The Grammar of the Aramaic of the Zohar
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1. Spelling and Phonology

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Chapter 1
Spelling

§1 The numerous differences in the spelling between the manuscripts of the Zohar and the different printings are determined by the spelling rules for the Zohar. Studies show us that the spelling in the manuscripts (for example in Ms Oxford 1546 and Ms Cambridge 1023)\(^1\) and the excerpts in the first printing of Recanati, is in most cases more plene than the spelling in the common printings. In any event, meticulous comparison confirms that the manifestations of the spelling in the Vilna printing were made to fit the ways of spelling of those manuscripts and of the different printings of the Zohar. Because of this, the Vilna printing is suitable to use as a basis to determine the rules.

A. Vowel marks

1. The vowels held in the Aramaic of the literary sources as long, are generally indicated by one of the matres lectionis, in an open syllable, in a closed syllable:

\(ח Zika, נפייך, ליעילא, ענייה, אנייה, ליעילא, נמי, זי.\)

Note: however there are also some that are not regular:

\(פרודא\)

2. The vowels held in the Aramaic of the literary sources as short, sometimes are not marked:

\(גולגלתא, בסחרנו, זמנה, ספרא, לקבליה, כל, דקדשיא, קדשים\)

However the plene spelling method became stronger in most of the occurrences (especially in closed syllables):

\(דאיחזו, סיטרא, רישומא, גולגלתא, אודנא, כותלא\)

Also:

\(איזיל, אינש\) and others.

Also in the printings of the Zohar Hadash (which consists of different sections from Midrash Ha-ne’elam and from the Zohar that was erased from the printings of the body of the Zohar) the plene spelling is more normal:

\(אידכר, למסבל, אידכר, לﱃטלא, ר郤מא, ספורא, אימיתא\)

Also in the Zohar Hadash (98c-d, Midrash Ruth Ha-ne’elam).

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\(^1\) See the appendix on the manuscripts and the Recanati.
\(^2\) The examples quoted in this chapter without citations are from the Vilna printing 3:128b-129a.
\(^3\) In Ms Oxford 1b. \(פרודא\).
\(^4\) In Ms Oxford this spelling recurs time after time consistently. The tendency towards plene spelling—at least an equal ratio compared to defective spelling—is also found in the manuscripts of the Mishnah (Y.N. Epstein, אמיות נילזה, פנפז דלמה, ה. p. 1207), and this is the custom in Babylonian Aramaic (Y. Kutscher, אמיות נילזה, פנפז דלמה, ה. p.11).
The letters א, ה, ו, י (matres lectionis)
Besides vowel markers, the matres lectionis are used as consonants.

1. א— as a mater lectionis marking /aa/ in the sources:

It is used to mark the definite article at the end of a noun:

as the marker of the feminine:

in third person III- verbs:

and in place of ה:

Mater lectionis marking /ee/:

And as marking the diptong /ay/:

and in the names of the sages:

:)as a consonant (at the beginning of a syllable א

2. ה— mater lectionis marking /aa/, after א

and with the verb הוה

and also not following :as the feminine marker א

and as a consonant:

3. ו— mater lectionis for /u/ and /o/:

As the consonant /w/ occasionally as one ו

but in the majority of occurrences with two ו

References are not marked next to common forms.
8 As is customary in the Babylonian Talmud (C. Levias, A Grammar of the Aramaic Idiom Contained in the Babylonian Talmud, Cincinnati, 1900 – henceforth abbreviated: Levias; p 26).
9 In the Cambridge ms, this phenomenon is found more often.
10 In the Sultzbach printing it is written in these places as הויירם.
4. mater lectionis marking /ii/

Marking /e/: 

As marking the dipthong /ay/, one: in the middle "י" at the end of the word, two, "י".

As the consonant /y/ one: is written at the beginning of the word.

The verbal prefix for the future is always written with one "י".

Adjacent to the letters aleph, vav, he, comes one yod:

but there are many exceptions to this:

In the middle of a word two yods:

5. There are a few instances in which a few matres lectionis are joined to mark one sound:

C. The letters ס–ש

The sin is maintained only in biblical words:

Whereas samech usually marks the phoneme /s/:

just as Late Aramaic.

§2

A. Letters as Numbers

1. The letters of the aleph-bet come in their numerical values in number phrases expressed in words:

Or also without these phrases:

11 As is customary in the Bab. Talmud (Levias p. 27); but also is found: )§3:186b( כרמיתא.
12 in the Bab. Talmud one yod is customarily written in the last syllable after a letter voweled with schwa (Levias p. 27).
13 Just as in the Bab. Talmud there is no known usage except in those same occurrences. An exception to this rule: )§2:73a( שאריא"– which is spelled with samech in the Talmud.
14 See the chapter on numbers (§22, 1:G,H).
Letters with this numerical usage are marked with a special sign (a point, or a lying line in manuscripts, inverted commas in print).

2. The frequent gematria in the Zohar:

arin ma'ah ve'tseh vemi de'shur ke'vortshem kedav'sh.

Words which come in gematria are marked with a special sign (as mentioned above).

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B. Punctuation

The use of the arbitrary punctuation exists in the different sources, but it is impossible to formulate rules for them. The Vilna printing in particular uses a dot to separate sentences and a colon to separate themes, but the division of sentences is far from accurate.15 The special name is marked in the Vilna printing, as in the manuscripts discussed, with two yods.16

C. Beginnings of words and other abbreviations

The beginnings of common words in the printings (and in the manuscripts) are not new, most of them are known from their use in the Talmuds and the Midrashim. For example:

Dav'h, be'ah, . . ., hah, ah, maa, etc.

Other abbreviations are not numerous in the Vilna printing and come in understood words:

v'ni,17

Thanks to the editors and the printers that completed the abbreviations that are in the manuscripts.

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15 In the Cambridge ms a dot above the line indicates the end of a sentence, and oblique dots on the highest part of the line mark the end of the speech; in the Oxford ms a small dot above the line indicates the end of the sentence, the end of a theme and a quotation as one. In the Sultzbach printing a few dots come to mark the ends of sentences.

16 In the Sultzbach printing with a .'

17 Truncations of word endings (due to the end of the line) come both in the Cambridge mss and the Oxford mss, and a few beginnings of words. The number of abbreviations is greater in the Sultzbach printing, not only at the ends of lines, but also in the middle of them (due to the need of the printing, and perhaps in order to decrease the combination of yod and he in the printing): איה עזר (איהבר).
Chapter 2
Phonology

§3 Since we don’t have a tradition of vowel pointing for the Zohar, it is upon us to understand the phonological manifestations extracted from the spelling, as far as we are allowed to witness it in the received and authoritative spelling. The forms of words in the Zohar generally indicate morpho-phonological manifestations that are common in the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud, and in a few occurrences of manifestations of Western Aramaic.

Listed here are selected phenomena from the domain of the phonology of the consonants, as they appear in the text before us (we will not delay with transformations, that is to say on diachronic processes).

1. Sonorants
An /n/ lacking a vowel in the middle of a word is assimilated:

There are instances in which it is not assimilated:

At the end of a word there are instances in which it is dropped:

And there are instances in which it subsists:

2. Dentals
/d/ - there are instances in which it is maintained:

and there are instances in which it is assimilated:

/t/ in the prefix for the reflexive binyanim – is assimilated

A. The consonants /t, T, d/ are treated the same as in the other dialects of Aramaic:

But many times this assimilation does not occur:

B. The common assimilation of :to other consonants ת

In I-and I 1-ve rbsh the ת is dropped

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18 See the previous chapter on spelling.
20 The feminine form of the verb adjacent to the definite noun (see below on the syntax of the noun, §32).
21 This is also the case with the Cambridge ms.
22 Perhaps it is possible to see in this disregard of the assimilation rules a sign of the language of the Middle Ages; see BZ Bakhar, Jerusalem Guide . . . p. 123; and also M. Gottstein, Syntax and Dictionary of the Hebrew Language in the Domain of influence of Arabic, Jerusalem 5712, §22.
23 3:189a.
C. With verbs whose first root consonant is a sibilant, the phenomenon of metathesis of the sounds and assimilation is common, as a rule:

ארתח, ארתח, ארכי, ארתח, ארתח, ארתח, ארתח.

However, the extraordinary behavior of disregarding this linguistic rule is more interesting. In this disregard there is a hint of consistency that approaches a new rule, at least with verbs of clearly mystical interpretation:

Traditionally, ארתח.

Consideration of the manuscripts and the first printing of the Recanati we learn that in the earlier version of the Zohar forms lacking assimilation such as these were more common, and it seems that many of them were corrected by the copyists who were striving for uniformity.

D. Exchanges of tav for tet:

An interpretation is also common based on exchange of this meaning; 'And from terror because it won’t come near you' (Isaiah 54:14) replacing terror with wheat by changing the tav to tet, giving an alternate reading (3:188b).

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24 In this form of the verb an opposition occurs in the different manuscripts: in the Oxford ms it is written in the body of the text as התברקבא but above it is corrected התברקבא. In the Cambridge ms: in התברקבא the parallel text in the Vilna אשתיך but in the parallel place התברקבא. Compare to the Midrash Vayyiqra’ 30:6: התברקבא

25 For example, in the Cambridge ms it is written התברקבא but in the Vilna in the parallel place התברקבא and in the first printing of Recanati התברקבא.

26 An interpretation is also common based on exchange of this meaning; 'And from terror because it won’t come near you' (Isaiah 54:14) replacing terror with wheat by changing the tav to tet, giving an alternate reading (3:188b).
2. Morphology

Chapter 3
The Pronoun

An examination of the pronouns that preserve the original forms of the language is very informative concerning the determination of the linguistic influences on the Zohar and concerning the characterization of its place among the Aramaic dialects. In order to effectively classify the material we will look at it from two different points of view:

1. From the aspect of the use of the pronouns, we will distinguish between:
   a. Personal Pronoun (Pronomen personale),
   b. Demonstrative Pronoun (Pronomen demonstrativum),
   c. Relative Pronoun (Pronomen relativum),
   d. Interrogative Pronoun (Pronomen interrogativum),
   e. Reflexive Pronoun (Pronomen reflexivum),
   f. Indefinite Pronoun (Pronomen indefinitum).

2. From the aspect of form, we must distinguish between the independent pronoun (pronomen separatum), which appears as a separate word, and the clitic pronoun (pronomen suffixum), which is attached to the verb or the noun, which together constitute one word.\(^\text{27}\)

§4 A. The Personal Pronoun
Different functions are associated with the personal pronoun in the sentence, and it is placed into these categories according to function:

1. Subject Pronouns (Nominative),
2. Possessive Pronouns (Genitive),
3. Object Pronouns (Accusative).

1. Subject Pronouns

(1) The Independent Pronoun

1\(^{st}\) person singular: the customary form in all the Aramaic dialects

אֶנָּה
ואֶנָּה אַשְׁחֵתָהוֹ דָּרְבּוֹן דָּוִיד בָּאָרָה
ואֶנָּה אֲבֹרָה
רְבָּנָה אַתְּנָה חַטָּבְכֶנָה
אֶל אַנָּה מִיָּה

2\(^{nd}\) person feminine singular:

אֶת
אֵה אַנְתָּבְעַתָא אֲפֹרָה. אַי מְלֹּךְ רְקִינִּי אֶנְיָנָ
דָּנְתָא שֵׁלִילָּה כָל מְלָכְי
ה.אָכֹדְּמָא אַנֶּה רַקְוֶל

2\(^{nd}\) person masculine singular:

אָנָה
אָנָה בֵּשַׁמְתָּה אֲפֹרָה. אַי מְלֹּךְ רְקִינִּי אֶנְיָנָ
דָּנְתָא שֵׁלִילָּה כָל מְלָכְי
ה.אָכֹדְּמָא אַנֶּה רַקְוֶל

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The first examples here are quoted from the section “saba” for sentences, and the complete ones from “yanoa” (3:186a-192a) and from other sources.
3rd person masculine singular: the dominant form in the Zohar

This form, common in the different dialects of Aramaic, also appears in the Zohar especially in fossilized sayings:

3rd person feminine singular:

3rd person feminine plural: there is no special form for the feminine (similar to the spelling in Biblical Aramaic)28

28 The pronunciation already distinguishing between אינין and אינון.

29 This complex form is considered to be fixed and fossilized and the clitic pronoun –na does not suffice to mark the first person and therefore it is preceded here by the additional ‘ana’.

We are not concerned here with the ambiguous meaning of this phrase (past, 1st person singular; past 1st person plural)30, since the pronoun becomes the tense morpheme of the verb and ceases to be the subject pronoun.

29 The pronunciation already distinguishing between איניני and אינון.

30 This complex form is considered to be fixed and fossilized and the clitic pronoun –na does not suffice to mark the first person and therefore it is preceded here by the additional ‘ana’.
2. The Possessive Pronoun

(1) The clitic pronoun\textsuperscript{31} when the possessor is singular:

\textsuperscript{30} See the chapter on the verb §§11, 17.

\textsuperscript{31} Here we first discuss the clitic pronoun because it is more frequent and basic than the independent pronoun.