

Turning one's face to the dew-dropping south

The Arabic passive in the light of Modern South Arabian

Huehnergard (2017) and Al-Jallad (2018) have recently attempted to identify the innovative features that define Arabic as a phylogenetic clade within Central Semitic in a strict Stammbaum approach. The tree approach indeed remains one of our most powerful tools for dealing with the history of languages, and we must follow it all the way to its limits if we wish to fully reap its rewards. As this has not been done for Arabic, such attempts as Huehnergard and Al-Jallad's should be welcomed and examined.

We will do so by focusing on two of the features recognized by them as diagnostic of Arabic: the *u-i* vocalic melody for the passive in the perfect, and the $maC_1C_2\bar{u}C_3$ pattern as the paradigmatic form for the passive participle (vs. respectively *u-a* and $C_1aC_2\bar{i}/\bar{a}C_3$ for proto-Central Semitic). We will argue that exactly such a morphology is at the basis of the corresponding MSA forms, with no internal reason to consider it a loan from Arabic. As MSA is not part of Central Semitic, this is unexpected.

1) The perfect passive in the basic stem

	Soqotri	Jibbali/Šhrēt	Omani Mehri	Yemeni Mehri
3ms	$C_1\bar{i}C_2\bar{e}C_3$	$C_1\bar{i}C_2\bar{i}C_3$	$C_1\partial C_2\bar{e}C_3$	$C_1\bar{i}C_2\bar{e}C_3$
3fs	$C_1iC_2iC_3oh$	$C_1iC_2iC_3\acute{o}t$	$C_1\partial C_2\partial C_3\acute{e}t$	$C_1\bar{i}C_2\bar{e}C_3\acute{o}t$

On the basis of relevant phonological parallels from the verbal system, we will show that:

- In the 3ms, the nature of the stressed (or in Soqotri stable) vowel in V_2 supposes a high vowel at proto-MSA level.
- In the 3fs, Soqotri /i/ in V_2 and Omani Mehri /é/ in the suffix suppose proto-MSA *i in V_2 .
- In the 3ms, stress (or Soqotri stability) in V_2 supposes that V_1 was also a high vowel in proto-MSA.
- The fact that a radical /l/ in Soqotri palatalizes in position C_2 or C_3 but not C_1 suggests that V_2 was originally palatal but not V_1 .

Which leaves us with $*C_1uC_2iC_3$ - as the only possible etymon (as already foreseen but not demonstrated by Appleyard 1996). As the passive morphology as a whole is productive, complex and deeply rooted in MSA, it is *a priori* unlikely to have been recently borrowed.

2) The passive participle in the basic stem

Soqotri	Jibbali/Šhrēt	Omani Mehri	Yemeni Mehri
$m\acute{e}C_1C_2(h)\bar{e}C_3$	$m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{e}C_3$	$m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{i}C_3$	$m\acute{a}C_1C_2\acute{i}C_3$

Several examples will show that the correspondance {Sq. /e/, Jb. /é/, Mh. /í/} is the typical outcome of * \bar{u} (cf. the Jibbali plural pattern $C_1C_2\acute{e}C_3 < *C_1uC_2\bar{u}C_3$) or of an * \bar{u} -triggered umlaut (especially in masculine plural verbal forms). The etymon is therefore certainly $*maC_1C_2\bar{u}C_3$.

Though a borrowing of this pattern (which pertains to the lexicon and not only to verbal flexion) is conceivable, it is noteworthy that: (1) MSA has no other way of forming a passive participle (no $*C_1aC_2\bar{i}C_3$ -like forms); (2) this pattern is productive even in Soqotri (the language least influenced by Arabic); (3) it is not particularly frequent with Arabic roots.

As the closest common node between MSA and Arabic is proto-West Semitic, such results may prompt us to reexamine our scenario for the morphology of the passive at that level. They also raise the question of to what extent we have the right to posit a loan just because it better fits our idea of how a particular tree should look like.

AL-JALLAD 2018: Ahmad Al Jallad, "The earliest stages of Arabic and its linguistic classification", in Elabbas Benmamoun & Reem Bassiouney (eds), *The Routledge handbook of Arabic linguistics*, London / New York, Routledge.

APPLEYARD 1996: David L. Appleyard, "Ethiopian Semitic and South Arabian. Towards a re-examination of a relationship", *Israel Oriental Studies* 16, p. 203-228.

HUEHNERGARD 2017: John Huehnergard, "Arabic in its Semitic context", in Ahmad Al-Jallad (ed.), *Arabic in Context. Celebrating 400 years of Arabic at Leiden University*, Leiden / Boston, Brill.