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The Formation of the “Verb” Category: from Pre-Semitic to Semitic

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List of Abbreviations

- AOAT = Alter Orient und Altes Testament.
- ArOr. = Archív Orientální. Prague.
- AS = Assyriological Studies.
- AuOr. = Aula Orientalis. Barcelona.
- BiOr. = Bibliotheca Orientalis. Leiden.
- BSÉG = Bulletin de la Société d'Égyptologie,
Gèneve.
- BSOAS = Bulletin of the School of Oriental and
African Studies. London.
- CILT = Current Issues in Linguistic Theory.
- GAG = von Soden 1952.
- GLECS = Comptes rendus des séances du
Groupe linguistique d'études chamito-
sémitiques. Paris.
- HSS = Harvard Semitic Studies.
- IOS = Israel Oriental Studies. Tel Aviv and
Winona Lake, IN.

List of Abbreviations

- JANES = Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society. New York.
- JAOS = Journal of the American Oriental Society. New Haven, CT.
- JNES = Journal of Near Eastern Studies. Chicago.
- JRAS = Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. London.
- JSS = Journal of Semitic Studies. Manchester.
- MIO = Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung. Berlin.
- MUSJ = Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph. Beyrouth.
- OLZ = Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
- Or. = Orientalia. Rome.
- RSO = Rivista degli Studi Orientali. Rome.
- ZA = Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie. Berlin.
- ZAh = Zeitschrift für Althebraistik. Stuttgart.

- ZAL = Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik.
Wiesbaden.
- ZAW = Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche
Wissenschaft. Giessen.
- ZDMG = Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgen-
ländischen Gesellschaft. Wiesbaden.
- ZS = Zeitschrift für Semitistik und ver-
wandte Gebiete.

Symbols

- /.../ surrounds a phonological transcription or interpretation
- [...] surrounds a phonetic transcription or interpretation
- ⟨ ⟩ surrounding a cuneiform sign indicates the specific reading of the sign
- < and > (from and to) indicate a phonological change
- and ← indicate a morphophonemic or morphosyntactic (analogical) change or replacement; indicate a relationship of derivation
- * precedes a reconstructed but not actually attested form

Introduction

The present study concerns the historical development of the Semitic verb, with close reference to the most ancient reported periods. Therefore, Akkadian, which is the oldest documented Semitic language, will have a central stage within the analysis.

For the sake of convenience, I will directly discuss the Old Babylonian dialect, being it the oldest (Akkadian) one for which huge data have been preserved. When relevant, I will mention other dialectal variants, whose features might be useful in diachronic terms.

In the same vein, I find opportune considering how usages of verbal forms changed over time. Therefore, I will investigate some Akkadian-specific developments, when conducive to rearrangements of the whole verbal system. For practical reasons, I will primarily address the Akkadian G stem (i.e., *Grundstamm* 'basic conjugation'), as derived verbal stems need additional investigations.

Objectives

The early history of the Semitic verb will play a pivotal role. Primarily, the analysis aims at describing how the verbalization process came to be expressed through the specific shape that the Semitic verbal paradigm presents.

Secondarily, I shall try to sketch a plausible connection between the various and almost opposite values that certain verbal forms exhibit along the recorded history. Admittedly, my goal does not

reside in illustrating the developments that individual Semitic languages underwent: scholarly literature is legion on this matter. Instead, I shall present some comments on the moot points related to the emergence of the “verb” category, in the hope of shedding more light on its essential functioning.

Theoretical framework

For these reasons, the recourse to the pre-Semitic background is felt as necessary. Here more than anywhere else, terminology is fairly eloquent: labeling the stage preceding the attested period “pre-Semitic” prevents (mono)genetic reasonings to get involved.

In the course of the investigation, I will explicitly admit my support for the “areal diffusion”; presumably around the second millennium B.C., the Amorite people might have spread – through diverse waves of immigration – linguistic innovations

from the Syrian Desert over their neighboring areas. The impact of the Amorite is historically documented: suffice it to say that their arrival in Mesopotamia, as the “Amorite dynasties” (ca. 2000-1595 B.C.) witness, should have affected the Old Babylonian dialect (*Amurru* lit., ‘west’ in Babylonian) to some extent. However, the scarcity and peculiarity of the Amorite data, (corresponding to onomastic material only) cause the linguistic influence not as easy to detect. Prominent attempts to emphasize the far-reaching Amorite role in the emergence of West-Semitic have been made by some Italian scholars (Garbini 1984; Garbini and Durand 1994), to whom I am indebted for the crucial inspiration.

As for the East Semitic (i.e., Akkadian and Eblaite) and West Semitic, the one-millennium time span between their respective attestations will be considered in the foregoing essay. Linguistically, the innovative traits of West Semitic – in contrast to

the archaic feature of East Semitic – may find a suitable explanation within the historical proposal summarized earlier.

Consequently, the foregoing overview will not concern proto-Semitic, since its theoretical implications clearly clash with the premises just explained. It goes without saying that the tree model is all but a convincing representation of how the Semitic verb emerged *in reality*.

Arguments and structure of the work

Throughout the essay, I will underline the nominal origin of the verb, as the key element on which the genesis of the Semitic verbal morphology relies. In other words, it is argued that our notion should be more heavily influenced by this conception.

In order to provide an adequate understanding of the issue, I will start focusing on a brief overview of the state of the art related to the Semitic verb. The most significant comparative studies (in the form of articles or comprehensive monographs or even grammars) will be offered with some comments (see Ch. 1).

In the ensuing chapter, some preliminary facts related to the *skeleton* of the Semitic morphology will be presented (see 2.1). Substantially, this is an essential section, in that it includes the premises of the core arguments which will be formulated later. Canonical notions, like triradicalism and fusional

property, seen as the (alleged) original structure of (pre-)Semitic morphemes, will call for comment.

Following this line, I will define the fundamental functioning of the Akkadian verbal system (see 2.2.). A detailed description of the verbal base will be fitting. As for the dynamic-state opposition, it will be postulated a nominal-adjectival background. Then, the external personal marker will be introduced (see 2.3.). It will be thus the turn of the Akkadian finite verbal forms (see 2.4.). I will mostly direct my attention to the *iprus* and *paris* forms, which will be said to constitute the nominal pre-Semitic nucleus.

The last section (see Ch. 3) represents the main body of the treatment. It will be claimed that the entire verb formation arose as a recent category within the Semitic history; it comes from pre-Semitic nominal elements that have gradually entered into a fully-fledged verbal system. The

specific formal modifications (e.g., coalescence of two distinct elements into one) and semantic re-definitions underlying the verbalization process will be shown in the remainder of the work. Further in West Semitic, another meaningful phenomenon, which is well recognized in the literature, is the reemployment of the Akkadian stative in a pure aspect system with a perfective nuance, opposed to the *iprus* form, re-used with an imperfective value. Arabic and Hebrew relics of the earlier perfective function bear out the “Semitic *continuum*” between Akkadian and West Semitic.

It is worth to stress the fact that the West Semitic verbal development will be marginally discussed herein. The most meaningful aspect of this dissertation is proposing a reliable pre-Semitic background at the base of the verbal reassessment occurred within West Semitic (and firstly attested in Amorite onomastics). Actually, analyses about the

relationships between the East and the West Semitic verbal system might be a pertinent sequel to the present work.

I will provide just a passing reference to some Afro-Asiatic languages (e.g., Berber and Egyptian) whose affinities with specific aspects of the Semitic verbal structure are beyond doubt. I have not taken the liberty of assuming to do full justice to all that material. At any rate, further investigations on this issue are needed.

Being aware of these limitations, the following overview does not seek to be complete or well balanced. Moreover, the arguments presented here should not be understood as decisive. Rather, it should be stressed the fact that any given reconstruction of unattested linguistic phases – as the pre-Semitic one – always remains hypothetical.

Akkadian Dialects Classification and Its Terminology

Given the historical approach, I will refer to the Akkadian verbal forms in terms of chronology and hence of dialects. Beside Old Babylonian, for the enumeration of the other linguistic periods I will use the following standard terms:

- Old Akkadian (ca. 2350 to 1950 B.C.), whose sources are usually differentiated in pre-Sargonic, Sargonic and Ur III periods.
- Old Babylonian (ca. 1950 to 1590 B.C) and Old Assyrian (ca. 1950 to 1750 B.C.).
- Middle Babylonian (ca. 1590 to 1000 B.C.) and Middle Assyrian (ca. 1500-1000 B.C.).
- Neo Babylonian and Neo Assyrian (ca. 1000 to 600 B.C).
- Standard Babylonian (ca. 1000 to 500 B.C.).
- Late Babylonian (ca. 600 B.C to the 1st century A.D.).

Chapter 1

THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE SEMITIC VERB: STATUS QUAESTIONIS

1.1. Preliminary Considerations

In the arena of morphology, the verb formation constitutes one of the most debated issue within the field of Comparative Semitic Linguistics. Broadly speaking, the difficulty arises when coming to the Akkadian language; it exhibits some controversial traits which, indeed, set it apart from the high degree of homogeneity that the rest of Semitic does perform. It goes without saying that such homogeneity is said to be a strong argument in favour of the

genealogical tree model; instead, the peculiarity of the Akkadian verbal system could be used against it.

For the time being, I will focus on a synchronic outline of the Akkadian verbal forms, in order to achieve an adequate comprehension of the elements under discussion.¹ Formally, the basic members of the Akkadian verbal paradigm² can be described as follows:

- *iprus* form, i.e., a prefix-conjugation for the expression of completed actions (traditionally called “preterite”).

¹ The foregoing section has deliberately a simplified and sober character, merely aiming at introducing the Akkadian verbal forms from a descriptive perspective. A critical and detailed analysis will be provided in Ch. 3. Moreover, my concern will mainly be on the finite forms of the basic stem, for derived verbal stems need much more space to devote.

² For clarity’s sake, I have not diverged from the terms which Akkadian grammars conventionally adopt. Whether we consider *iprus* form “perfective” or “perfect” is largely a question of terminology. The same can be said for *iparras* form (whether “imperfective” or “present”).

- *iparras* form, i.e., a prefix conjugation with gemination of the second radical, for expressing incomplete actions (usually called “present”).
- *paris* form, i.e., a suffix conjugation, usually called “stative” or “permansive”, in that it basically denotes states, not actions. The question whether this form belongs to the verbal or to the nominal category has been under debate for several decades.³

³ For bibliographical references, see 2.4.2. Given the nature of the present study, I will focus on its diachronic development. At any rate, its nominal/adjectival origin should be out of question.

From von Soden onwards⁴ it is common to include within the basic stem paradigm the *iptaras* form (labelled as “perfect”), i.e., a prefix conjugation with an infix *-t-*. According to the traditional view, it “expresses an action complete in itself but still persisting in its effects (or subsequent to another completed action)”.⁵ Morphologically speaking, it is generally agreed that the infix *-t-* was originally restricted to themes whose first radical is a sibilant, being *t-* prefixed in all other cases. Therefore, the process of metathesis concerns the whole themes.⁶

⁴ Cf. GAG §80. Before him, see also Landsberger 1926a: 355-72. In contrast to the current view held by the early Semitists, he did not assign a reflexive-reciprocal-passive value to *iptaras* (like the West Semitic *t*-affix verbal forms). Based to the observation of the *šumma* conditional clauses in the Code of Hammurabi, he compared the *t*-form function to a sort of puntual present. Then, Oppenheim, 1935: 1-30, started to term it as “perfect”, maintaining that it firstly expressed “emotion”.

⁵ S. Moscati 1964: 132. Actually, the term “perfect” may be misleading, since its wide range of functions is far from being univocal.

⁶ See GAG §98b.

For reasons that will become apparent in the course of the dissertation, I am not inclined to conceive the *iptaras* form in the realm of the basic stem. In this place, what matters most across the Akkadian verbal history is the gradual rise of *iptaras* form as a past tense in main clauses and the subsequent relegation of the *iprus* form to subordinate clauses.⁷

As explained above, the Akkadian verb, when compared to the other Semitic languages, poses several questions which do not yield decisive answers. In sum, the fundamental issues that permeate more than one hundred years of Semitic Studies are the following:

- How to explain the penetration of a geminated theme, like the *iparras* one, into the tense-

⁷ As Bergsträsser (1928: 23) has already observed. Then, Kuryłowicz (1962: 48) comes back to the same point.

aspect system of Akkadian, although in the rest of Semitic the derived theme with the gemination of the second radical (i.e., the so-called “D stem”) mainly conveys an intensive (only subsequently factitive) meaning. In other words, the evolution from inflectional to derivational seems hard to conceive.

- How to explain the passage perfective > imperfective that the *iprus* form underwent across the recorded history.⁸
- how to explain the passage from stative to perfective of the *paris* form. In this case, the

⁸ Significant vestigial forms of the former usage are unambiguous within some Semitic languages (e.g., the Arabic verbal form *lam yaqtul* ‘he did not kill’ and the Hebrew imperfective form with waw converse, e.g., *wayyiqtol* ‘he did not kill’), thus proving the relatedness of the latter usage to the earliest one. Recently, most scholars (see, for example, Kouwenberg 2010: 130 and elsewhere) employ the (diachronic) typological approach, by postulating a resultative value for the early Semitic prefix conjugation, that could have developed into a past/perfective in the later stages.

diachronic path seems to be far more natural to reconstruct.

So, we deal with this set of questions regarding the significant rearrangement that affected the Semitic verbal system, as it is attested from the II millennium B.C onwards. However, the situation is arguably more interesting – and, I would say, more speculative – since another actor appears, that is the Proto-Semitic (the *ursemitische Sprache*), i.e., the quintessence of the genealogical tree model (*Stammbaumtheorie*). In fact, scrolling through the scholarly literature, it indisputably plays a crucial role in the argumentations.

As it will become clearer in the next section, in general a historical investigation of the Semitic verb formation implicitly means a reconstruction of a presumptive proto-language, as if the two members were conceptually related. Among other things,

this risks to superficially polarize the debate in terms of archaisms and innovations. The paradox which is glossed over is that focusing on a hypothetical common ancestor does not provide a concrete interpretation of the historical facts. At most, it might serve as a methodological working aid.

In the course of my selected bibliographical survey, I will follow a chronological arrangement, in that the wealth of the literature on this topic demands some criterion of ordering. For the same reason, I shall dwell on the most significant contributions, which are strictly pertinent to the Semitic verb formation.

1.2. The Earliest Approaches to the Semitic Verb Formation

Given the relevance of the verb category *per se*, the “verb question” is felt from the early comparative investigations⁹ as an urgent crux to disentangle. On one hand, this first period betrays a knowledge of the Akkadian language still far from being established. Then, the main languages under discussion were the best documented at that time (e.g., Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic¹⁰). On the other, the embryonic stage of the first Semitics may enable us to have a fresh look at the object as we were prejudice-free, thus reconsidering all standard views

⁹ It seems safe to regard the *Lectures of the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic languages* (1890) by W.W. Wright as the first grammar of comparative Semitic linguistics. Despite it is somewhat obsolete in a sense, it retains a historical value within that field.

¹⁰ Specifically, the Syriac was the first Aramaic dialect to be deeply analysed, due to its monumental literature at disposal.

with a more critical approach, as if the subject were totally new.

In this respect, Wright (1890) is emblematic of the above-mentioned context. What strikes me as important is his great emphasis on the nominal origin of the verb, an intuition that hasn't been expanded by other scholars in a more systematic way. Thus, he clearly states: “[...] *the verbal forms of the Semites are really nominal forms, mostly in combination with pronouns. Each person of the verb is, so to say, a sentence, consisting of a noun and a pronoun, which has gradually been contracted or shrivelled up into a single word*”¹¹. As for the suffix conjugation (his “perfect”), it would originate from three classes of noun (both substantive and adjective) of the types *katal*, *katil*, *katul*.¹² In this way, *katala*, the 3rd m.sg. of the

¹¹ Wright 1890: 164.

¹² I retained the original transcription each author used for the entire survey.

1.2. The Earliest Approaches to the Semitic Verb Formation

perfective¹³ is in origin a simple noun (being the final *a* the oldest termination of the masculine Semitic noun). As for the prefix conjugation (his “present”), it may develop out from two nominal classes, one is *katil*, the same of the perfective stem, the other is *k’tal/ k’til/ k’tul*. Therefore, *yaktul*, the 3rd m.sg. of the imperfective, is a noun, without any affix, as a specific class of both common and proper Semitic nouns proves.¹⁴

Actually, it is the monumental work by Brockelmann¹⁵, which is still a paramount reference among Semitists, that symbolises the traditional

¹³ It is worth remembering that Akkadian is still not a main subject in Wright’s survey, so his assessments are made with reference to Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac only.

¹⁴ Admittedly, Wright was right in foreseeing the nature of the particle **ya*, similar to a relative pronoun (i.e., “one who, he who”). *Ib.* p. 182.

¹⁵ Brockelmann, 1908 and 1913a.

approach¹⁶ *par excellence*. In general, Semitic writings of that times are crucial, insofar their way of portraying the Semitic verb will pioneer the setting of the issue. Consequently, I shall devote much attention to this stage. Within the verbal theme, the *Ablautverhaltis* (1908: 504) of the second syllable plays a key role in distinguishing completed actions from uncompleted ones.¹⁷ Moreover, the *Ursemitische Sprachen* increasingly gains ground within the analyses. By contrast, the nominal force on the verb seems to be felt as somehow occupying a marginal place.¹⁸ To be precise, at first

¹⁶ According to the latter, proto-Semitic surprisingly resembled the Arabic in almost each domain (such as phonology and morphology). However, this view has been gradually abandoned when Akkadian language extensively came to be deciphered and, subsequently, it became the real most ancient attested Semitic language.

¹⁷ In this section I shall not get into details; I will treat them in my own analysis provided in the ensuing chapters.

¹⁸ “*Die Imperative des Grundstammes waren vielleicht ursprünglich Nomina im Sinne des Kommandos, daher sie zugleich auch als Infinitive auftreten*”. (Brockelmann 1908: 504).

1.2. The Earliest Approaches to the Semitic Verb Formation

Brockelmann posits that the perfective theme *qatal* is supposed to coincide with the fundamental stem, from which the imperative and the imperfective are further formed.¹⁹ Later, under Bauer's influence, he depicts a somewhat different frame: the West Semitic verbal system is said to be the original one.²⁰ The imperative is the oldest verbal form, then the imperfective was formed by means of prefixes, the final member to appear is the perfective one, by means of suffixes. Therefore, Akkadian replaced the latter by a prefix conjugation, due to the emergence of the stative.²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.* The opposite stance was previously taken by Haupt (1878: 246), who conceived the *iparras* form being the oldest one, in contrast to the perfective form, being a new formation from the participle.

²⁰ For the classification of the Semitic languages, I will retain the standard terminology, in order to avoid ambiguities. Less traditionally, the label "West Semitic" generally includes all the Semitic languages affected by the Amorite influences (from the II millennium onwards): hence, only Akkadian and Eblaite are left aside.

²¹ Concerning the secondary nature of the Akkadian stative, Barth (1887) already posited it.

The publication of Bauer's study (1910) is closely related to the verb formation in Semitic. He takes a more unambiguous stance within the debate²²: on the basis of Akkadian the prefix conjugation "[...] *war die einzige Form, in der jene Menschen, etwa vor dem sechsten Jahrtausend, mögen sie in Afrika, in Arabien oder am Persischen Meere gesessen haben, verbale Beziehungen auszudrücken vermochten*"²³ (Bauer, 1910: 10). In other words, he argues that Proto-Semitic possessed one verbal form, formally

²²See, for example, Haupt 1878; Nöldeke 1910; Zimmern 1898, who is more cautious on the matter.

²³ Later on, this view achieved much consensus among early scholars. See, for example, M. Cohen 1924: 16. In particular, Bergsträsser 1928 claimed that the imperfective stem *yaqtul* had originally a jussive meaning. Being the only declarative verb form, it was associated with past actions. A different conclusion was envisioned by Klingeheben 1956: 255-259. He says that Afrasian proto-language has a single verbal form, with two different pronunciations but without semantic distinctions between the twos: one of the *ia-pru/i/as type and the other of the *ia-paru/i/as type. In historical periods, the first type would have acquired a perfective semantics in some language and an imperfective value in others. A similar interpretation was previously held by Bauer (1910: 10-11).

1.2. The Earliest Approaches to the Semitic Verb Formation

correspondent to the short *yaqtul* (from which the long *yaqtulu* developed), to which he ascribes a timeless and universal function (“zeitlosen und daher universalen Funktion”). After a transitional stage, *qatala* rises as a conjugational verbal noun; thus, the temporal axis was set upon a binary opposition formed by *yaqtul*: present versus *qatala*: perfect. Regarding Akkadian, the assumption that it deviated from the “original” verbal structure still persists. Driver’s (1936) theory²⁴ is similar to that of Bauer, in a way. The main difference relies on the priority given to *qatil*, instead of to the prefix conjugation.

A notion that achieved a growing interest among researchers was the tense/aspect system in the verb. M. Cohen (1924) has been of key importance in

²⁴ It will further be supported by Thacker (1954), who compares the Akkadian and the Egyptian verbal system.

such an issue, since he applied the theory of aspect (“le degré d'achèvement d'un procès”) in the Semitic verb.²⁵ From now on, the aspectual category constitutes a polarity opposition within every analysis regarding the Semitic verbal system. To be more precise, M. Cohen holds that ancient Semitic languages, with the exception of Akkadian²⁶, have two conjugated forms which express two aspects of the action, which are “l’accompli” and “l’inaccompli”.²⁷

Landsberger (1926a: 360) touches upon the Akkadian verb, specifically upon the difference between the “momentanen Aktion” of “*i-kšud*” and the “ruhender Zustand” of “*kašid und i-kašad*”, thus establishing the basic opposition as stative versus

²⁵ C.f. Brockelmann (1951: 134) who introduced the terms “konstaterend” and “kursiv” for actually denoting the same notions.

²⁶ Landsberger (1926a: 360) calls the system of the Akkadian verbal forms a system of “Aktionsarten”, adding that “*der Vorgang bzw. Zustand wird unabhängig von dem Standpunkt des Aussagenden als solcher ins Auge gefasst*”.

²⁷ M. Cohen 1924: 10.

1.2. The Earliest Approaches to the Semitic Verb Formation

dynamic. Kuryłowicz (1949), instead, considers the existence of three finite forms to be original to Akkadian. The forms are a perfect as *ikšud*; an imperfective as *ikaš(š)ad*; and a permansive as *kašid*.

A dissenting voice against the existence of a primary proto-Semitic verbal form was firstly Rössler (1950). He argues that both prefix and suffix conjugations (each of them having a simple form and a double middle radical form) belong to a common ancestor.²⁸ Afterward, several eminent Semitists accepted his view.²⁹

Another treatment which deserves attention is Rundgren (1959)³⁰, involving the verbal aspect in

²⁸ It should be pointed out that he extended the comparison to Afro-Asiatic.

²⁹ See Brockelmann 1951: 140; Rundgren 1959; Polotsky 1964: 111; Diakonoff 1965: 23. By contrast, Klingeheben (1956) rejected point by point Rössler's view, asserting the appearance in proto-Semitic of the imperfective stem only.

³⁰ His examination is restricted to Semitic, although a brief reference to Afro-Asiatic is found on the Hebrew aspects (Rundgren 1961: 108-11).

the Semitic Verb. The author states that the aspectual category represents a constitutive element of proto-Semitic. He agrees with Brockelmann (1951)³¹ and Landsberger (1926a) in regarding the correlation "Sein: Geschehen" (*qatal-yaqtul*) as the basic semantic opposition. With respect to the Akkadian verb, he claims that East Semitic followed a different verbal pattern from West Semitic, thus performing a triptotic verbal system whose *ikaššad* member is a secondary form stem from *kašad*. In concrete, his most original assumption posits that the imperfective Akkadian value is a reinterpretation of the original derivational meaning of the D-stem. This being the frame, the archaic (and original) aspectual correlation has been transformed in Akkadian by

³¹ His terminology is influenced by Brockelmann (1951). See "perfektiv = konstativ" and "imperfektiv = kursiv".

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the emergence of *ikaššad*, for expressing a durative Aktionsart (1959: 105).

Thus, until the second half of the 20th century, these are the leading issues on which Semitist conducted stimulating discussions. Apart from a few methodological reservations, I am inclined to make some conceptual considerations. Little can be said about the crisis of the early “Arabic-centric” view that the advance in Assyriology brings about. Once all the terms of the discussion are established, the debate seems to be stuck in a gridlock: deciding what proto-Semitic looked like by an appeal to the “archaism rule”, while determining which are the best candidates – among the wide array of linguistic terminology – for expressing the tense/aspect system. This whole argument may result to be beyond the point.

1.3. Semitic Studies in the Last Decades³²

As clearly summarized by Moscati (1964: 133-134), the main arguments that seem to have reached *consensus* – thus representing the “new” standard approach - are the following:

- The Arabic verbal system results from a significant process of evolution and systematization.
- Proto-Semitic performs one suffix conjugation. The stative meaning of Akkadian *paris* has found general acceptance among scholars. It represents a relic of the former, which the West Semitic evolved into a real verbal conjugation.

³² Due to the general homogeneity of the recent literature, I will portray a summarized outline and focus on someone’s contribution, only when relevant.

- Proto-Semitic at least possesses one prefix-conjugation, for expressing actions (either completed or incomplete). Moreover, it is generally admitted that the prefix conjugation is regularly built from a form identical to the imperative, with the addition of a prefix.³³

West Semitic languages distinguish complete and incomplete actions by means of suffixes and prefixes respectively; East Semitic deeply reorganises the opposition by adding a double middle radical stem. For a while, the prefix conjugation may have been unmarked in terms of aspect, but subsequently it came to express the incomplete nuance.

³³ A completely different approach is offered by Zaborski (2005b), holding that the rise of the Nord West Semitic imperfect is the result of an expansion of the subjunctive, the Akkadian subordinative, claiming that a shift to dependent clause is a universal process. Nevertheless, it remains tentative, not reaching much approval.

Turning to the main issues, they are confronted through different interpretation:

- Regarding the explanation of the gemination of the *iparras* form (as already stated), some scholars suggest to refer to the influence of the stress (Diakonoff, 1988: 84).³⁴ As for its historical role, D. Cohen (1984)³⁵, Knudsen (1984/86) and more recently Kouwenberg (1997; 2010) side with Rundgren's view (see above); others reconstruct *iparras* as a proto-Semitic aspectual form³⁶.

³⁴ In his attempt to reconstruct the common Semito-Cuscito-Berber, he argues that at this hypothetical stage the distinction between aspects was realized by tonal oppositions. Later, the dynamic accent replaced the former.

³⁵ Among other things, D. Cohen (1984) examines the gradual verbalization process that nominal constructions underwent in the Semitic history, originally emphasizing the significant role of the syntax.

³⁶ E.g., Kienast (2001); Lipiński (2001); Huehnergard (2006); Weninger (2011). See in particular Zaborski 2005: 12, who argues that "derived verbal forms are, from a historical point of view, mainly remnants of the original independent, later more or less lexicalized [...]and of periphrastic forms with original auxiliary verbs *nV.

- Regarding the bivalent value of *iprus*, now it is largely assumed that Akkadian preserves the original perfective meaning. Hebrew and Arabic exhibit peculiar constructions in which its early feature is clear.
- Regarding the passage from stative into perfect, a typological reasoning seems to be quite plausible: the latter can be seen as a further development of the grammaticalization of the resultative function.³⁷

Before moving on to the linguistic facts, I would advance two observations. First, Moscati's picture is still relevant, in that attempts to provide new analyses hardly deviate from the standard path. Second, proto-Semitic still roots elsewhere in the

³⁷ See Aro 1965: 407-411; Tropper 1995a: 504-12; T. D. Anderson 2000: 26-32.

Comparative Semitics. Frequently, the recourse to compelling reasonings eventually aims at reconstructing the proto language, thus moving in a vicious circle.

To be more balanced, one should admit that in recent years much work has been done on methodological ground. So, among the criteria for establishing evidence, the comparison extended to Afro-Asiatic appears prominent. Within the verbal morphology, many scholars claim that necessity to analyse the Semitic verb as strictly related to some branches of Afro-Asiatic (e.g., Egyptian, Berber, Cushitic).

Chapter 2

THE MORPHOSEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE AKKADIAN BASIC STEM

2.1. Nominal and Verbal Themes

Broadly speaking, the Akkadian verb can be defined through its morphosemantic opposition to the noun.

To be more exact, two different themes ought to be kept distinct from each other¹:

- Themes that are originally nominal², which generally convey the fundamental and objective elements of the human experience, such as parts of the body, kin relationships, animals etc. Formally, the pattern is *pVrs*, i.e., it displays a short or long vowel between the first and the second consonant. Also, a great number of them presents a biradical form. In contrast to verbal derivation (conjugation),

¹ In general, the paradigmatic theme that will be used here is the standard triconsonantal *prs*, yet the biconsonantal counterpart (for which I use the verbal theme *kun* as a standard example) will be provided when necessary.

² They are called “primary” or “unmotivated” nouns, in that their pattern does not reveal a (synchronic) grammatical function. Opposite to them are the “deverbal nouns”, in that they are connected to verbal roots. A standard reference work is still Barth 1894a.

nominal derivation (declension) occurs by way of suffixation only.³

- Themes that are synchronically verbal – when, in fact, are historically noun/adjective-related⁴. They express an action or a state. The pattern is *pros*, showing a short vowel between the second and the third consonant. Here, inflectional changes take place by means of affixes, such as prefix, infix and reduplication of the second consonant.⁵

³ However, as Kouwenberg pointed out (2010: 38²⁰), there are cases of internal inflection (such as gemination, reduplication) in some Akkadian primary nouns, particularly for the formation of diminutives.

⁴ A historical account of the verbalization process will be provided at length in Ch. 3.

⁵ For the sake of completeness, it is convenient to underline that also the derivational verbal system involves prefixation, infixation and gemination (of the second consonant). As it will be clarified later, it seems likely that some derived verbal forms secondarily penetrated into the basic stem.

As a result, the verbal paradigm is far more complicated than the nominal one, as the large array of affixations causes substantial modifications within the base.

2.1.1. Roots, radicals and triradicalism

As customary in every grammar, the Semitic lexicon is viewed as made up of a consonantal skeleton, which is called root, and it constitutes the semantic nucleus of a word. Accordingly, vowel pattern along with external modifications represent the “scheme”. The latter provides the needed morphological elements, making the abstract root a real grammatical form.

Thus for example in Akkadian, the three consonants (also called “radicals”) *p-r-s* constitute a root expressing the general meaning of “dividing”; the verbal form *iprusū* (“they cut”, impf.) subsumes the

grammatical (discontinuous) morpheme *i--u--ū* and the lexical (discontinuous) morpheme *prs.*

Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the above-mentioned facts:

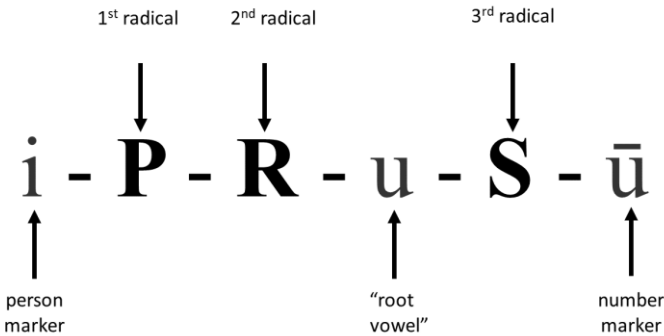


Figure 1 A standard representation of the morpho-phonological segments of the Akkadian verbal form 'iprusū'. In lower-case are shown the grammatical morphemes, whereas in capitals are shown the three radicals forming the root.

Most roots are triradical (they have three consonants), hence (tri)radicalism is an essential feature

of the Semitic languages.⁶ This issue requires some comments.

In keeping with grammatical tradition (mostly the Arabic one), early literature⁷ remarks the three-consonants structure of the Semitic roots. In other words, the entire morphology is built around a clear-cut distinction between radicals (the lexical

⁶ Furthermore, there exist some phonological incompatibilities that make the Semitic root a strict structure: for example, the first and the second radicals cannot be either identical or homorganic. Among the main restrictions within Akkadian: *g* and *z* cannot occur in third position, all three radicals cannot be voiced, in the same root it cannot occur more than one emphatic consonant. In general, such phonological restraints were firstly investigated by Landsberger (1938: 450-452) and later by Greenberg (1950: 162-181).

⁷ Cf. Barth (1894); Brockelmann (1908: 286-287), who admits roots and scheme being an artificial aid, Bergsträsser (1928: 6), Dillmann (1907: 122-125), M. Cohen (1936), Cantineau (1950a: 73-83 and 1950b: 119-124;), Gelb (1955: 105), Greenberg (1950: 162), von Soden (GAG §50), Fleisch (1961: 247-251). The same traditional view was later held by Moscati (1964: 71-75), although he cautiously admitted some roots being originally biradical and not necessarily consonantal. See also Petráček 1960: 547-606, Kuryłowicz 1962, and Diakonoff 1970: 453-480.

item) and vowel patterns.⁸ Therefore, inflectional and derivational processes are assumed to occur by means of both vowel alternation (apophony) and affixes upon a trilateral base.

Synchronically, there is no crack in this framework. Nevertheless, as often happens, synchronic analyses tend to blur historical developments. Suffice to say that the (*ad hoc*) assumption of biradical roots emerging from the loss of the glides *w/y* – which originally would have behaved as strong radicals – sounds very tentative.⁹ In addition, the

⁸ Among other things, the vowels cannot occur alone (for they are discontinuous morphemes). Above all, the only way in which they can occur is in combination between each other. Buccellati in his work entitled “A Structural Grammar of Babylonian” (1996) uses the term “interdigitation” for highlighting their reciprocal relationship.

⁹ Not to point out some of the abovementioned unmotivated nouns, which are biliteral, as well as some verbal forms with unmotivated root vowel.

same can be said about the theory of the biradical origin of the Semitic lexical morphemes.¹⁰

As far as I am concerned, the point is not questioning the actual entity of roots – i.e., if they are biradical or triradical.¹¹ The point may lie in the root itself. Let's take a step back. In order to adhere to linguistic facts, it is convenient to reconsider how verbal and nominal forms developed over time.

¹⁰ See, for example, Bohas 1998 and his arguable but challenging fashion for bolstering his arguments in favor of biradicalism. In general, the semantic concurrence of two radicals within many trilateral roots has been referred to as a cogent evidence of biradicalism. Among others, Voigt (1988: 81-83) reiterated the triradical stance while endorsing the “Reimwortbildung” theory (i.e., semantic derivation by similar-sounding radicals). The latter was first formulated in the realm of Indo-European studies, then it was introduced in Semitic studies by Brockelmann (1913b: 107-112; 1927: 6-38). In the last decades, significant reports of the main debated points are associated with the names of del Olmo Lete 2003 *passim*; Goldenberg 2005: 7-25 and Rubio 2005: 45-63. Ultimately, the matter seems far from being settled.

¹¹ At any rate, admitting the existence from the beginning of both the kinds, thus reconsidering the alleged univocal nature of the roots, could be a step forward in the debate. Actually, some early Semitist already referred to many trilateral roots as extensions of original bilaterals. See, for example, Bergsträsser 1928: 7.

That is to say, why taking for granted that Semitic morphology is originally root-based? No diachronic investigations would point to a group of discontinuous morphemes (as the root is) being the historical and natural source of nouns and verbs.

In sum, we can say that inflectional processes occur on the level of words (real words). That is the crux of the matter. To be more specific, it can be said that Semitic word structure is 'theme-based'¹² in origin and it arguably comes from a pre-Semitic conformation consisting of a flexible and expandable nucleus, in that it does lack a fixed structure (in terms of root and scheme) and it is inflected through external morphemes.¹³ This unreservedly suggests an agglutinant way of forming. It may

¹² For the meaning which has been ascribed here to the verbal "theme" see 2.2.

¹³ It is reasonably conceivable that the external morphemes were, in turn, independent words and they were semantically transparent.

indicate that the systematization process affected the typological nature of Semitic, determining a gradual shift from agglutinative to fusional by means of phonological modifications.¹⁴

It now makes a lot of sense maintaining that (tri)radicalism is a secondary rearrangement that took place in Akkadian and in historical Semitic languages at large.¹⁵

Undoubtedly, the preponderance of words with three consonants ensured that almost all the lexicon came to be adjusted on trilateral base. As a standard evidence, weak verbs can be mentioned. Although etymologically biliteral, they underwent that kind of systematization by analogical mechanisms.

¹⁴ An example is metathesis involving some prefixes of specific derived verbal forms. In fact, the verbal structure appears still affected by agglutinative vestiges, as I shall argue throughout the present study.

¹⁵ As it has been fairly pointed out by many scholars. Cf. Kouwenberg 2010: 40-44, Garbini and Durand 1994: 91-92, Fronzaroli 1963: 122-123.

Early and Medieval Arabic grammarians (and the Hebrew ones as well) played a crucial role in standardizing the language¹⁶. Indeed, it is not by chance that older Semitic languages were affected by formalization to a lesser extent. For example, Akkadian does not perfectly fit into root-scheme structure as much as Arabic instead does. It is likely that the root-based approach came to be used specifically as a mere working device since the formative ages of lexicography.¹⁷

¹⁶ As Rubio (2005: 48) rightly reported, from the very beginning of the Arabic grammatical tradition it has been usual to arrange words by their consonantal roots. The latter were remarkably listed according to anagrammatic occurrences, the so-called “root permutation” (*ktb* along with *kbt*, *tbk* and so on), without semantics links between stems of the same root. Further in the Medieval lexicography, a new trend was established, the so-called “rhyme order”, consisting of arranging roots by final consonant (instead of the first one). The introduction of the alphabetical arrangement is credited to the Persian grammar Ibn Fāris (?-1004 AD). Later it was adopted almost everywhere.

¹⁷ It is beyond any doubt that grouping words by their roots is highly artificial, in fact it does not represent a natural adjustment within the speakers’ minds.

This is how Semitics adopted the above-mentioned approach – obviously with reformulations that belong to the modern Western tradition – thus affecting historical analyses on nominal and verbal derivations. In a very few words, the resulting outline is needed for a comprehensive understanding of the formative phase of the Akkadian (and Semitic) verb, that is the crucial issue of the present study.

2.1.2. Vowels, vocalism and syllable structure

While a thorough phonological investigation of the Akkadian vocalism is far beyond the scope of this study, I now proceed to give some general account that I do find strictly pertinent to the economy of the present discourse.

Some preliminary remarks are needed. First, the Akkadian cuneiform signs represent an adapted system from the original Sumerian script.

Moreover, the syllabic character makes the writing system even more unsuited. Second, the understanding of the syllabary evidently has suffered from the influence of other Semitic languages, mostly Arabic, which is at least three thousand year younger than Akkadian. In the main, the Akkadian phonological repertoire, as handed down to us, is undermined by such limitations.

I shall not dare to speculate about a hypothetical vowel inventory that proto-Semitic might have had. The most it can be said is that according to linguistics facts, both inside and outside Akkadian (including Egyptian and Berber), it cannot be ruled out that in origin the vowels had a phonemic distinction. This made them participate in the lexical distribution alongside with the consonants; later in the reported history, the vowels underwent morphologization processes under the pressure of (tri)radicalism.

Certainly, the growing relevance of the consonantal root entailed a subordinate role of the vowels, the latter merely serving as grammatical morphemes.

For the time being, I will direct my attention to descriptive accounts of the basic stem of the Akkadian verb.

2.2. The Core of the Verbal Paradigm

Basically, the Akkadian verbal theme is a combination of consonants and vowels whose specific accommodation acquires relevance on the morpho-semantic level. As it will be pointed out below, historically two distinct sources have given rise to two different categories. Then, the latter came to be the primary members of the verbal paradigm. The following will investigate in further details the

diachronic mechanisms involved in the appearance of the prefix and suffix conjugations.

2.2.1. Dynamic and state verbs

As in all languages, in Akkadian there exists a distinction between dynamic verbs¹⁸, denoting actions, and state verbs, denoting a quality or more generally static situations.

Unlike the rest of Semitic¹⁹, peculiar to Akkadian is the fact that such opposition has turned out to be grammatically relevant, just as the differentiation between prefix and suffix conjugations marks.

¹⁸ In Semitic linguistics the term “fientive” is more largely used.

¹⁹ Aside from Akkadian, the re-assessment of prefix and suffix conjugations across the entire range of Semitic languages carries a great deal of implications on both historical and formal levels.

2.2. The Core of the Verbal Paradigm

Figure 2 schematically presents the Semitic state of affairs:

FIENTIVE VERBS		
Themes		Vowels
Triconsonantal	/-prvs-/	[u, i, a*]
Biconsonantal	/-kvn- / ; /-knv- /	[u, i, a]

STATE VERBS		
Themes		Vowels
Triconsonantal	/parvs-/	[i, u, ∅]
Biconsonantal	/kvn- /	[u]

Figure 2: The formal distinction between dynamic and state verbs in Akkadian. Vowels are listed in descending order of frequency

*: conditioned by the presence of posterior consonants

As it is noticeable, dynamic verbs perform /u/, /i/, /a/ (the latter might be due to the influence of certain neighboring consonants²⁰) in middle position for triconsonantal themes and in middle or in final

position for biconsonantal themes; whereas state verbs exhibit /i/, /u/ /∅/ as an epenthetic vowel²¹ in middle position for triconsonantal themes, and /u/ in middle position for biconsonantal themes.²²

Formally, in Akkadian two interrelated factors – albeit unrelated to lexical themes – are involved in making action verbs different from state verbs (and *vice versa*):

- The way in which external morphemes are attached to the base, namely by prefixation²³ or by suffixation respectively.

²¹ When the resulted syllable is closed, otherwise the same vowel does not appear. A case in point may be *paris - parsāku*. In the first form the vowel i appears, the syllable being closed. Instead, in the second form the vowel i does not appear, due to elision.

²² Cf. Garbini and Durand 1994: 112.

²³ Actually, the term “circumfix conjugation” used by Goldenberg 2013 in place of “prefix conjugation” appears more accurate, in that the external morphemes of this conjugation are actually both prefixes and suffixes.

- The (qualitative) nature of the “root-vowel” (i.e., the vowel between the second and the third consonant)²⁴, within the theme itself.

It follows that to every verbal theme could be assigned a dynamic or a static connotation *a posteriori*, hinging solely on its morphological status. Practically, it seems highly disputable to completely disregard the intrinsic semantic nature that makes a given verb referred to as events or states. In support of this claim, two considerations come to mind.

The first one pertains to cross-linguistic sphere, i.e., with reference to action and state verbs, it is fairly more common across languages encountering the lexical association than the grammatical one;

²⁴ This applies to triconsonantal bases. As already mentioned, in biconsonantal themes the root vowel occurs in middle or in final position.

yet, I do not feel comfortable with typological approach or referring to it as a decisive argument.

The second one concerns internal historical facts that may constitute more suitable arguments to bring up. Within Akkadian, it is beyond doubt that the inflectional distinction between fientive and state verbs is well attested. Notwithstanding, on closer inspection such grammatical(ized) opposition is not always semantically empty; therefore, it does not perfectly work in all cases.

An objective indication might be the fact that some verbal themes (which inherently denote static situations) reveal a cumbersome overlap of morpho-semantic type, in that when occurring in the prefix conjugations, they still bring along remnants of their primary static meaning.²⁵

²⁵ More concretely, I am referring to two different circumstances:

2.2. The Core of the Verbal Paradigm

This may help maintaining the grammaticalization of action and state verbs as a secondary process *vis à vis* with the lexical meaning that each theme is naturally provided with. In fact, such process is somewhat fluctuating across the whole verbal paradigm. For the present, I would not go too far or deviate from the main issue. Here, the nub of the matter is that what looks like a peculiarity of Akkadian is rather a by-product of the historical

-
- verbal themes that are (mostly) attested in the prefix conjugations, while keeping their static meaning (GAG §78b). Most notably, their imperfective (*iparras*) form is temporally neutral (like the suffix conjugation) and their perfective form (*iprus*) does not imply distinction between events and states. In sum, they mixed up features of both prefix and suffix conjugations.
 - verbal themes - which are strictly related to adjectives - whose defective paradigm (they lack the participial forms) brings out their static meaning (GAG §85d). Furthermore, such verbs have an ingressive nuance in the prefix conjugations.

Both of them are widely described in Kouwenberg 2010: 55-66, where the author also provides many examples. On the general frame of Semitic, the abovementioned phenomena may help envisioning the pre-Semitic context from which historical verbal forms could have developed.

developments that caused /-prvs-/ and /parvs-/ to arise as the two poles of the conjugational system. With reference to the latter, it is worth noting that it is grounded on an opposition still far from being well settled.

On balance, the inflectional correlation between action and state verbs is an accidental consequence of the distinct sources from which /-prvs-/ and /parvs-/ have emerged. Specifically, fientive verbs are originally related (to a greater or lesser extent) to nominal themes proper²⁶, whereas state verbs are

²⁶ It is revealing that early Arab grammarians termed the infinitive *maṣḍar*. According to tradition, it then followed many controversies (in particular between the two leading grammar schools, Baṣra and Kūfah, respectively) about whether it refers to the infinitive as the “source” of the verb, or whether the other way around. According to diachronic-linguistic criteria, it should be out of question that the first option is the most fitting one. Similarly, Garbini and Durand (1994: 112).

derived from adjectival themes.²⁷ Therefore, in the reported history both nominal and adjectival elements have penetrated into the verbal paradigm, acting as two distinct inflectional terms of the prefix and suffix conjugations respectively.

In principle, all lexical morphemes shift from one morphological pattern to the other, depending on whether they connote events or states. As already noticed, the resulted accommodation tends to overlap on the semantic association, rather than completely superseding the latter²⁸. Hence, the grammaticalization has not occurred to a prominent degree. As a matter of fact, the Akkadian distribution

²⁷ It should be mention that the Akkadian suffix conjugation as a predicative construction is also attested with noun bases as well as with any other adjectival scheme different from *parvs*, as for instance *ṣeḥḥerū* 'they are pretty small/young'. These details will be accounted for in the pertinent section.

²⁸ Subsequently, West Semitic will merge the two semantic categories into one unitary conjugational system. It brings to the discourse on the significant reorganization that affected the West Semitic verbal system. I will elaborate on this issue in the next chapter.

of fientive and state verbs on morphological basis is a low-ranking feature: in diachronic terms, it is all but the original axis of the whole verbal paradigm.

To sum up, it is convenient to mark a dividing line between the semantic and the morphological strata just mentioned: it may serve to avoid falling into methodological contradictions, in particular when we are confronted with the vocalic behaviour, just as Figure 2 shows.

2.2.2. The root vowel

The second factor characterizing dynamic and state verbs is the so-called theme-vowel.²⁹ Its unpredictability poses a problem in reconstructing a plausible line of development. In practice, while the root vowel does not adhere to any fixed

²⁹ It is worthwhile underlying that the root vowel is relevant to the basic verb only, for the derived stems display a fixed vowel pattern whose predictability seems to reveal a secondary development.

morphological pattern, there have been manifold attempts to detect (at least) a semantic meaning for such vowels, most notably in the prefix conjugation of fientive verbs³⁰, represented by the scheme /-prvs-/. Among Semitics, the latter have received most of the attention. *Prima facie*, fientive verbs may offer (by their nature) a semantic range that is wide enough to be detected across the different vocalic variations.³¹ However, it is broadly agreed that such semantic links are somewhat loose³²; rather, they result from systematization processes. At any rate, the established practice of Akkadian grammars allocates all the attested vocalic stock in an

³⁰ As I already mentioned in 1.2.

³¹ With reference to a presumptive aspectual correspondence in the vowels themselves (in particular, *a* for neutral actions, *i* for transient actions, and *u* for permanent actions), see Castellino (1962: 48), Gelb (1969: 209) and GAG §87; as for specific semantic links in the entire vowel classes, see GAG: §87b); Kienast (1967: 69), Ségéral (2000: 287).

³² See, among others, Fronzaroli (1963: 125-129); Kuryłowicz (1972: 43); Kouwenberg (2010: 69-70).

orderly fashion; what follows is a schematic illustration:

Vowel Class	Root Vowels
I	i - i
II	a - u
III	u - u
IV	a - a

*Figure 3 The standard classification of vowel classes of the prefix conjugations. Listed root vowels correspond to *iprus* and *iparras* forms, respectively. Vowel classes are given in ascending order*

In other words, dynamic verbs are classified in four vowel classes³³, depending on to which root

³³ Additionally, Kouwenberg (2010: 75) postulates the existence of a vowel class a/i (only valid with certainty to a handful of some weak and irregular verbs); Castellino (1962: 45) does the same towards the existence of a vowel class i/u of uncertain value.

2.2. The Core of the Verbal Paradigm

vowels are found in the perfective (*iprus*) and in the present (*iparras*) forms, respectively. Other combinations are not attested. Moreover, this configuration remains almost unchanged across the diverse Akkadian periods.³⁴

The root vowel of the suffix conjugation of state verbs (represented by the scheme /*paris-/*) is almost invariably *i*.³⁵ Such vowel does not seem falling into any conventional classes, most likely by reason of its unpredictability. Also in this case, attempts have

³⁴ Nevertheless, substantial changes in vowel classes may be found in a few Assyrian verbs. By way of illustration, a well-known instance is *balātum* ‘to live’, belonging to the vowel class u/u in Babylonian but to the vowel class a/a in Assyrian.

³⁵ Consequently, the remaining adjectival themes are modelled on *paras* or *parus*. Common examples are *rapāš* (*rapāšum* ‘to be wide’) and *zapur* (*zapārum* ‘to be malicious’).

been made in order to assign a semantic function to the theme vowel.³⁶

While ordering the complex articulation of the basic stem, Akkadian grammars cannot do justice to the historical context in which such arrangement happened. Indeed, the emergence of the theme vowel results from earlier phenomena layered one on top of the other. In terms of chronology, it is quite conceivable that prefix and suffix conjugations have followed two discrete paths of development for a time. In keeping with the analysis advanced up to this point, certain reasonings may be drawn. If the claim that /-prvs-/ and /parvs/ historically arose from different sources is correct, the question about the function of the theme vowel

³⁶ Thus for example, the root vowel *i* might be pointed to transient qualities, whereas the root vowel *u* may be refer to permanent qualities. Cf. GAG §59. It is generally said that these semantic associations go back to the Arab grammarians' tradition.

may find a good answer in the sources themselves. Without any evidence to the contrary, it seems safe to argue that in origin the vowel variations *i*, *u*, *a* within a given verbal theme were not either motivated or semantically determined, a view that the nominal and the adjectival backgrounds (of fientive and state verbs) could bear out.³⁷ Chronologically, the prefix form is the prototype from which action verbs are inflected, likewise the vowel structure of action verbs is the most ancient one that the prefix conjugation has performed. Conversely, the suffix form and its own vowel schemes mean the same thing for state verbs. Needless to say, the vocalization of the prefix form of state verbs and the vocalization of the suffix form of action verbs are a secondary development, arising by analogy with the

³⁷ An ultimate but logical consequence of the discourse is that in pre-Semitic *the vowel between the second and the third consonant* (i.e., the “root vowel”) may have been barely relevant.

suffix base of state verbs in the first case and by analogy with the prefix base of the action verbs in the second case. It results that these new forms show a considerable degree of predictability with reference to their vowel pattern. Below I present in tabular form the processes just described:

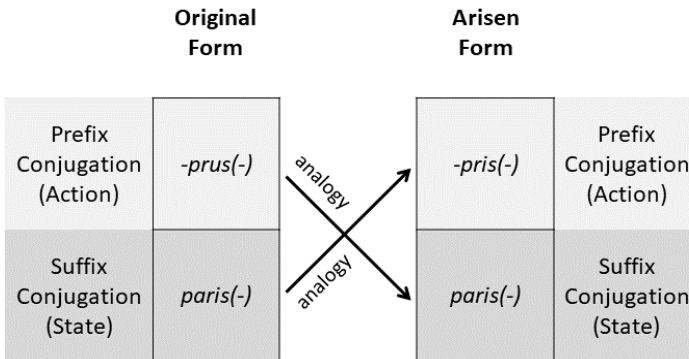


Figure 4 Diachronic representation of the Akkadian verbal system. In the foreground, the original forms of the prefix theme and suffix themes, alongside with the further forms arisen by analogy with the first ones, with special reference to Akkadian schemes /-prus(-)/ and /paris(-)/, respectively.

Thus, the semantic classes, while being rather vague in the formative stage, they gradually gained

in productivity under the analogical and normative influence.³⁸

2.3. The External Markers

Once the functioning principles of the verbal base have been established, we meet with the personal affixes, which provide person, number and gender indications. The way in which these markers are attached to the verbal theme is responsible for the conjugations naming system and hence for the terms “prefix conjugation” and “suffix conjugation”. It is self-evident that dynamic and state verbs historically employ prefixes (with additional suffixes, see below) and suffixes, respectively. The

³⁸ The view promoted above is anticipated. In particular, Fronzari (1963: 119-129) represents a comprehensive analysis about the functioning of the vocalism in the nominal and verbal themes across Semitic. Similarly, see Garbini and Durand 1994: 112-115.

situation may best be examined starting from the following diagram:

Figure 5 The personal affixes of *iprus* and *paris* forms in Old Babylonian. In brackets are given the older variants.

		<i>iprus</i> conjugation	<i>paris</i> conjugation
Persons	1csg	<i>a ---</i>	<i>--- āku</i>
	2ms	<i>ta ---</i>	<i>--- āta / i; - āt</i>
	2fs	<i>ta --- ā</i>	<i>--- āt, - āti</i>
	3ms	<i>i ---</i>	<i>--- ∅</i>
	3fs	<i>(ta ---)</i>	<i>--- at</i>
	1pc	<i>ni ---</i>	<i>--- ānu</i>
	2mpl	<i>ta --- ā</i>	<i>--- ātunu</i>
	2fpl	<i>ta --- ā</i>	<i>--- ātina</i>
	3mpl	<i>i --- ū</i>	<i>--- ū</i>
	3fpl	<i>i --- ā</i>	<i>--- ā</i>
	3dum	<i>(i --- ā)</i>	<i>(- - - ā)</i>
	3duf	<i>(i --- ā)</i>	<i>(- - - ā / - - - tā)</i>

What follows is a detailed list of the meaningful variants attested across the Akkadian dialects. In

order to dispel any confusion, I will proceed analysing each set of affixes separately:

- In the prefix conjugations, the 3rd feminine singular prefix *ta-* represents a residual form within Old Babylonian (GAG §75h) that mostly appears in poetical texts; the form *yi-* is an older variant (productive in Old Akkadian) of the 3rd masculine singular and the 3rd masculine plural prefixes *i-*³⁹; (pre-Sargonic) Old Akkadian exhibits the 3rd plural prefix *ti-* instead of *i-*; the 3rd dual form (*i --- ā*) is residual in Old Babylonian, while regularly occurring in (pre-Sargonic) Old Akkadian, (Sargonic) Old Akkadian and Old Assyrian; finally, the 2nd person prefix *ti-* is a variant that

³⁹ As Hasselbach 2005: 190-192 pointed out, this is corroborated by the use of the specific sign <i>, which is different from other *i-* signs.

occasionally appears instead of *ta-* in Old Babylonian.

- In the suffix conjugation, the dual forms are quite marginal and exclusively attested in the oldest dialects (i.e., in the pre-Sargonic and Sargonic periods of Old Akkadian, more sporadically in Old Babylonian), in some case (i.e., Sargonic Akkadian) by distinction between genders, in the other case by a single common form (i.e., pre-Sargonic Akkadian and Old Babylonian). Among the variants of the second masculine singular suffix, *-āti* regularly occurs in Old Assyrian and in the earliest periods of Old Babylonian, for this reason it seems to be older than the standard form *-āta* (the latter probably shaped on the correspondent independent pronoun *atta*); their reduced counterpart *-āt* seems to be

productive from the earliest dialects onwards. The first plural suffix shows a significant dialectal variation: the form *-ānu* in the Babylonian side and the form *-āni* in the Assyrian side (GAG 75b). To me, any attempt to detect the formal reasons of this splitting - so as to determine which one is the most original - would be irrelevant as well as unsuccessful. Finally, Neo-Assyrian replaces *-t-* of the 2nd persons (both singular and plural) with *-k-*.⁴⁰

Generally speaking, the subject of a (finite) verbal form is expressed by means of affixes. More precisely, the first set is valid for the prefix conjugations (both *iprus* and *iparras*),

⁴⁰ The second personal endings in *-k-* have parallels in South Semitic and in some Yemeni Arabic dialects.

whereas the second set is valid for the suffix conjugation.⁴¹ Both the types are unequivocally of pronominal origin: their resemblance to

⁴¹ A further set of personal affixes is specifically used for the derived verbal stems (except for the N-stem, in that it employs the same affixes of the G-stem). Basically, the slight difference lies in the vowel of the prefixes, that is *u* for all persons instead of being *i/a*.

2.3. The External Markers

the independent subject pronouns⁴² is remarkable, as Figure 6 shows.

		Independent Personal Pronouns	Verbal Affixes	
			Prefix Conjugation	Suffix Conjugation
Persons	1csg	<i>anāku</i>	<i>a -</i>	<i>--- āku</i>
	2ms	<i>atta</i>	<i>ta -</i>	<i>--- āta / i; - āt</i>
	2fs	<i>atti</i>	<i>ta --- ī</i>	<i>- āti</i>
	3ms	<i>šu</i>	<i>i -</i>	<i>- ∅</i>
	3fs	<i>ši</i>	<i>ta ---</i>	<i>--- at</i>
	1pc	<i>nīnu</i>	<i>nī ---</i>	<i>--- ānu</i>
	2mpl	<i>attunu</i>	<i>ta --- ā</i>	<i>--- ātunu</i>
	2fpl	<i>attina</i>	<i>ta --- ā</i>	<i>--- ātina</i>
	3mpl	<i>šunu</i>	<i>i --- ū</i>	<i>--- ū</i>
	3fpl	<i>šina</i>	<i>i --- ā</i>	<i>--- ā</i>

Figure 6: Akkadian independent personal pronouns in comparison with the personal affixes of the prefix and suffix conjugations

⁴² In Akkadian there exist independent and suffix personal pronouns. In both cases, a further differentiation concerns the role played by the pronoun itself. As for the first type, three distinct forms are used depending on whether the pronoun is the subject, the object or the indirect object within a sentence. As for the second type, the subject form can be attached to nouns and to certain prepositions, whereas the object and the oblique forms can be attached to verbs.

In practical terms, the person markers of the finite verbal forms are basically personal pronouns which underwent phonetic reduction.

Before moving to investigate the individual verbal forms, some comments should be made. Regarding the prefix conjugation, the affixes provide the person-gender-number information in a somewhat discontinuous way. Specifically, the 2nd singular feminine, the 2nd common plural and the 3rd plural (both feminine and masculine) show additional suffixes (\bar{i} , \bar{a} , \bar{a} , \bar{u} , respectively) corresponding to plural markers. As in the rest of Semitic, in Akkadian the 2nd masculine singular and the 3rd feminine singular prefixes are identical, although the latter was already lost in Old Babylonian. Accordingly, the system as a whole turns out to be inconsistent, due to a kind of mismatch between some of its members. A

likely explanation could be found in diachronic terms, as we will see later.

With respect to the suffix conjugation, the personal affixes remain fairly uniform over the Akkadian history, with the notable exception of the velar second personal endings of Neo Assyrian. Just as for the prefix forms, certain discrepancies should be noted. In particular, while both the genders of the 3rd plural forms are built on the 3rd masculine singular, the dual feminine suffix, albeit very rare, is clearly built on the feminine singular form *-at*⁴³ (by adding of the plural marker *ā*) and not on the masculine counterpart, as we may expect. By far the most striking aspect lies in the 3rd singular suffixes:

⁴³ To be more accurate, in the dual feminine suffix a vowel syncope (i.e., the drop of the last vowel of a series of two or more vowels in open syllables, a very frequent tendency in the later dialect of Akkadian) is also involved. By way of illustration: *damiqatā* (built on *dam(i)qat*) > *damiqtā*. As it will be noted later, the vowel syncope “rule” occurs throughout the stative verbal them.

in sharp contrast to the other forms, they do not go back to any pronominal sources. The zero ending of the masculine ending has not gone unnoticed among Semitists, so much to constitute one of the main cruxes of the Semitic verbal morphology. Instead, the surface ambiguity of the zero ending is nothing but the predicative form of the adjective *parvs*. Accordingly, *-at* is the feminine equivalent as well as \bar{u} and \bar{a} are the corresponding plurals.

Furthermore, this claim may strengthen the assumption about the nominal origin of the verbal structure. In fact, the plural markers mentioned above - that we find both in the prefixes and in the

suffixes – are a clear echo of the plural suffixes⁴⁴ of the nominal and adjectival inflections⁴⁵. The same

⁴⁴ There was criticism by Kuryłowicz 1972: 93 and Kouwenberg 2010: 179 about the nominal derivation of the verbal suffixes *-ū* and *ā*. The latter are regarded by the authors as parallel to the plural markers *-ū* and *-ā* of the prefix forms (i.e., *iḫrusū* and *taprusā*). This should justify the absence of the feminine marker *-t-* within *parsā* and the immunity of the vowel *ā* to palatalization (thus turning to *Ē*), whenever expected. Two observations may follow. First, if one agrees that the plural endings in question are still of nominal derivation in the end, then it would be essentially an inconsistent reasoning, unless one postulates a secondary development of the suffix conjugation. Second, if the proposal indirectly invalidates any nominal correlation, the question as to the history of these affixes remains unsolved.

⁴⁵ The common practice of Akkadian grammar consists of falling nouns and adjectives into one single inflectional class, in that they share the marks of gender (masculine and feminine), number (singular, dual [restricted to nouns]) and case (nominative, oblique, accusative). Actually, adjective declension diverges from the nominal one in the plural masculine endings only. In the following, I graphically provide a sketch:

NOUN DECLENSION

	masc.	fem.
sg. nom.	-um	-(t)um
obl.	-im	-(t)im
acc.	-am	-(t)am
du. nom.	-ān	-(t)ān
obl./acc.	-īn	-(t)īn

ADJECTIVE DECLENSION

	masc.	fem.
nom.	-um	-(t)um
obl.	-im	-(t)im
acc.	-am	-(t)am
	/	/

can be assumed about the 3rd feminine singular prefix *ta-* compared to the nominal feminine suffix *-(a)t*.⁴⁶ Moreover, this scenario draws attention to the way the affixes are bound up to the verbal theme, namely by agglutination. The latter feature does have important diachronic implications, in so far as it should not be overlooked when tracing back to a presumptive proto-Semitic. I will better come back to this issue in the final chapter.

pl. nom. -ū - ātum
ātum
obl./acc. -ī - ātim
ātim

nom. -ūtum -
obl./acc. -ūtim -

⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, the affix *t(a)* looks very problematic in Semitic history, in that its manifold functions (i.e., person marker, gender marker or even derivational marker) blur its original transparency. I will treat this issue in Ch. 3.

2.4. The Primary Finite Verbal Forms

The personal affixes discussed in the preceding section remain fairly stable across the paradigm, as opposed to the verbal themes, on which morphological modifications give rise to distinct temporal-aspectual nuances.⁴⁷ What come out are the finite verbal forms.⁴⁸

It is well to insist from the outset that this setting applies to the basic stem as well as to the derived stems. In conventional terms, it is the simple stem, also called G-stem⁴⁹, representing the fundamental configuration of a

⁴⁷ Additional functions, which are still grammatically relevant within the Akkadian language, are the following: modality (by adding the prefix *l-* and the proclitic particles *i*, *lū*, *ē* /*ay*, *lā*), direction (by means of the suffix *-am/-m/-nim* of the ventive) and subordination (by means of suffix *-u* of the subjunctive). For reasons of space, I will not extensively treat them.

⁴⁸ A finite form implicitly or explicitly expresses the subject of the verb.

⁴⁹ "G-stem" is a notation taken from the German Semitist tradition, standing for "Grundstamm" (lit. basic stem).

given verbal theme; the derived stems put into effect further degrees of semantic values, whose association with the basic stem is (at least originally) identifiable.⁵⁰ Given the

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive picture of the verbal paradigm, I briefly enumerate the derived verbal stems of Akkadian, adopting the German notations mentioned above:

- D-stem ("*Doppelungsstamm*", which alludes to the 'doubling' of the second radical of the root), thus featuring *uparris* as the perfective form and *uparras* as the imperfective form. Roughly speaking, gemination conveys plurality, intensity (especially in dynamic verbs) and causativity (especially in state verbs).
- Š-stem (referring to the prefix *š(a)-* attached to the verbal theme), represented by *ušapris* and *ušapras* in the perfective and imperfective forms respectively. Generally, it stands for the causative counterpart of the G-stem.
- N-stem (concerning the prefix *n(a)-* attached to the verbal theme), formally indicated by the perfective *ipparris* and the imperfective *ipparras*. As it is apparent, the consonant /n/ undergoes assimilation to the first consonant of the verbal forms. In very broad terms, it expresses a passive value in action verbs and an ingressive function in state verbs.

2.4. The Primary Finite Verbal Forms

complexity of the underlying morpho-semantic structure, the (finite) verbal forms are commonly mentioned in the basic theme, where the changes involved in the tense/aspect function are clearly discernible and they do not overlap the derivational patterns. Figure 7 shows the traditional use of listing the finite verbal forms of Akkadian:

Further, all the stems (including the G-stem) show a secondary set of derivatives, which consistently contribute to the great wealth of forms of the Akkadian verbal system. In practice, to every verbal theme can be added the infixes *-ta-* or *-tan-*. Basically, the former conveys reciprocity or reflexivity to the G-stem and passivity to the D- stem and Š-stem (but it is lacking in the N-stem, due to the passive meaning that the latter performs by definition. The second generally provides iterativity or gradualness of a given action. The common practice of Akkadian grammar refers to them as 't' or 'tn' to be followed to the stem, thus for instance, Gt-stem or Gtn- stem, and so forth.

Finite Verbal Form	Traditional Designation
<i>iprus</i>	perfective (preterite)
<i>paris</i>	stative (permansive)
<i>iparras</i>	imperfective (present)
<i>iptaras</i>	t-perfect (perfect)
<i>purus</i>	imperative

Figure 7 The finite verbal forms in Akkadian, with the designations traditionally ascribed to them

For the sake of clarity, it is useful starting from this descriptive overview. A legitimate observation may concern the forms *iparras* and *iptaras*, with reference to their characteristic features (i.e., gemination and the infix *-ta-*, respectively) usually ascribed to the derivational forms. This and other questions may find an answer in the last section of the present chapter, in that further evaluations regarding the historical significance of each element can be

inferred only after detailed (re-)examinations of the single forms. Furthermore, it will become clearer in the course of the chapter the reason why I maintain the double value “tense-aspect” as referring to the combination of these two categories in the Akkadian verbal system. In keeping with the line of inquiry followed so far, I will extensively analyze the fundamental members of the Akkadian verbal system – which are *iprus* and *paris*, respectively.

2.4.1. The *iprus* form

The straightforward morphological status of the *iprus* form agrees with its essential function of expressing completed actions, consequently punctual situations (i.e., happening at a given point in time). With regard to grammatical terminology, the term

‘preterite’⁵¹ is found elsewhere, although recently it seems to be going out of fashion, being replaced by and large by the term “perfective”. The latter is probably to be preferred, by virtue of its wide

⁵¹ A passing mention of the etymology of the term ‘preterite’ is probably worthy: it derives from Latin *praeteritum* ‘gone by’, i.e., the past participle of *praetereō* ‘I go by’, (*praetor* [comparative form of *prae* ‘before’] + *itum* [past participle of *eō* ‘I go’]). This label was initially used with reference to some Indo-European languages, then it came to be employed within Semitic grammars too.

2.4. The Primary Finite Verbal Forms

validity even in the rest of Semitic. The entire conjugation is graphically indicated below:

		<i>iprus</i> conjugation
Persons	1csg	<i>aprus</i>
	2ms	<i>taprus</i>
	2fs	<i>taprusī</i>
	3ms	<i>iprus</i>
	3fs	<i>iprus</i>
	1pc	<i>niprus</i>
	2mpl	<i>taprusā</i>
	2fpl	<i>taprusā</i>
	3mpl	<i>iprusū</i>
	3fpl	<i>iprusā</i>

Figure 8 The Akkadian (Old Babylonian) prefix conjugation

So, the Akkadian perfective is formed by adding the personal markers to the base /-prvs-/ (v=u, i, a). The latter should be by now familiar, being the

same theme originally employed with action verbs (see 2.2.1.). So far so good.

However, to retrace the formative verbal path does beg the question of which exact function *iprus* might have held in the reported periods. In a few words, scholarly literature has been largely concentrated on the extent to which the Akkadian *iprus*, and consequently the whole verbal system, is *more markedly* tense-oriented or aspect-oriented.⁵² It may be appropriate devoting some space to this matter. Now, some remarks about the contexts in which the perfective is attested should be warranted. It can be safely said that throughout history the Akkadian *iprus* is used for connoting actions which are completed at the moment of reference; this means that in subordinate clauses *iprus* denotes

⁵² Among the main reference works, see GAG §79, Streck 1995a: 195-96; Buccellati 1996: 101; Huehnergard 2005a: 19; Kouwenberg 2010: 127-129 (the latter including additional literature).

anteriority, in this case the reference point being generally realized in the main clause. In conclusion, the subtle difference outlined above can be syntactically predictable. Here, there is no room for speculations.

Along the same vein, the question whether the Akkadian perfective is compatible or not with inherently durative verbs⁵³ appears irrelevant because of its methodological weakness⁵⁴: if one agrees that the historical form *iprus* stands for a morphological device which is primarily intended for expressing completed actions, then it has to be conceded that even durative connotations adhere to this conjugation without surprise, since intrinsic

⁵³ Specifically, the sense of durativeness pertains to continuing actions.

⁵⁴ The question seems to be firstly raised by Landsberger 1926a: 159-160; then by von Soden (GAG §79a), both giving negative answers. Conversely, thus taking the opposite stance: Leong 1994: 134-36; Loesov 2005: 111; Kouwenberg 2010: 127.

properties of verbs take second place with respect to whatever grammatical functions a verbal form conveys. This also holds for state verbs - historically corresponding to the *paris* pattern (see 2.2.1.) - whose inherent static meaning takes an ingressive nuance in the prefix conjugation.

As a general rule, it is necessary to recognize the lexical and syntactical factors which naturally lead difference in behavior between verbs whose nature may mismatch the express function of *iprus*. Nevertheless, the latter does not lose its relevance. At any rate, the continuous interaction between the diverse levels (morphological, phonological, semantic, and so on) of a system should be always kept in mind.

Apparently, an actual difficulty rather resides in the standard terminology adopted, in so far as literature has long tended to polarize the debate about the function of the perfective - and by extension of the whole verbal system - into "tense" and

“aspect” definitions. There is no compelling reason to squeeze the usages of the verbal forms into one of the above-mentioned categories rather than the other one: it is enough to state that in Akkadian a kind of bias in favor of the temporal mark is detectable. Further comments on terminological issues sound to me immaterial.

In addition, *iprus* form is employed in combination with proclitic particles as basis of volitive constructions. The latter basically express a speaker’s willingness toward an event, regardless the diverse nuances in meaning that standard terminology wants to emphasize. To be more specific, each particle conveys slight differences in significations with respect to the person involved: *i* is used for expressing exhortations in the first plural person (and more rarely in the third feminine person) and it is traditionally called ‘cohortative’ (e.g., *i nisqur*

‘let’s talk’; *i taprus* ‘may she talk’)⁵⁵; *lū* denotes a positive wish in the first person singular and in the third (both sg. and pl.) persons⁵⁶, thus forming the

⁵⁵ It may be specified here that the Assyrian parallel of the Babylonian *i niprus* is *lū niprus*, as well as *lū taprus* in place of the Babylonian form *i taprus* (albeit rare and archaic). Buccellati 1996: 181-182 maintained the *i* element and the vetitive *aj* and *ē* (see below for these forms) as prefixes, rather than particles, with legitimate reservations advanced by Kouwenberg 2010: 216.

⁵⁶ In this case, the vowel of the *lū* particle merges with the vowel-initial perfective by a kind of crasis (different from contraction), resolved either in favor of the former vowel (i.e., *lū + a > lu-*) or in favor of the second vowel (i.e., *lū + i > li-*). This applies to Babylonian, when the precative paradigm of the G stem is therefore somewhat fluctuating (e.g., *luprus* < **lū-aprus* ‘may I divide’; *liprus* < **lū-ipur* ‘may he divide’; *liprusū* < **lū-ipurū* ‘may they divide’). Along the same vein, in the D and Š stems the combination between the *u* vowel of the particle *lū* and the *u* vowel of the prefixes results in *i*, rather than the expected *u*. In other words: **lū-uparris > liparris*. Most likely, this seemingly inconsistency might be emerged by analogy with the precative of the G stem. Instead, the Assyrian counterpart appears more straightforward in its solution: the precative forms always take the vowel of the personal prefixes, in both the G stem and in the derived stems (e.g., *laprus* < **lū-aprus*; *liprus* < **lū-ipur*; *liparris* > **lū-uparris*).

so-called ‘precative’ paradigm.⁵⁷ The latter is attested also in combination with stative themes. Again, *aj*⁵⁸ (*ē* with consonant-initial perfective, e.g., *aj ibluṭ* ‘may he not live’; *ē tabluṭ* ‘may you not live’) performs the ‘vetitive’, expressing negative wishes in

⁵⁷ Beside the precative function, the *lū* particle - without crasis - is also found before vowel-initial perfective and nouns as well, holding asseverative function (see GAG §81f). It seems hardly conceivable that the Akkadian distribution of *lū* (before consonants) and *l-* (before vowels) within the precative comes from two different proto-Semitic sources, namely **law* (with hypothetical meaning) and **la* (with emphasizing function), as argued by Huehnergard (1983: 569-593): according to the semantic similarity that *lū* and *l-* do exhibit in combination with perfective and with stative also, it seems more straightforward that *lū* is a single particle originally employed in both asseverative and volitive (desiderative) contexts. Afterward, the latter came to be differentiated from the other one by secondary grammaticalization processes (most probably because of the higher frequency of volitive constructions, as Kouwenberg 2010: 215-216 suggested).

⁵⁸ The spelling of this particle is quite varying according to dialect. In contrast to Babylonian, in Assyrian *ē* is used both before a consonant and before a vowel, /*ē*/ being the regular Assyrian outcome of the diphthong *ay*. Moreover, in the oldest periods (i.e., Sargonic Akkadian and Old Assyrian) such particles are also attested before a stative form. Later, the vetitive is said to be preserved basically as an archaism, or even not attested, as in Neo-Assyrian and in Neo-Babylonian (see GAG §81i).

all the persons (therefore it is not in competition with the prohibitive construction, the latter conveying concrete negative injunctions rather than urgent requests).

On the basis of these descriptive premises, it escapes me why it should be odd that the perfective form is put to the service of volitive expressions. Indeed, it has widely been referred to this secondary usage as unusual and conflicting with the past reference.⁵⁹ Still, the question about the *dual function* of *iprus* is in principle ill-conceived, in that it is based on largely conjectural assumptions: as far as Akkadian is concerned, it is methodologically unsound to ascribe modality to the perfective itself. Rather, it is obvious that such modal values strictly

⁵⁹ See, among others, Hetzron 1969; Kuryłowicz 1972: 64; GAG §79a; Lipiński 1997: 336; Buccellati 1996: 183; Voigt 2004: 44; and Kouwenberg 2010: 130-132.

reside in the proclitic particles described above.⁶⁰ Therefore, it turns futile detecting presumptive parallels in other Semitic languages; not to mention the unnecessary recourse to (speculative) proto-Semitic reconstructions.⁶¹

Being aware of these limitations, a diachronic approach may offer probative and more understandable reasonings. It has been argued in 2.2.1. that *iprus* and *paris* represent the morphological core of the verbal paradigm; accordingly, it needs

⁶⁰ It seems quite plausible that the particles in question are residual forms with semantic relevance gradually blurred by phonological changes. However, attempts to reconstruct the original provenance of such formatives appear much problematic.

⁶¹ Among other things, the assumed Semitic evidences of the coexistence of past tense and modal functions are somewhat stumbling in comparative perspective, as it will be accounted for in Ch. 3. One stated view brings the (alleged) twofold nature of the perfective back to proto-Semitic. The latter is thought to have two prefix conjugations, distinct from one another in their syllable stress: past tense with final stress, while modality with stress on the penultima. This proposal was initiated by Hetzron 1969, then followed by Lipinski 1997: 336; Buccellati 1996: 183; and Voigt 2004: 44; and convincingly rejected by Kouwenberg 2010: 130-131.

not surprise one that modal functions exploit exactly those patterns, the latter simply being the ones available by that time in the Akkadian system. Accordingly, this process may have bearing on the theory whereby *iparras* form penetrated into the basic stem at a later time: a case in point may be the secondary spread of the prohibitive. The fact that the volitive particles are also attested in combination with *paris* forms (and with nouns proper) may be a further confirmation that we are on the right track in maintaining the temporal-aspectual feature a secondary outcome. In fact, *iprus* and *pari* themes still bring along the primary action-state opposition, when preceded by the volitive particles. In conclusion, the Akkadian modal category reveals a historical background whereby independent elements with “volitive” meaning – used indiscriminately with *iprus* and *paris* forms – were at a certain point grammaticalized and thus reduced to

particles. In particular, certain phonological circumstances caused volitive constructions to be closely associated with the *iprus* form, thus shifting the attention from the particles to the verbal form. I will not go into further detailed analyses on modality, since it is not the major concern: what matter most here is the light the history of the modal category sheds on how the Akkadian – and Semitic to some extent – verbal forms surfaced.

Moving to inner-Akkadian developments, the gradual replacement of the perfective with the *t*-perfect represents a remarkable phenomenon, as I already mentioned in 2.1. It already occurred in the oldest dialects; from Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian onwards the distribution of *iprus* and *iptaras* came to be syntactically determined.

This means that the former was relegated to subordinate and negative clauses⁶², whereas the second was employed as a past tense in affirmative main clauses.

2.4.2. The *paris* form

In descriptive terms, *paris* constitutes the conjugal form of the *parvs* adjectival themes (already discussed in 2.2.1.) bound with the suffixed person

⁶² In certain later dialects, the perfective seems to be attested in volitive contexts without the particles examined above. In particular, this occurs in Late Babylonian (GAG §81g; Streck 1995a: 127-141) and in Neo-Assyrian (Hämeen-Anttila 2000: 93; Streck 1995a: 139-41). It cannot be excluded that the unmarked precativ forms arose as a consequence of the decline of *iprus* in affirmative main clauses, in the sense that the volitive particles may have been perceived no longer relevant, thus losing their distinctiveness with the indicative use. Nevertheless, this explanation cannot be fixed with certainty, in so far as the process in question does not occur regularly throughout the later periods of Akkadian. A different interpretation is advanced by Streck (1995a: 245-47) and Lipiński (1997: 513-14): they ascribed the Akkadian unmarked volitive forms to Aramaic influence.

2.4. The Primary Finite Verbal Forms

markers. According to traditional grammar⁶³, it can conveniently be called “stative”.⁶⁴ For the sake of completeness, I graphically give the full paradigm in Figure 9:

		<i>paris</i> conjugation
Persons	1csg	<i>parsāku</i>
	2ms	<i>parsāta</i>
	2fs	<i>parsāti</i>
	3ms	<i>paris</i>
	3fs	<i>parsat</i>
	1pc	<i>parsānu</i>

⁶³ Earlier literature (mostly the German Semitic tradition, e.g., Brockelmann 1908) seems to favour the term “permansive” (from Latin *permaneō* ‘I hold out’ [i.e., *per* ‘thoroughly, utterly’ + *maneō* ‘I remain’]). From von Soden onwards, the term stative prevails on the former. Descriptive analyses of the functions of the stative include GAG §77; GKT §72c/e; Rowton 1962; Kraus 1984; Metzler 2002: 892-900; Huehnergard 2005a: 219-223.

⁶⁴ Terminological confusion arises when the term stative also refers to the lexical (state) meaning that certain verbs inherently hold. For this reason, I call the latter state verbs.

	2mpl	<i>parsātunu</i>
	2fpl	<i>parsātina</i>
	3mpl	<i>parsū</i>
	3fpl	<i>parsā</i>

Figure 9 The Akkadian (Old Babylonian) suffix conjugation

It may be helpful recalling that the *paris* form originally arose for inflecting primary adjectives and then it came to arrange even /-prvs-/ themes (viz. the historical fientive verbs). As a consequence, this “twofold” trait remains manifest throughout the reported history of Akkadian, thus triggering certain morpho-phonological processes (accounted for in 2.2.1.) which represent the quintessence of the Akkadian stative. At the same time, such peculiarity may hamper the understanding of the historical

mechanisms underlying the *paris* form. For these reasons, in the following analysis it was considered appropriate to cross-reference synchronic and diachronic levels.

As the label stative ostensibly suggests, the *paris* form denotes a state of being with regard to dynamic verbs, it expresses the result of an action. Formally, the first function is rendered for the most part by *paris* and marginally by *parus* or *paras*; the second meaning is mostly conveyed by *paris*, beside the limited Assyrian instances of *paras* and *purus*. I will not get into historical comments, which I already dealt with in 2.2.1. Back to figure 9, it is worthwhile noting that the “*i, u, a*” vowel variations are apparent in the third masculine singular

only, in that phonological modifications caused the elision of the vowel in question.⁶⁵

In the Akkadian grammars, it is customary to view the stative on par with the other finite verbal forms. Nevertheless, the borderline between its predicative function and its partaking in the verbal paradigm has been hardly conciliated within literature. Indeed, not much consensus has been reached on its controversial morpho-syntactical status.⁶⁶ I would not take part within the debate: whether *par-is* has to be placed in the nominal or in the verbal

⁶⁵ As a general rule within Akkadian, the succession of two short open syllables in word interiors causes the elision of the second vowel (e.g., 3rd f.sg. **parisat* > *parsat*). This rule seems optional when the second vowel comes before *r* and *l* (e.g., *zikarum* ~ *zikrum* 'male').

⁶⁶ In particular, the claim that the stative is a nominal sentence rather than a verbal form is eminently advanced by Buccellati (1968; 1988 and 1996: 121-122). Yet, it has not found wide acceptance at the end. Cf. Huehnergard (1987a: 230-231), Kouwenberg (2000: 22-26 and 2010, esp. 165). Apart from the semantic level, it seems objectively true that the stative at least synchronically does present syntactical and morphological features which belong to the verbal domain.

sections seems to be basically a matter of grammatical terminology. Ultimately, the stative shows a strong tendency to be verbalized, yet it does not abandon /relinquish its nominal character. The two poles of such ambiguity can emblematically be represented by the suffixation of the stative person markers to pure nominal themes on one side, and by the suffixation of the ventive and subjunctive⁶⁷ endings (most rarely of the suffix pronouns of dative and accusative also) to the inflected stative forms on the other side. However, in practical terms both these usages are restricted to specific environments. To be more precise, the stative with noun bases is mainly attested in later texts (of legal

⁶⁷ In Akkadian, the (improper) term “subjunctive” indicates the *-u* suffix which marks the consonant-final verbal forms (the ones without personal or modal endings) in subordinate clauses; yet, a verbal form with vowel ending remains unchanged, being mutually exclusive with the subjunctive morpheme. In the later periods, the *-u* suffix turned to be inconsistent, as short final vowels generally dropped.

and literary types), but it is scantily productive in the early periods⁶⁸; in addition, it cannot be followed by any attribute or complement. The ventive morpheme occurs only in the third persons (singular masculine and both genders for the plural); the subjunctive is not attested before the Old Babylonian period and it appears exclusively in the third person singular (mostly masculine).⁶⁹ To do justice to the linguistic facts, it might be convenient to place these marginal cases at the outskirts of the *paris* conjugation. Nonetheless, they cannot be

⁶⁸ For a detailed investigation of the stative of the nouns, see Rowton 1962: 261-262; Kraus 1984: 14-17; Kouwenberg 2000: 38-48 and 2010: 166-168.

⁶⁹ The reason why both ventive and subjunctive morphemes occur only in the third persons is thought to be related to morphological incompatibility. Cf. Reiner 1966: 97; Buccellati 1996: 167: through different ways, they eventually came to the same conclusion, according to which personal suffixes and “modal” endings need to be directly attached to the verbal base, thus they are mutually exclusive. In practice, the former suffixes, when present, take precedence over the second ones.

completely overlooked. The overall framework looks like a conglomerate of diverse sources that finally came to be adjusted to the paradigmatic requirements of the whole verbal system. This being so, the most accurate way to describe the developing of the *paris* form is to account for the diachronic processes which have led to this state of affairs in Akkadian.

Certainly, the adaption of the active verbs (of the *iprus* type) to the suffix inflection clearly brings out that the stative was originally devised with the express function of supplying a predicative form to adjectives and nouns. It has been described in 2.2.2. that the formal guise of fientive verbs, when inflected in the suffix conjugation, arose by analogy with the *iprus* pattern. On the same footing, the active verbs, when confronted with the semantic implications of the stative, show a large variety of nuances in meaning. In fact, the neutrality toward

tense, voice and subject-object relationships (i.e., transitivity and intransitivity) of the stative can hardly accommodate the verbal category. As a consequence, the more general resultative meaning of the “verbal” statives (see GAG §77e) falls into some syntactical subgroups which are determined by the inherent meaning of the original dynamic verbs they are derived from.⁷⁰ The complex of semantic nuances verbal statives display is heavily marked by the scenario described above; therefore it does

⁷⁰ On top of that, the stative forms derived from fientive verbs are the most attested type (compared to adjectival and nominal statives). They can be divided into intransitive, passive and active statives. In particular, the active stative seems to have a high frequency: it is scarcely attested in the earliest dialects, but it becomes quite common in the Old Babylonian and Standard Babylonian periods until the latest dialects. A thorough account of the active statives is Rowton 1962, whose semantic interpretation of some statives has been questioned by many scholars. See, for instance, Kraus: 1984: 6-10; Maloney 1981: 151-153; Streck 1995a: 177; Kouwenberg 2010: 170. It should be obvious that only a direct analysis of the texts and its surrounding context can determine which meaning better fits into a given context. Neither exterior arguments nor contrived translations can establish the real sense the verbal form conveys, after all.

not reside in the basic content of the stative itself. Nor does it prompt to further diachronic implications. Since these details mainly concern synchronic analyses, I will not go into them.⁷¹

Within Semitics, there is unanimity about the secondary formation of the stative of action verbs. Instead, it is a vexing question whether adjectives or nouns are the primary source of the *paris* form.⁷² As mentioned above, everywhere else in Akkadian the nominal statives constitute a relatively minority group. In terms of productivity, literature extrapolated conflicting conclusions on the data available

⁷¹ An exhaustive survey of the semantic range that verbal statives exhibit is provided by Kouwenberg 2010: 168-174.

⁷² The view according to which nominal stative are a secondary development is endorsed by Landsberger 1926b: 971, Huehnergard 1986: 238-39 and 1987; Kraus: 1984; Voigt 1988a: 121; Tropper 1995a: 498-99. For the opposite stance see Rössler 1950: 471; von Soden 1961b: 41.

from the diverse Akkadian stages.⁷³ At any rate, this issue does not seem to be a major problem, even more so because the difference in frequency among dialects is very limited. In the final analysis, it should be noted that the numerical scarceness of the nominal statives is not necessarily related to a later stage in development. Strictly speaking, nouns in predicative function may optionally occur either in nominative form (the most attested one in the later dialects) or in stative form. However, the former case is usually followed by a qualifier (e.g., attributive adjective, suffix pronoun or particle,

⁷³ Compare, for instance, Kraus 1984: 17-20 and Huehnergard 1987: 223²³(stating that nouns occurring in the stative show a growing frequency in the later Akkadian dialects, in comparison with the earliest periods) with Kouwenberg (2010: 167²⁰⁻²¹) who said that such statives are fairly rare in Old Babylonian as well as in Neo- and Late Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian. For direct references to the texts from which instances of nominal statives are taken, see Rowton 1962: 261-62; Kraus 1984: 14-17; Kouwenberg 2000: 38-48. At the end, it is still not clear to me the exact distribution of the attested nominal statives among Akkadian. It would be needed a direct study of attested data.

genitive). As remarked above, the latter case is instead syntactically restricted to simple (nominal) predicates. Consequently, it seems that within nominal bases the stative option is generally in complementary distribution with the nominative case form. Practically, it is fairly rare to find predicative constructions in which the noun – regardless its nominative or stative shape – is not accompanied by any qualifier.⁷⁴ This made the use of the nominal stative even more uncommon.

In sum, the relatively sporadic nature of the attestations of the stative of nouns stems from syntactical and pragmatic factors. That being so, it is hardly conceivable that the formation of the stative – formally emerged by combining nouns and independent personal pronouns phonetically reduced – arose from these very (limited) contexts, since

⁷⁴ Cf. Huehnergard 1987: 224.

univerbation is expected to take place within high-frequency expressions. Generally, predicative adjectives are far more common than nouns. Since the first ones are attributes in themselves, they are not constrained by the syntactical conditions that nouns instead are. Within adjectives, the stative form seems to be preferred in the early dialects. In contrast, in Neo-Babylonian and in Neo-Assyrian the nominative form stands out as the most used (as happened with nouns).⁷⁵

Strictly speaking, we can safely state that the stative construction emerged from predicative constructions whose subject is represented by an independent personal pronoun. In this respect, it should

⁷⁵ According to Buccellati 1968: 9, within the later Akkadian periods the predominance of the nominative form in predicative construction may be due to Aramaic influence. If we look at the same matter from the complementary point of view, it may be convenient to conclude that the decay of the stative with nominal and adjectival bases is probably due to the contemporary rising of verbalization process that the *paris* form undertook.

likewise be noted the similarity in word order with the nominal sentences, which allocate the pronominal subject (if present) always at the end of the clause. Within this view, it is futile questioning which is the oldest one, whether adjective or noun, to cause the formation of the stative. Certainly, the latter stood out as formally distinct from the non-predicative counterpart (e.g., *damiqum* 'good' used attributively; *damiq* used predicatively). Aside from the "unmarked" third person (sg.), it is likely that the remaining persons rose by analogy with predicative constructions with adjectives/nouns in the nominative, accompanied by independent personal pronouns which were phonologically reduced to enclitic suffix pronouns (e.g., *damiqum anāku* > *damqāku* 'I am good').

Back to the main issue, it is self-evident that the stative primarily emerged for paradigmatic reasons, in order to morphologically *mark* the

predicative form of primary adjectives, as the formal similarity bears out. Regarding the nouns, they simply copy the stem of the adjectival statives. As far as I am concerned, it seems unnecessary arguing that nominal statives are a secondary development. The paramount fact is that at some point in the Akkadian (pre-)history the *paris* form came to incorporate verbal themes too. In keeping with inner-Akkadian evidences, the stative cannot be regarded as a fully-fledged conjugation, in that it has not completed the process of grammaticalization, as instead it will happen later in Semitic. There, the *paris* form will turn out to be in paradigmatic relationship with the other verbal forms, as part of the tense-aspect system.

Chapter 3

THE NOMINAL BACKGROUND OF THE SEMITIC VERB

3.1. Proto-Semitic and Pre-Semitic

As it has been shown in the first chapter, the historical background of the Semitic verb has plagued scholars from the start. For the sake of clarity, I shall outline again the way the issue has been settled. Basically, the main disagreements concern the following points:

- The reconstruction of the *original* morphological and functional status of the verbal forms.

- The diachronic “hierarchy” among the verbal forms.
- The leading function of the whole verbal paradigm, whether fundamentally aspectual or temporal.
- The way the overall system developed over time across Semitic.

Ultimately, the proto-Semitic abstraction constitutes the glue that holds all the resulting controversial matters together. In fact, the idea of a single mother-language that would have split into different “branches” is indisputably *still* the prevailing (pre)conception. Within this frame, trying to outline the diachronic processes of the verb formation is tantamount to levelling all the chronological and geographical differences in favor of a timeless heritage. Accordingly, a high degree of uniformity comes out, which does not leave room for further

reassessments: every element appears already well-settled. This also applies to the verbal structure, which is indeed thought to be an unconfutable symptom of a common ancestry. Recently, such way of developing is more widely deemed as obsolete and linguistically unsound. Nevertheless, historical studies have been remained bound by the regularity of proto-Semitic: the latter is ubiquitous in any given reconstruction. Finally, this methodology seems to be *non sequitur*.

In view of the need to provide a more suitable option, the “wave model” (*Wellentheorie*) may be a plausible candidate, in that, by invoking the metaphor of a wave, it explains more concretely the way new traits (innovations) spread from a given point

(area of innovation)¹, until affecting surrounding areas. In this fashion, contacts between neighboring languages gain in importance when dealing with shared features.

In the course of the present Chapter, I will expressly eschew the term proto-Semitic. Instead, by using the term “pre-Semitic” I would emphasize the attempt to provide a plausible line of development adhering to the diachronic facts. With specific reference to the verb formation, I will try to describe a pre-Semitic background from which the reported verbal forms have emerged, without any recourse to proto-Semitic speculations. For the time

¹ This theory was initially presented in 1872 by the German linguist J. Schmidt with reference to Indo-European languages. Within Semitics, it was principally endorsed by Garbini (see Garbini 1984 and Garbini and Durand 1994), who posits the Amorite languages as the areal influence around which the renovations of the West Semitic verbal system took place. More recently, see L. Edzard 1998.

being, I will remain focused on the Akkadian period.

3.2. The Pre-Semitic Verb

From a diachronic point of view, it is commonly thought that the form *i-prus* constitutes the core of the Akkadian and Semitic verbal paradigm. Further evidences of the spread of such form are offered by comparison with Afro-Asiatic.² In particular, Berber (and Cushitic) exhibits a prefix conjugation (*yāFRəS*, the so-called “aorist”) revealing

² Extended the areal theory to Afro-Asiatic, some of its branches (e.g., Berber, Cushitic and Egyptian) would have originally had a different origin from Semitic. The latter, through diverse and copious waves, would have penetrated into those areas. Cf. Garbini 1984 and Garbini and Durand 1994.

similarities in form and function with *iprus*.³ Already in the early literature, it has been claimed that the Akkadian perfective conjugation results from the combination of a pronominal subject with a *verbal theme* corresponding to an infinitive form.⁴

It seems to be a good proposal to start with. In a loose way, it is in line with the reconstruction I am about to support. So, if we go just one step further in maintaining the so-called “infinitive” a nominal theme in origin, we get the alternative interpretation sketched in Ch. 2. Comparative evidences

³ The premises held in 3.1. about the theory of areal and contact influences may be extended to Afro-Asiatic. In particular, it seems conceivable that similarities between Semitic and some branches of Afro-Asiatic are originally due to contact. In keeping with the present discourse, the specific claim that Berber is originally an African language which underwent several “waves” from the Semitic area sounds likely. Unfortunately, the Afro-Asiatic scant material is not enough dated to make such proposal broadly accepted among scholars. Cf. Garbini and Durand 1994: 163.

⁴ So, Bauer (1910: 8) posited “*qutul*” (which would correspond to the imperative and the infinitive form) as the verbal base. Similarly, Bauer and Leander (1922: 176), and more recently Kienast (2001: 196).

outside Akkadian may better clarify the scenario. A case in point is the vestigial use in predicative position of the Arabic “verbal noun” (*maṣḍar*, lit. ‘source’) – which strongly resembles our /-prvs-/ theme – as certain syntactical contexts bear out. Incidentally, the terminology adopted here reveals itself as meaningful; in fact, the term “verbal noun” mirrors the ambiguity of such forms, being in the midway between the features associated to the respective nouns and verbs categories. A good example is the syntactical construction *hum sukūt-u-n* (lit. ‘they [keep] silent’), which juxtaposes a personal pronoun with the verbal noun (or “agent noun”); it may represent an earlier form with respect to the corresponding finite verbal form *ya-skut-ū-n*.⁵ In practice, the penetration of the latter into the verbal system caused the verbal noun to be synchronically

⁵ The above instances are quoted in Garbini and Durand 1994: 111.

perceived as dependent on the second. Therefore, their original relationship came to be finally reversed.

Going back to the main issue, it cannot be ruled out that what traditionally has been referred to as the finite verbal form *iprus* derives from syntactical constructions. The latter gradually merged into a single element made up of a pronominal marker and a noun base of the /-prvs-/ type. In final analysis, the underlying grammaticalization made *iprus* acquire the status traditionally labelled as *verbal*.

As for the personal markers, it has already been stated that the third personal prefix is different from the other ones, in that it is more likely to be

related to demonstrative pronouns.⁶ Outside Akkadian, the latter is found elsewhere in Semitic, with slight differences in form, so that in some cases it can be envisioned a phonetic reduction of the type *ya-* > *yi-* > *i-*. A decisive remark is offered by a group of Hebrew (and marginally South-Ethiopian) personal and place names, which bears a prefix *y-* before the nominal nucleus (viz., *yābīn* 'the wise')⁷. Their formal structure outwardly resembles a (third person) prefix verbal form; yet, their specific

⁶ The demonstrative origin of the third personal prefix was firstly pointed out by Reinisch 1909: 264, then by Speiser 1936: 35; Castellino 1957: 192-193; Diakonoff 1965: 80-81; Gelb 1969: 171-192; Kouwenberg 2010: 52 and 130. This claim may be supported by South Ethiopic languages, which exhibit demonstrative pronouns with the same prefix **ya-*. Also, the same element seems to be present in some Arabic dialect, in Berber, and as a part of indefinite pronouns (**mi-ya*) in Ugaritic, Phoenician and Hebrew. Cf. Garbini 1984: 83. See also Pennacchietti 1968.

⁷ A large number of instances of this specific group is given by Garbini 1984: 85-86.

context⁸ is unfit for the temporal-aspectual function (whatever the Akkadian-like perfective or the West Semitic-like imperfective) historically ascribed to the prefix conjugation. Put simply, it sounds more reasonable to place such forms in a timeless frame.⁹ As for the prefix *y-*, it seems highly plausible that it stands for an archaic “designational” marker¹⁰ that was specialized as pronominal marker in all the Semitic prefix verbal forms (and as demonstrative pronoun in some Semitic languages, see n.6).

Given these observations, nothing prevents us from positing that we are dealing with pre-Semitic relics that constitute a crucial argument in favor of

⁸ In addition, personal and place names generally tend to remain unchanged over time, so that their “frozen” form may be traced to very ancient linguistic phases.

⁹ So, the example adduced above might be literally correspond to expressions like ‘he who/the one who is wise’.

¹⁰ In practical terms, the prefix *y-* is semantically close to a kind of relative marker. For this function, Garbini 1984: 87-88 suggested the term *nota designationis*.

the nominal origin postulated for the *iprus* form. To sum up, the diachronic process that the prefix conjugation underwent in Akkadian can be schematically analyzed in the following way:

$$y(i)prus \rightarrow yiprus^{11} \rightarrow iprus$$

An important corollary of this pre-Semitic scenario is the lack of tense-aspect function. Indeed, if we want to wholly back up the nominal claim, we need to admit that the entire verbal system emerged on a timeless basis.

Following this line of inquiry, it now becomes more understandable why the third-person prefix verbal form is a peculiar one: it is essentially the “starting point” of the verbalization process. This

¹¹ As mentioned in 3.3., *yiprus* represents the Old Akkadian variant of the standard *iprus*, which chronologically comes after the former.

means that construction like $*y(i) + prus$ (roughly 'the one who' + 'dividing') corresponds to predicative constructions, thus representing the embryonic stage of the historical prefix conjugation. In a way, the verbal process is concretely set in motion after the nominal base came to be extrapolated from that original construction and re-used for being referred to the other (grammatical) subjects involved in a given action. As for the latter, the enclitic pronouns, which stem from the independent personal pronouns, are put into service. As for the plural number, the nominal background imposes its markers. By summing all these facts, we eventually obtain the prefix conjugation.

Interestingly enough, the third person *paris* form exhibits the same kind of idiosyncrasy the third-person prefix form holds. Accordingly, we can postulate a way of developing which is comparable to the one outlined above. We cannot speculate about

the nominal origin that the *paris* theme, and the whole conjugation, indeed ostensibly reveal. In this specific case, it is broadly accepted that *paris* simply corresponds to the unmarked predicative form of the Akkadian primary adjective. Then, the latter constitutes the other “starting point” from which the whole paradigm is then formed. Incidentally, this assumption may also clarify why the Akkadian, and by extension Semitic verbal forms, exhibit unchanged themes around which external markers are added. Further analysing, the grammaticalization processes underlying the inconsistent making of the personal affixes of verbal forms (see 2.3.) may shed light on the fact that the verbal system did not originally emerge as unambiguous.¹² Returning to the suffix conjugation, the personal pronouns are placed at the end of the adjectival/nominal base,

¹² So already Kouwenberg 2010: 74.

just like nominal clauses behavior with the pronominal subjects. In conclusion, the great transparency of the structure makes the involved diachronic mechanisms somewhat easy to reconstruct. Figure 10 graphically represents the historical reconstruction just discusses:

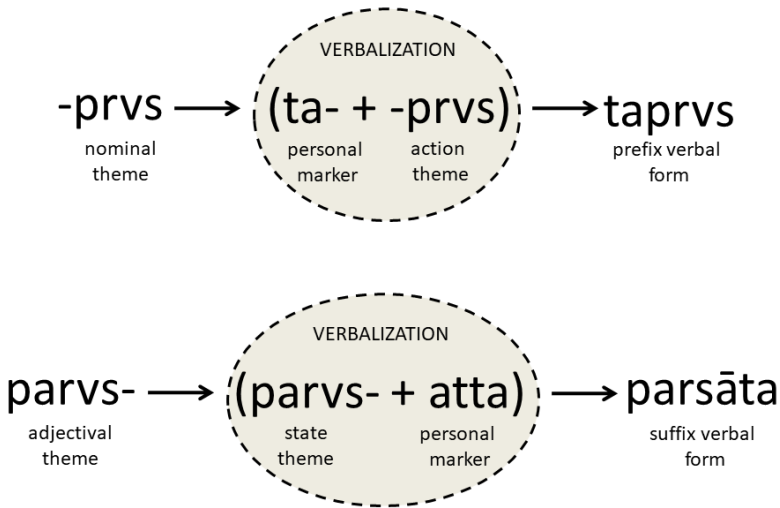


Figure 10 The emergence of the Akkadian prefix and suffix conjugations from a diachronic point of view. The given example shows the 2nd f.sg. form.

We are still left with the last, but not least, piece of the argumentation: the relationship between *iprus* and *paris* forms. Although it has already been sketched in the previous chapter, now it seems opportune to furtherly assess the situation. The fundamental semantic distinction between the two forms resides in their sources. The prefix conjugation is originally used for “verbalizing” nominal themes of the *-prus* type, thus resulting in verbs with an action meaning; the suffix conjugation is originally employed for adjectival bases of the *paris-* type, thus generally obtaining verbs with a state meaning. It turns out that initially the two members followed two distinct grammaticalization paths. These processes caused these forms to be accidentally incorporated *in a kind of* verbal system. This made them become the two members of an action-state opposition. At this point in the pre-Semitic history, the temporal-aspectual feature is

still far from being settled. There, I am inclined to conceive *iprus* and *paris* forms temporally unmarked in origin, their primary distinction being inherently semantic. It turns out that tense-aspect information were implicitly or explicitly marked by the context or by external elements.

3.3. The Rise of the Semitic Verbal System

The penetration of fientive verbs into the suffix conjugation (and the other way around) constitutes a second stage of the verbalization process, in which the semantic action-state opposition turned out to be morphological. From a functional point of view, the prefix conjugation acquired a higher rank, since “prototypical” verbs perform actions. Moreover, the penetration of secondary verbal forms (i.e., *iparras* and *iptaras*) into the Akkadian basic stem caused a new hierarchical structure. Within this

frame, a tense-aspect connotation came into being. The *paris* form, at least in the Akkadian period, did not take part in such temporal system, keeping its state-resultative meaning. This implies a marginal role of the stative conjugation, which instead will gain a full perfective role in West Semitic.

3.3.1. The secondary forms of the Akkadian verb

The *iparras* form is one of the additional members of the Akkadian verbal system. Synchronically, it appears rather aspect-oriented, conveying an imperfective value.¹³ In diachronic terms, its secondary nature may be inferred by specific morpho-semantic features. In fact, it is conceivable that it

¹³ Detailed descriptive analyses of the *iparras* form are offered by GAG §78; Streck 1995a: 190-94; Leong 1994: 31-32, 292-360; Huehnergard 2005a: 98-99; Metzler 2002: 886-92; Loesov 2004b: 416-417; 2005; E. Cohen 2006; Kouwenberg 2010: 91-94. It is worthwhile underling that in the Akkadian cuneiform script the *iparras* form is also attested without the gemination of the second radical.

shares a common semantic source with the D stem, in so far both perform gemination (of the second radical) for basically conveying, at least in origin, the values of plurality and repetitiveness. Nevertheless, they have undergone different developments, as it is clear from their distinctive formal realizations. Outside Semitic, Egyptian and South Berber witness remnants of verbal forms in which reduplication occurs. The similarity in use with the D stem gives strength to the claim that the reduplication is an old stage which precedes the gemination process, as most scholars say.¹⁴ A plausible evolution may be the following:

/prvs/ → /prvs-prvs/ → prvs-rvs/ → pvrrvs¹⁵

¹⁴ For critical views about the relationship between the *iparras* form and the D stem, see Ch. 1.

¹⁵ Cf. Garbini and Durand 1994: 120.

Outside Akkadian, the consistent decline of the *iparras* form is out of question, being restricted to South Semitic only, (notably to the “North Ethiopic” group) which retains the imperfective value, like Akkadian. Then, the relationship between *iparras* and *yəqattəl* and the question whether they stem from a common origin is one of the most debated cruces among Semitics.¹⁶ As far as I can tell, I am inclined to consider the second form not an inner

¹⁶ So far, the question is still pending. For the claim about the genetic relationship between *iparras* and *yəqattəl*, see Haupt 1878, then Landsberger 1926b: 970; Gensler 1997; Voigt 2004: 49-50; Rössler 1950: 504-5 and Kienast 2001: 228. For the opposite stance, see Aro 1964: 194, M. Cohen 1953: 89-90 and Kouwenberg 2010: 117-123. A further different view is held by Garbini (1984: 145-145 and *passim*): he explained the similarities between the two forms by areal influences. Interestingly, he referred to the similarity between *iparras* and South-Semitic conjugation as one of the arguments in favor of the Mesopotamian origin (II millennium B. C.) of South-Semitic.

development of South-Semitic, although several arguments¹⁷ would prompt one to reject that idea.

Generally, there seems to be a rather common methodological assumption when we appeal to the comparative approach: parallel forms in different languages are expected to share the same functions too. Rather, the history of every language suggests a more natural way of developing; it is comparable to a dynamic strata's overlapping, where older forms compete with innovated ones, constantly creating some adjustment that involves the whole system. Following this reasoning, it might be argued that the Ethiopian Semitic verbal system (generally represented by Ge'ez) formally develops out from a diachronic "overlap" between the Akkadian and the West-Semitic paradigms, in

¹⁷ Among the main arguments, the fact that only one member of the Akkadian paradigm is only preserved in South-Semitic, without leaving any traces in West Semitic, gains consensus.

combination with new functions that renewals obviously require.

On the basis of the facts roughly summarized above, it seems safe to argue that the gemination of the second radical is originally a hallmark of “plurality” (the sphere of plurality being wide, ranging from intensity, repetitiveness, and to habituality as well) that, under grammaticalization paths, gives rise to two distinct morphemes in Akkadian, one marking the inflectional paradigm, the second marking the derivational one. Apart from Semitic, Berber exhibits a verbal form (the so-called “imperfective”) denoting habitual actions, that it is formally comparable to the *iparras* form. Therefore, there are good reasons to assume that the Berber form is the result of a Semitic inference.¹⁸ This means that

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Egyptian writing does not provide with certainty the existence of a form which is comparable to the *iparras* one.

the gemination process must have occurred even outside Akkadian in a rather remote period. It thus becomes hard retaining the *iparras* form as an inner development of Akkadian.

The other secondary Akkadian verbal form is *iptaras*.¹⁹ It doesn't have a counterpart in the other Semitic languages. Then, a careful analysis is needed, in order to explain how the *t* morpheme penetrated into the G stem as expressing a "tense"; thus, on one hand it formally resembles the Gt stem, on the other it functionally differentiates from it. Nevertheless, it might be approximate overlooking the several subcategories that the *iptaras* form subsumes. As such, the label "perfect" might be misleading, especially on comparative grounds, since it

¹⁹ Exhaustive studies on the functioning of the *iptaras* form are Oppenheim 1935; Goetze 1936; GAG §80; Leong 1994: 151-225; Streck 1995a and 1999; Metzler 2002: 875-86; Loesov 2004a; Kouwenberg 2010: 140-155.

risks to not fit the real complexity of the *iptaras* form. At a first glance, it gives no clues on the fact that *t* might be the same marker of the “*t*-affix” derivational stems – as it is largely assumed – and that the Akkadian perfect is a specific and secondary development, whose diachronic path is still far from clear. In general, *-t-* is a fairly productive morpheme within the whole Semitic verbal morphology, being found in several derivational stems. Basically, it gives a “collective” nuance to the stem involved, namely it conveys some kind of involvement among subject(s) and object(s). It mainly denotes reciprocal actions, sometimes it indicates reflexiveness, yet there are many instances in which the meaning is unpredictable, as a result of lexicalization process. Apparently, it seems to have almost nothing in common with the *iptaras* functions. The most one can say about the alleged unitary origin of the *t* is that the early function of the *t*-perfect form

may be historically related to the category of “proximity”, as suggested by Izre'el (1991), thus filling the semantic gap between the two verbal stems in question. In conclusion, it can safely be argued that both *iparras* and *iptaras* forms arose from the old nominal theme /prvs/. To the latter, morpho-semantic elements were added in order to convey further nuances of functions that the verbal system inherently required.

As already stated, an important development in the Akkadian history is the gradual increasing in use of the *t*-perfect and the subsequent decline of the *iprus* form. At the same time, it is remarkable the fact that West Semitic in restoring the prefix conjugation reversed the Akkadian value, although showing vestigial forms of the Akkadian perfective meaning. So, the continuous renewing of the verbal system tends to furtherly use lower ranking forms, resulting in an improved role of the forms themselves.

Conclusions

By assuming the nominal origin of the verb, it is implied that in the pre-Semitic system, noun and verb were not well differentiated and that a clear-cut distinction between the two categories required a certain time to be strongly established. In this frame one can envisage a sort of, so to say, “verbalized syntagms”, as if they were a kind of pre-conjugational forms. They can formally be divided into two types, according to their different sources. One consists of a nominal base, like /prvs/, to which prefixes (standing for personal marker) are attached to originally “conjugate” an action. The other comes from an adjectival base like /par(v)s-/, to

which reduced personal pronouns are suffixed, for conjugating states.

As it has been pointed out, Semitic writings unanimously recognizes the ostensible nominal origin of the stative. In fact, it has been exhaustively analysed within literature. It results that it is a well-known fact that the stative is a morphologization of predicative constructions, which consist of an adjectival base and a pronominal subject. Despite the uniformity in function, its different usages are said to be apparently controversial in synchronic terms. By contrast, the diachronic approach applied in the present study could have bridged the gap. Indeed, it has been claimed that the Akkadian stative reflects an intermediate stage in which different strata of different times converged into one form. Later, it acquired a verb-like usage which made it gain in ranking, still without completing its verbalization path in Akkadian. This scenario has important

implications, which are thoroughly described in the work and summarized in the following. It seems quite likely that the stative is, so to say, the most evident residual of the pre-conjugational paradigm. *Mutatis mutandis*, the *iprus* form followed a similar line of development. Compared to the *paris* form, its nominal origin is hardly recognized among Semitists. Actually, my special attention to this verbal form aimed at casting light on its paramount role. To be more exact, it has been argued that it originally stood for the conjugation of the dynamic verbs. Going back to pre-Semitic, it might be said that *iprus* is the *original (atemporal) verbal form*, being action the prototypical property of the verb. By contrast, the Akkadian *paris* is said to be initially engaged as the predicative form of adjectives. Unlike the *iprus* form, the stative penetrated secondarily into the verbal system.

Early as the Akkadian history, it is implied a binary opposition (action verbs vs. state verbs) which is still far from being grammaticalized. Given this semantic basis, it turns out that the remaining verbal forms (i.e. *iparras* and *iptaras*) emerged as secondary developments after the whole system specialized in tense-aspect function.

Further in the recorded history, the two semantic categories of action and state merged into a single one (though vowel pattern variations are exactly modelled on their different sources), whereas the formal contrast between *iprus* and *paris* forms accommodates new functions (most notably related to our notion of tense/aspect). From early Semitic, *iprus* form appears fairly structured, as it is clear in Akkadian, where it expresses past actions. As I have already said, the *iparras* form seems to penetrate the basic stem in Akkadian, as well as in some Berber dialects, denoting habitual, hence present

actions. As for the *paris* form, it reveals a high flexibility in the first stages. In fact, in Akkadian this pattern applies to nominal base too. Across Afro-Asiatic, we found a similar suffix verbal form in some Berber dialects and in Egyptian too.

Among other things, it has emerged that each Akkadian conjugational form (i.e., the imperfective *iparras*, the perfective *iprus*, the *t*-perfect *iptaras*, the stative *paris*) may entail distinct developments resulting from the pre-Semitic background. For example, it can safely be said that *iparras* form and *iprus* form do not constitute a perfect dichotomy in origin. Nevertheless, at a given moment in history, these two elements have surfaced as a temporal-aspectual definite opposition.

The last remark, the one about the morphological mechanisms which are the base of the verb formation, deserves a close-up attention. An example could clarify the intention; analyzing the form

taprusū with respect to the reasonings provided in this work, we get the following scheme:

taprusū ← *ta* + *-prus* + *-ū* (you m./f. + -'dividing' + plural marker)

So, *taprusū* derives from a nominal nucleus /prvs/, to which an enclitic personal pronoun (standing for the 2nd personal pronoun) is attached. Finally, the suffix /-ū/ specifies the plural number. In other words, in addition to implying a nominal origin, the verbalization process developed itself in an agglutinative fashion. This can lead to think that the fusional character historically ascribed to the Semitic (verbal) morphology might be go back to pre-Semitic mechanism of agglutination. This suggestion could be interesting for future works development.

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