THE CAMELS OF TIGLATH-PILESER III AND THE ARABIC DEFINITE ARTICLE

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One of the earliest publications of Professor Simo Parpola, forty years ago, related to Assyro-Arabian relations.[1] This alone would justify presenting the following short note to him but his keen interest in etymologies and the relations between various languages adds another reason for presenting him with this article as a small gift from his former student.

Assyrian texts contain some references to Arabs.[2] The first recorded mention of (North) Arabs comes in Shalmaneser III's annals, which mention Gindibu and his 1,000 camels, referring to an Arab tribal leader active in 853 BC.[3] Here the word used is ANŠE.*gam-ma-lu*, but besides it, there is also another word for camel, *a-na-qa-(a)-ti/te*, often found in Neo-Assyrian texts.[4] The word is usually considered an early Arabic loan in Akkadian, corresponding to the Classical Arabic *nāqat-* "she-camel". Recently Alasdair Livingstone (1997) has taken the word ᶠANŠE.*a-na-qa-a-te* in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions to be the first attestation of the North Arabic definitive article *han-* and his analysis has been accepted by Burkhart Kienast (2001: 163) and Felice Israël (2006: 30–31).

Livingstone, unfortunately, ignores the etymology of the word *nāqat-*. As already shown by Vullers (1906: 90) and Brockelmann (1908: 248), and later very convincingly by Vycichl (1988), the Arabic word cannot be discussed apart from the Semitic root YNQ "to suck", in the causative "to suckle", and it seems most probable that the word *nāqat-* is derived from **yanāqat-*, with a semantic specialisation from "suckling, or suckled, (camel)" to "she-camel".[5]

The loss of the initial syllable is irregular but not inexplicable. Vycichl (1988: 487–488) explains this as a false division (**yanāqat- ~ yā nāqat-* "Oh camel"), which I find less than credible. More probably the loss is due to certain general tendencies in Arabic. The initial Y in Arabic roots is unstable[6] and there are, consequently, few

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[1]   Deller & Parpola 1968, "Ein Vertrag Assurbanipals mit dem arabischen Stamm Qedar".
[2]   These have been studied by, e.g., Eph'al 1982 and Retsö 2003, but much remains to be done. Especially Assyrian and Babylonian letters need to be sifted and carefully analysed.
[3]   Discussed from an Arab point of view in, e.g., Eph'al 1982: 21, and Retsö 2003: 124–128.
[4]   See AHw. s.v. *anaqātu*, and CAD, s.v. *anaqāte*.
[5]   On the passive meaning of the pattern *faʿāl*, see Vycichl 1988.
[6]   See Brockelmann 1908: 248–249.

roots that have Y as their first radical. Thus, e.g., the root YDʿ "to know", widely diffused in Semitic languages, is not found in Classical Arabic vocabulary.[7]

In addition to the instability of Y as the first radical, one may note that Early Classical Arabic had a strong tendency to drop an unstressed open syllable consisting of *hamza* + a short vowel in initial position, especially before a stressed syllable, when neither the root nor the grammatical pattern protects it.[8] Thus, one finds the older form ʿ*unās*- later almost completely replaced by *nās*- and the place name known from Assyrian sources, Adummatu,[9] appears in Arabic texts as *Dūmat* (*al-Jandal*). Thus, even though we may not be able to prove that Classical Arabic *nāqat*- goes back to *ʾ*anāqat*- ← *yanāqat*-, such a development would by no means be contrary to the trends of Arabic.

There are two cases which might seem to contain vestiges of the longer form. In Classical Arabic, among the many plurals of this word there are two which seem to have Y as their first radical, viz. ʿ*aynuq*- and ʿ*ayāniq*-.[10] Here, however, the first consonant need not be, and probably is not, a relic of an original Y, but the first is, like ʿ*awnuq*-, probably due to a metathesis (from ʿ*anwuq*-, ʿ*anyuq*-), the second a secondary plural formed from ʿ*aynuq*-. Thus, they cannot be taken as evidence for the existence of the longer form in Pre-Classical Arabic, which remains hypothetical, although highly probable.

There is one feature that does not seem to have received any attention in earlier discussions. Camels during Tiglath-pileser's time were, without doubt, "Arabian" animals, and it is only natural to search for an Arabic etymology for the word – words tend to travel together with the things they denote, as has been well known since the time of the Neogrammarians. From a purely linguistic point of view, though, it is less easy to see why we should seek the etymology of a word, clearly connected with the root YNQ, from a language which lacks the root.[11] Instead, we do find in, e.g., Biblical Hebrew, expressions such as *gᵉmallīm mēnīqōt* (Gen 32:16), which would fit with the etymology of *nāqat*-. It might be worth considering whether Arabs may have got the word for camel from a language which does use the root YNQ, in which case both the Akkadian *a-na-qa-a-te* and the Arabic *nāqat*- would be loanwords from West Semitic.

Be that as it may, the camels of Tiglath-pileser III have to remain what they are, a proof of the relations between Assyrians and Arabs in the 8th century BC, and no further loads should be laid on their backs. The word *a-na-qa-a-te* does not provide

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[7]   The rare verbs ʿ*aydaʿa* and *yaddaʿa* (see, e.g., Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v.) are clearly derived from the noun ʿ*aydaʿu* (i.e., "to apply ʿ*ayda* on oneself") and ʿ*aydaʿa* should be stricken from Koehler-Baumgartner 1994–2000, s.v. YDʿ. See also Nöldeke 1910: 202–206.

[8]   See also Fischer 1972: §49d.

[9]   See Parpola 1970a: 4–5.

[10]   Both are mentioned in, e.g., Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, s.v. NWQ, the former also in Fischer 1972: §100, Anm. 1.

[11]   If Arabic ever had the root, it has been replaced by others, most notably by RDʿ.

us with the first attestation for the Arabic definite article.[12] What it does prove is that there is every reason to connect Arabic *nāqat-* etymologically with the Semitic root YNQ.

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[12]   One might add that the Arabic definite article is an excellent case showing how easily scholars find what they are looking for. The earliest attestation of the Arabic article *al-* has also been sought for in Herodotus, whose Alilat has, wrongly, been seen to contain the article *al-*, see Hämeen-Anttila & Rollinger 2001. For various attempts to explain the development of the definite article in Arabic and other Semitic languages, see Voigt 1998 and Lipiński 2001: 142 (§17.4) and 276–277 (§33.10).