinian Aramaic”, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 18 (2021), pp. 217-223. Through the collation of palimpsest texts and new manuscript discoveries many could be established and verified.

² It is explained as an assimilation of the object indicator *l-* to the final consonant of *ntn* (Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*, 1. Band: *Laut- und Formenlehre* [Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1908], p. 219). Despite this the object indicator *l-* still follows in Syriac or CPA *ntl* when the object is indicated by a pronominal suffix.

³ Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*, p. 8.

⁴ Suggested in Christa Müller-Kessler, “The Old Jerusalem Lectionary in Christian Palestinian Aramaic as an Early Witness (Sin. gr. NF MG 32)”, in Jost Gippert, Eva Kvirkevelia, and Mariam Kamarauli (eds.), *The Ecumene of the Jerusalem Rite: Lectionary*

Although *ntl* is established in CPA, there have been a few cases in early manuscripts, where the imperfect of *ntn* was chosen instead. Taken as residues and isolated examples they did not stir much attention in the first dictionary by Friedrich Schulthess and the following two grammars on this dialect.⁵ The attestations concern only Biblical texts or two quotations from the New Testament. *ntl* has been accepted to be the appropriate verb to be deployed as replacement for *yhb* in the imperfect in CPA, and Theodor Nöldeke who could only base his grammatical sketch on Gospel lectionary A took it for granted except for one facsimile example of an early palimpsest published by Jan P. N. Land in 1862.⁶ All previously attested examples of *ntn* stem from four independent text translations and manuscripts.⁷ They might have been carried into from the spoken dialectal usage as in the case of the rare interchanges of guttural characters (e.g. ‘< *h*’)⁸ or their omission (e.g. *he*), which can be noticed from time to time already in the corpus of the early manuscripts.

Traditions of the First Millennium «Eastern Christian Cultures in Contact» 2; (Turnhout: Brepols) (in press).

⁵ Friedrich Schulthess, *Lexicon Syropalaestinum* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1903), p. 129; Friedrich Schulthess, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924), pp. 68, 76; C. Müller-Kessler, *Grammatik des Christlich-Palästinisch-Aramäischen*, p. 197.

⁶ Theodor Nöldeke, „Beiträge zur Kenntniss der aramäischen Dialekte. II. Ueber den christlich-palästinischen Dialect“, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 22 (1868), pp. 443-527.

⁷ Only the example in Psalm 123(124):6 is not one, since one has here the *nota accusativi* with the pronominal suffix of the first person plural. Erroneously suggested by N. Pigoulewsky, “Fragments syro-palestiniens des Psaumes CXXIII-IV”, *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934), pp. 519-527, esp. 525, and later followed by Moshe Bar-Asher, *Palestinian Syriac Studies: Sources-Texts, Traditions, and Grammatical Problems* «Diss. Hebrew University» (Jerusalem: Diss. Hebrew University, 1997) [in Hebrew cursive hand], p. 297. For a new reading of this verse, see Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff (eds.), *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic Old Testament and Apocrypha Version from the Early Period* «A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic», I (Groningen: STYX, 1997), p. 126, which is not at all identical to Pigoulewsky as quoted in Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein and Hanan Shirun, with Introduction by Moshe Bar Asher, *The Bible in the Syro-Palestinian Version: II. Psalms*, ed. by Matthew Morgenstern and Noam Mizrahi (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2008), pp. 42-43. Another new witness from a CPA Psalter reads ܡܠܟܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ‘Blessed is the Lord who did not give us (as) prey to their teeth’ (Sin. CPA NF Frag. 12, fol. c d 2r / c d 3v; unpubl.).

⁸ Recent examples are: ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ < *ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ‘he became son-in-law’ 1 Kingdoms (1 Samuel) 18:27, and in the same biblical fragment ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ < *ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ‘he will become son-in-law’ 18:26, or in the μεταγραφαι ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ܥܦܦܬܬܐ, but in the CPA translation is used: ܕܥܝܢܝܗܘܢ ‘be opened’ Mark 7:34 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 54r; unpubl.); see Christa Müller-Kessler, “New Palimpsest Fragments for 1 Kingdoms with Lucian and Origen Additions in a Christian Palestinian Aramaic Witness (Sin. gr. NF MG 14)”, *Revue Biblique* 129 (2022), pp. 321-340, esp. 331 n. 52.

With the identification and publication of new and early palimpsest manuscripts for this Western Aramaic dialect one is in the position to obtain a better insight. New attestations of *ntn* in the imperfect surfaced in unpublished manuscripts, which give the impression that its usage does not seem to be so rare as previously assumed. Therefore, one should take a closer look at the situation of the attestations so far. Noteworthy is that when following up the text passages where *ntn* appears they are restricted to biblical manuscripts. They never occur in text groups like lectionaries, theological, or hagiographical texts, and if they do, there are restricted to biblical quotations. All attestations are limited to the early period (5th to 7th/8th century AD) and no examples are to be found in the late text material (11th to 13th century AD).

The provenance of the manuscripts is difficult to pin down, since they are made of parchment, which was very often trafficked for reuse. Now it looks a bit as if certain translators still preferred to employ *ntn* instead of *ntl*. Only in one biblical manuscript Hosea-Joel from the Genizah of the Ben Ezra synagoge in Cairo, now kept in the Taylor-Schechter collection, Cambridge (T-S 16.325), both variants *ntn* and *ntl* are found⁹, and in one Pentateuch (Sin. gr. NF M167) and one Gospel manuscript (Sin. syr. NF M56N)¹⁰ from the Monastery of St Catherine. The reason for this is difficult to explain. One can only look at the text situation and the attestations of all available texts today to obtain an idea of their distribution.

On this issue only *ntn* will be taken into account, as examples of the “regular” usage of *ntl* can be browsed in the text editions and in the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*. Far more informative and telling in this study are the new occurrences of *ntn* in specific texts. It would not make much sense to prepare statistics in this connection, as the manuscripts involved are just fragmentarily preserved.

Attestations of ntn¹¹

Despite being a homily and not being identified yet, the first example of *ntn* usage was published by Land in his *Anecdota Syriac* IV in 1875: ܠܚܒܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܥܠܝܬܐ ‘so that you will give [δός] from your labour to the poor’ (NLR, Syr. 16, fol. 51va3 = CSRPi).¹² It is not a direct Bible quotation, but it seems to interpret Mark 10:21.

The next manuscript for *nṭn* to turn up came from the Cairo Genizah:  ‘The Lord may give [δῶη] mercy’ 2 Timothy 1:16; 18 (Bodl., Syr. c. 17 r [P] =

⁹ The scribe of the Hosea-Joel text also mixes the two object indicators *l-* and *yt-* in the identical syntagm.

¹⁰ The identification of the text passages go back to Alain Desreumaux in the Sinai Palimpsests Project and can be looked up under “Browse” in <https://sinaied.library.ucla.edu/>.

¹¹ All original texts have been collated and read several times; the readings of the *ntn*-examples can be taken as established.

¹² Jan P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* IV (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1875), p. 183 [collated reading].

CCPA IIB 179)¹³, but in CCR2B one finds ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ ‘God may give mercy’ (CCPA IIB 176)¹⁴.

In the Hosea-Joel manuscript occurs one example of *ntn* next to *ntl*: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ ‘and I will not give you again as reproach to the nations’ Joel 2:19 (T-S 16.325, fol. 2v; CCPA I 193), but two verses before ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ ‘and do not give your heritage to reproach’ (T-S 16.325, 2v; CCPA I 193).¹⁵

Pavel Kokowzoff published two non-palimpsest folios with Ephrem Graecus, *de Poenitentia* and Abba Isaiah of Sketis’ XI Logos.¹⁶ The attestation of *ntn* in the Abba Isaiah of Sketis Logos’ text is a quotation from Romans 14:12: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ ‘so that he is prepared to give [δῶσει] account to God concerning all his deeds’.¹⁷

Exceptional is also the attestation in a vita of a monk ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ ‘what is this Aloe which fell to me to give’ *Erzählungen aus dem Mönchsleben* b14 (Vat. sir. fol. 14r).¹⁸

The seventh manuscript to have *ntn* is CCR1, a Gospel manuscript under *Codex Climaci rescriptus*, which was edited by Agnes S. Lewis a few years later in 1909.¹⁹ What is contradictory concerning the Aramaic employed in this manuscript is that it tends to “eastern morphemes” or rather “Syriac morphemes”.²⁰ Thus *ntn* should not occur in this morphological environment. All the other deviating linguistic features employed are the expected Eastern ones. The verb *ntn*, however, has to be accepted in this text as being correct. The example is the following: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܝܪܝܐ

¹³ At first published by George H. Gwilliam, *The Palestinian Version of the Holy Scriptures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), pp. 16–17.

¹⁴ Agnes S. Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus. Fragments of Sixth-Century Palestinian Syriac Texts of the Gospels, of the Acts of the Apostles and of St. Paul’s Epistles* «Horae Semiticae», VIII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), p. 172.

¹⁵ Edited by Agnes S. Lewis and Margaret D. Gibson, *Palestinian Syriac Texts from Palimpsest fragments in the Taylor-Schechter Collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), p. 40, but readings in verse 19 are corrected through collations.

¹⁶ Alan Suci, “Addition to the Christian-Palestinian Aramaic Literary Corpus: Logos XV of Abba Isaiah of Scetis”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 61 (2016), pp. 449–461. According to the edition by René Draguet, *Les cinq recensions de l’Ascéticon syriaque d’Abba Isaïe* «Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium» 293, «Scriptores syri» 122; (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1968), pp. 39*–67*, it is in fact the XI Logos.

¹⁷ Pavel K. Kokowzoff, *Nouveaux fragments syropalestiniens de la Bibliothèque impériale publique de Saint-Petersbourg* (St Petersburg: Académie impériale des sciences, 1906), pp. 27, 36.

¹⁸ Hugo Duensing, *Christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Texte und Fragmente nebst einer Abhandlung über den Wert der palästinischen Septuaginta* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), p. 22.

¹⁹ Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*.

²⁰ See Christa Müller-Kessler, ‘Die frühe christlich-palästinisch-aramäische Evangelienhandschrift CCR1 übersetzt durch einen ostaramäischen (syrischen) Schreiber?’, *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* 1 (1999), pp. 79–86.

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘that he will give [δοῦναι] them their food in its season’ Matthew 24:45 CCR1 (CCPA IIA 30); also with usual spelling ܡܥܬܝܢܐ (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 73v; unpubl.).²¹

In a recent identified palimpsest of two non-detached folios with Leviticus and Numbers from the New Finds at the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai one can note two examples: ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘and I will give²² you bread by weight’ Leviticus 26:26 (Sin. gr. NF M167, fol. ? r); ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘I will give fright into his heart’ Leviticus 26:36 (Sin. gr. NF M167, fol. ? v).²³

In the early Gospel manuscript from the New Finds at St Catherine’s Monastery, Sin. syr. NF M56N, one comes across quite a few attestations. It looks a bit as if this manuscript containing Matthew and Mark deployed *ntn* as the regular verbal form instead of *ntl*, but there are also three exceptions to be noted:

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘I will put [θήσω] my spirit upon him’ Matthew 12:18 [Isaiah 42:1] (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 44r; unpubl.);²⁴

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘and I will give [δώσω] you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ Matthew 16:19 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 79r; unpubl.);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘he will give [δώσει] good things to those who ask him’ Matthew 7:11 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 6v; unpubl.);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘by oath he promised her to give [δοῦναι] her’ Matthew 14:7 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 22r; unpubl.);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘and what will a man give [δώσει] in exchange for his soul’ Matthew 16:26 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 80v [r]; unpubl.);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘and to give [δοῦναι] his soul a rescue’ Matthew 20:28 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 31v/38r; unpubl.);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ‘to give [δοῦναι] (their food in its season)’ Matthew 24:45 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 73v; unpubl.), but with alternative spelling ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘that he will give [δοῦναι] them their food in its season’ Matthew 24:45 CCR1 (CCPA IIA 30);

ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ ‘and he will give [δώσει] the vineyard to others’ Mark 12:9 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 29av; unpubl.).

²¹ Lewis, *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, p. 52.

²² A second feminine singular is expected here instead.

²³ C. Müller-Kessler, ‘Unparalleled Variant Readings for Leviticus 26:26b-44 and Numbers 4:15b-5:6a in an Early Christian Palestinian Aramaic Palimpsest from St Catherine’s Monastery (Greek NF M 167)’, *Revue Biblique* 128 (2021), pp. 354-370, esp. 336-337. The manuscript is not foliated yet according to the information by Father Justin, librarian.

²⁴ In a CPA witness of the Isaiah pericope 42:1 from the Old Jerusalem Lectionary tradition one finds the verbal root *yhb* in the perfect instead of the imperfect from *ntn*: ܡܥܬܝܢܐ ܥܡܢܝܐ (Sin. gr. NF MG 32, fols. 4v/5r+17r); see Christa Müller-Kessler, ‘The Early Jerusalem Lectionary Tradition in Christian Palestinian Aramaic (5th-7th Centuries AD): Lections Containing Unattested Old and New Testament Pericopes in Unpublished Palimpsests (Sin. Gr. NF MG 32; Georg. NF 19, 71)’, *Le Muséon* 136 (2023), p. 237.

ܠܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܠܥܥܪܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ‘is it permitted for us that we give [δοῦναι] tribute to Caesar or not?’ Matthew 22:17 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 37r; unpubl.);

ܕܢܝܢܐ ܠܥܥܪܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ‘is it permitted that we give [δοῦναι] tribute to Caesar or that we do not give (it)?’ Mark 12:14 (Sin. syr. NF 56, fol. 25v; unpubl.);

The exceptions so far in this manuscript are only attested in the plural forms: ܠܢ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܠܥܥܪܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ‘and do not give [δῶτε] the holy to the dogs’ Matthew 7:6 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 6r [v]; unpubl.); ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ‘they will give (ἀποδώσουσιν) a thought concerning it on the day of judgement’ Matthew 12:36 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 42v; unpubl.); ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ‘and they promised to give [δοῦναι] him money’ Mark 14:11 (Sin. syr. NF M56N, fol. 20r; unpubl.).

Conclusion

One can conclude that although the Syriac loan *ntl* is preferred in the written format of CPA there are a number of attestations of *ntn* to be found in the early manuscripts of various provenances. The scribes of these manuscripts retained their colloquial usage of this verbal form and in two manuscripts they deployed them in alternation. The attestations are limited to Biblical passages or their quotations as in the usage of object suffixes.²⁵ As we possess only a fragmentary picture of the written relics in this Western Aramaic dialect, it is difficult to judge the distribution of either variant. It would be of interest what the compiler of inscriptions would have used in these cases.

Abbreviations

CCPA I Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff (eds.), *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic Old Testament and Apocrypha Version from the Early Period* «A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic» I (Groningen: STYX, 1997).

CCPA IIA Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff (eds.), *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic New Testament Version from the Early Period. Gospels* «A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic» IIA (Groningen: STYX, 1998).

²⁵ Christa Müller-Kessler, ‘On the Rare Usage of Object Suffixes in Christian Palestinian Aramaic: A Phenomenon in Biblical Texts?’, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 22 (2025), pp. 39-59.

CCPA IIB Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff (eds.), *The Christian Palestinian Aramaic New Testament Version from the Early Period. Acts of the Apostles and Epistles* «A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic» IIB (Groningen: STYX, 1998).