

## “Diachronic Observations on the Development of the *tanwīn alif* in Christian Palestinian Arabic”

There are several features attested in pre-modern and modern forms of Arabic that have been connected with *nasalization* (Arabic *tanwīn*) and etymological case vowels. Most salient among these are: 1) ‘dialectal *tanwīn*’ (DT), which is a morpheme suffixed to morphologically indefinite nouns (realized *-in* or *-an*, depending on the dialect); and 2) the *tanwīn alif*, which is especially prevalent in the corpus of Christian Palestinian Arabic (CPA) texts from southern Palestine in the late 1st and early 2nd millennia CE. The regnant diachronic narrative concerning the origin and development of both is that of J. Blau, who discussed (1) at great length in his monograph on the emergence of Neo-Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic (1981: 178ff.), and (2) in his grammar of Christian Palestinian Arabic (1966-7: §221-228). Blau derived each of these features from the etymological accusative *\*-an*, a development he traced to the earliest Islamic centuries, during which time case was lost due to the rapid acquisition of Classical Arabic-like varieties by speakers of other languages. He considered (1) to be a living feature, given its attestation in contemporary bedouin dialects, and (2) to be a hypercorrection because of its apparent lack of parallel in any modern dialect.

A number of recent developments in our understanding of the history and development of Arabic, however, have rendered Blau’s assumptions untenable, especially: the identification of pre-Islamic corpora of Arabic inscriptions written in the Safaitic and Ḥismaic scripts; further discoveries of Arabic features in the Nabataean script (Al-Jallad 2018); re-interpretation of early Islamic texts and inscriptions, such as the Qur’ānic Consonantal Text (Van Putten and Stokes 2018); and critical engagement with the Arab grammatical tradition. It is thus clear that Arabic before Islam was quite different than that underlying Blau’s fundamental assumptions.

Thus a re-examination of features associated with case in the Islamic period is now due. In this talk, I focus on the functions and distribution of the *tanwīn alif* morpheme in the Christian Palestinian Arabic corpus, and contextualize it with data relating to other manifestations of case + *tanwīn*, without assuming that it must be a hypercorrection, or indeed that it need be primarily understood within a dialect/Classical Arabic dialectic. Blau’s interpretation of the feature leads him to categorize its functions syntactically, e.g., subject of existential clauses, subject of *kān / ’inna*, etc. Instead, I interpret the role of *tanwīn* here as type of indefinite specific marker (on which, see Brustad 2000: §1.4.2). I draw on descriptions and data of *tanwīn* from Sibawayh to the contemporary dialects to situate the distribution of *tanwīn alif* in the spectrum of manifestations of *tanwīn* in Arabic, and propose a scenario that accounts for both *tanwīn alif* in CPA and DT as reflexes of the same development from etymological *tanwīn*.

## Works Referenced

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