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Etymology and Polysemy: A Non-Objectivist Approach to the Domain of Vision in the Semitic Languages
On Some Arabic Roots and Their Etymological Relevance

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Abstract
One of the features of Arabic is the distinction between the pharyngeals ʕ / ḥ and the velar/uvular fricatives ġ / ḫ. The present article will focus on a number of Arabic roots containing one of these four consonants. Such a comparison may contribute to further investigations concerning the following two objectives: First of all, to consider the possibility of loanwords in early Arabic, or Semitic, that might explain the existence of two different roots with similar meaning. And, secondly, to take into account the possibility of semantic interference between different roots. Moreover, the question of semantic interference and inner-Semitic loans deserves some attention due to its relevance for etymological considerations.

Key words: Etymology, semantic interference, loanwords, Arabic, ġʿaz, Hebrew, Syriac

A main objective of the present article is to study the opposition between pharyngeals and velar/uvular fricatives in Arabic. This includes sketching a—preliminary, and certainly extensible—list of minimal pairs that show this opposition, as well as proposing some new etymological relations. The latter are, in general, in accordance with the regular correspondences and might not represent loanwords. Nevertheless, loanwords and semantic interference between different roots will be taken into consideration. In all this, however, the following two restrictions have to be acknowledged:

– Since Arabic has the largest attested lexicon of all Semitic languages, it has been used to interpret roots of uncertain meaning in several ancient Semitic languages, like, e.g., Ugaritic and Sabaic. This is especially relevant in those cases where the languages do not have a manuscript tradition and research has to rely on a comparatively small text corpus.¹

– It might be tempting to include a discussion of minimal pairs of voiced and unvoiced sounds. This, however, deserves a treatment in its own right. Before any such inclusion, a primary assessment of such phenomena like voicing, devoicing, assimilation and dissimilation may be needed in general.

¹ Cf., e.g., RENFROE 1992. It is self-evident that whenever the interpretation of a word in such a language is based exclusively on the Arabic lexicon a comparison with the Arabic lexicon makes little sense and gives no additional evidence whatsoever for a certain interpretation.
The distinctive phonemes

The inner-Semitic correspondences show the clearest sound changes with the pharyngeals, the velar fricatives, the laterals and the interdentals, which are given in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pharyngeals</th>
<th>velar fricatives</th>
<th>laterals</th>
<th>interdentals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab.</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaṯaz</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ʕ (ḥ)</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aram.</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>ʕ (q)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebr.</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akk.</td>
<td>ʕ</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, the correspondences of Arabic ʕ, i.e., sˤ (ʃ) and sˤ (s), the spirantization of pl/ ṭ and b/dl in Aramaic and Hebrew and the sound change of p to f in Arabic and South Semitic might make a difference in loanwords. The following text will treat some pairs of Arabic roots with an inner-Arabic opposition between pharyngeals and velar fricatives, taking into account their cognates in other Semitic languages.

The Arabic roots

Several Arabic roots containing either pharyngeals or velar/uvular fricatives are presented below. The roots are arranged according to the Arabic alphabet. Arabic roots that differ only in one of these consonants will be listed together and not separated.

(1) ʕḥdː Arab. ḥadara “to swell, to fatten; to incline, to descend”, Jib. ḥodor “to turn, to look aside”, Hebr. ḥādor “to enter, to penetrate”, Ugar. ḥdr “(funeral) chamber”, cf. Arab. manzil “house, station” from Arab. nazala “to descend”.

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2 One might think also of the similarity between South Semitic ṭḥ, Arab. ṭibh “profit”, and Northwest Semitic ṭwb, Hebr. ṭwah “profit”.
\(\text{√ḥdr}:\) Arab. \(ḥidrn\) “curtain, shelter”, \(ḥadırā\) “to be numb, asleep; to paralyze”, \(ḥdāra\) “to conceal; to stay (in a place)”.\(^7\) Cf. Gaṣṣaz \(ḥadārā\) “to spend the night”.\(^8\) Sab. \(ḥdṛ\) “(funeral) chamber”.\(^9\) Jib. \(ẋdīr\) “to put up a sunshade”.\(^10\)

The meaning “(funeral) chamber” could have been—in either case—a loanword that had been interpreted as being from the corresponding other root, i.e., a hypothetical loanword Arab. \(ḥidrn\) “funeral room” might have been associated with something like “shelter”, “restricted place” or “place of sleep” and a hypothetical loanword Arab. \(ḥidrn\) “funeral room” might have been associated with something like “place to descend, station, cave”. Moreover, the Arabic meaning “to conceal” might be influenced by Aramaic \(ḥōdar\) “to surround”, which is related to Hebr. \(ḥāzar\) “to return”.

\(\text{√ḥšr:}\) Arab. \(ḥasira\) “to be laid bare, to lay bare, to be in distress”,\(^11\) Sab. \(ḥsbr\) “to be in distress”.\(^12\) Gaṣṣaz \(ḥasra\ l ḥasra\ “to be disgraced”, cf. also Akkad. \(eseru\) “to press for payment due”.\(^13\)

\(\text{√ḥšr:}\) Arab. \(ḥasira\) “to suffer loss”;\(^14\) Gaṣṣaz \(ḥasra\) “to be wasted, to be reduced”;\(^15\) Jib. \(ẋsr\) “to lose; to pay a bride-price”;\(^16\) Hebr. \(ḥāšēr\) “to diminish, to lack”;\(^17\) Syr. \(ḥasur\) “to be wanting; to lose”, Ugar. \(ḥsr\) “to be missing”;\(^18\) Akkad. \(ḥesēru\ l ḥasārā\ “to chip”.\(^19\)

Arab. \(ḥasira\) “to be in distress” could be compared to Gaṣṣaz \(ḥasra\) “to be disgraced”. It is not improbable that there were two roots in Gaṣṣaz. It cannot be excluded that \(ḥasira\) “to be in distress” may be a very old loan word going back to \(ḥasīra\) “to loose, to chip”.

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\(^13\) CAD 1958, IV: 332; von Soden 1965, I: 249ff. The latter could be associated with and related to Arab. ġasūra “to be hard, difficult; to be in difficulty”.


(3)  \( \sqrt{dhr} \): Arab. \( dāhara \) “to push (away), to defeat”,\(^{20} \) a synonym to \( ḥabīdā, ḥāḥara \) “to drive away” and to \( sāhaqa \) “to crush out”, \( ḡāzāz dāhara \) “to drive out, to send away”\(^{21} \). Jib. \( dāhār \) “to find, to befall”, \( edhār \) “to lean on”\(^{22} \) cf. also \( ḡāzāz dhabrā “after, behind”.\(^{23} \)

\( \sqrt{dhr} \): Arab. \( dāhara \) “to become small, base, to shrivel up (?).”\(^{24} \) The root is contrasted to Aráb. \( fāhara \) “to get big, to take pride”.\(^{25} \) The root is probably related to Syr. \( döher “hardness”\), \( ḥāhar “to make hard”.\(^{26} \) The root might be related to \( ḡāzāz dāhara “to marry off, to sanction, to allow”;\(^{27} \) since Arab. \( dāḥīrūn means “being small” and probably “lacking pride”.

\( ḡāzāz dhabrā “after” is usually derived from Sem. \( Ḵhr “behind”;\(^{28} \) but the similarity to Aráb. \( ḥabīdā and sāhaqa and the Jib. meaning “to lean on” suggests that \( ḡāzāz dhabrā “to follow behind” could have been \( dhr, and was later linked to \( Ḵhr. On the other hand, one could argue for a semantic relation between \( \sqrt{dhr “small, hard” and \( dhr “far”, since something that is left more and more behind is getting small and little or even scarce, cf. also Hebr. \( ṭō-vittim ṣhōqūt, lit. “at distant times”, i.e. “at rare intervals, seldom”. In this case, one might ask, whether \( dāhara “to push away” could be an old loanword in Arabic.

(4)  \( \sqrt{dīm} \): Arab. \( dāšama “to strengthen, to support, to assist”.\(^{29} \) It is not clear, whether this root is somehow related to Jib. \( dāṣam \) “to crash into”.\(^{30} \) One might think of something like “to throw in” and “to be thrown in”.


25 Cf e.g. the Arab. saying al-\( ḥāwwalā ḥāhirūn wa-l-⊆bhrā ḥāhirūn “the first one is getting big (or taking pride), and the other one small,” az-ZABĪDĪ 1972, XI: 278.


27 LESLAW 1991: 129.

28 Cf. LESLAW 1991: 129. The derivation from \( Ḵhr or \( ḱhr alone lacks a good explanation of the \( d \) in \( dhrbā, as long as there are not more examples in support of a sound correspondence \( t/t \) to \( d \) in \( ḡāzāz.


\textbf{\textit{\textbf{v}dgm}:} Arab. \textit{da\text{"a}gama} “to befall, afflict sb. (heat, frost), to be heavy (rain), to hit and break the nose, to cover up, conceal (vessel)”, \textit{da\text{"a}gima} “to get a black nose, afflict sb. (heat, frost)”,\textsuperscript{31} Magh.-Arab. \textit{d\text{"a}gm} “to bruise”.\textsuperscript{32}

Considering the meaning of both roots, interference is possible. Jib. \textit{da\text{\text{"a}m}a} “to crash into” and Arab. \textit{da\text{"a}gama} “to befall” are quite close in meaning. In contrast to \textit{da\text{\text{"a}m}a}, Arab. \textit{da\text{"a}gima} is to be seen in the context that several derivations of this root have somehow to do with the nose, cf. Arab. \textit{\text{"a}d\text{"a}gam} “having a black snout (about a wolf who is suspected to have eaten something forbidden to him), having darkened or reddened nose tip and chin, having a dark face”, \textit{\text{"a}d\text{"a}gama} “to insert the bit or noseband of the birdle into the mouth of a horse”, \textit{\text{"a}g\text{"a}m} “to break the nose to the inside”.\textsuperscript{33} The root \textit{\text{"a}gm} has, therefore, a clear connotation that distinguishes it synchronically from Jib. \textit{da\text{\text{"a}m}a} “to crash into”. Nevertheless, Jib. \textit{da\text{\text{"a}m}a} could be related to Arab. \textit{da\text{\text{"a}m}a} “to support”. Thus, I would not exclude that one of the two forms may be an old loanword.

\textbf{(5) \textbf{\textit{\textbf{v}dm}:} Arab. \textit{\text{"a}d\text{\text{"a}m}a} “to lack, to lose, not to have, to be destitute”,\textsuperscript{34} Ugar. \textit{\text{"a}dm} “loss, misery, desolation (?)”.\textsuperscript{35} In a technical usage Arab. \textit{\text{"a}damun} can mean “debit” and is an antonym to Arab. \textit{milk\text{"i}y\text{\text{"a}m}a} “credit”, cf. also Syr. \textit{\text{"a}s\text{"a}r} “to be wanting” and Ugar. \textit{\text{"a}sr} “debit”.\textsuperscript{36} Anything that is still on the agenda and is not acquitted is still missing. Ga\text{\text{"a}z} \textit{\text{"a}dd\text{"i}m\text{"a}m} “to designate, to determine, to convokve” is probably related.\textsuperscript{37} cf. Ga\text{\text{"a}z} \textit{fa\text{"a}q\text{"a}m} “to want” as opposed to Arab. \textit{fa\text{"a}q\text{"a}m} “to lose” and Amh. \textit{g\text{"o}\text{"a}d\text{"a}y} “affair, matter, wanting” as compared to Amh. \textit{g\text{"o}\text{"a}d\text{"a}al} “to be missing, to lack”.

\textbf{\textit{\textbf{v}dm}:} Alg.-Arab. \textit{\text{"a}damun} “salicornia fruticosa”.\textsuperscript{38} The word is not well attested and could be regional, cf. also Arab. \textit{\text{"a}damun \text{"a}\text{"a}d\text{"a}m\text{"a}mun} “arthrocnemum macrostachyum” and \textit{\text{"a}damun} “serophularia”. Arab. \textit{\text{"a}damun \text{"a}\text{"a}d\text{"a}m\text{"a}mun} is described as a sort of \textit{\text{"a}m\text{"a}d\text{"a}m\text{"a}n}, which is a generic term for several ‘desert’ trees like, e.g., saxaul.\textsuperscript{39}
The Ugaritic meaning “loss, misery” shows, how similar Arab. ḥasira “to lose” and Arab. ḥasira “to be in distress” are actually. A relation between Arab. ṣhadum “lack, debit” and Gaṣz Ṣaddāmī “to designate, determine” seems obvious. Nevertheless, it escaped the notice of Leslau in his etymological dictionary of Gaṣz.40 There is no obvious semantic similarity between the root ḏdm and Arab. ḡudum. Arab. ḡudum could be, however, from the root ǧgm, considering that the source that is quoted by Dozy refers to plant names in Algeria and that the dentals and the interdentals are usually not distinguished in the Arabic dialects of that area. The latter could mean that ḡudum is a dialect form of Arab. ḡudamun.

(6) ṯḏh / ṣḏw: Arab. Ṣiddūn “(thorn) trees”, Ṣiddatun “(thorn) tree”, cf. Hebr. ūš “tree”, 43 Ugar. ūš “tree, timber, beam, staff”. 44 Gaṣz ūš “tree”, 45 Akk. ʾṣu “tree, timber lumber, wood, wooded area”. 46 Cf. also Arab. ʾṣāsun “stick”, which is not far from ūš “(piece of) wood, stick”, 47 and ṣiddātun / ṣḏwun “part, piece”. 48

.badlogic: Arab. ḡudan “saxaul tree” or similar to saxaul, maybe also “Calligonum comosum L’Her”, 49 is designated by the Arabic lexicographers as the prevalent tree in the Najd50 and is often described as a sort of tamarisk.51

That both roots, i.e., ṣḏh and ṣḏw, might be related has already been suggested adducing for the etymology of Hebr. ūš both Arab. ṣiddatun and Arab. ḡudan as “tree”.52 The Gaṣz

40 LESLAU 1991: 56.
47 Cf. e.g. CLINES 2007, VI: 512.
49 HESS 1917: 104f.
52 See KŒHLER 1967, I: 817.
plural Šḏaw suggests the plural form fišal from the Singular fiš of a root tertiae infirmae.\textsuperscript{53} Nöldke links Šidḥun “(thorn) tree” to Šidun Šiddun “thorn bush”, which leads to a refutation of a relation of Šidun “thorn bush” to Arab. Saḏa to “bite”.\textsuperscript{54} Nevertheless Arab. Šiddun Šiddun might indeed be at first the “biting” and then used secondarily for “pricking (bush)”. When Šidun “pricking bush” was contrasted with Šidḥun “trees” the obvious difference was that the latter is bigger and the most obvious common ground that both terms include thorn trees. The acceptance or rejection of the link to Šiddun “pricking bush” also explains why the definition “thorn tree” for Šidḥun instead of just “tree” was obviously not everywhere accepted.\textsuperscript{55}

(7) \textsuperscript{56} \textsuperscript{57} \textsuperscript{58} \textsuperscript{59} \textsuperscript{60} \textsuperscript{61} \textsuperscript{62} \textsuperscript{63} \textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. Nöldke 1910: 145.
\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Nöldke 1910: 145; Ibn Manẓūr, XIII: 516: Wa-qīla ʾīl-Saḏar i-šagāri kullu-hā Šidḥun, and ibid.: 517: Qīla [Ibn Barī ?]: Wa-l-ʾArab tasammū kullu šagāratii ṣaṣimmatii wa-kullu ṣeṣīn gāza i-buqāla i-Šidḥu ... wa-qīla i-Šidḥu kullu šagāratii ṣaṣimmatii i-buqīla kānun ka-hā sawāl ṭaw li-yakan.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. Debro 1989: 280.
\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Leslau 1991: 621; Dillmann 1865: col. 895.
\textsuperscript{60} Cf. Levy 1924, IV: 516; Kane 2000, I: 322 u. 326.
\textsuperscript{62} Cf., e.g., the Arab. personal pronouns huwa and hiya.
Summary

The objective of the present article was to treat several Arabic roots and their etymological relevance. Since oppositions between pharyngeals and the velar/uvular fricatives are also relevant for comparative Semitic studies, the article focuses on roots that differ in these consonants. The issues that are addressed by the present study are various. Some possibilities like the question whether Arab. ǧadān “saxaul tree” is to be linked to Hebr. ǧes “tree” are taken up. A small number of etymological relations are newly proposed as with Arab. ǧadima “to lack”. And in some cases, the difficulty of semantic interference has been addressed, as with the contrasting of Arab ǧiddun “pricking bush” and Arab. ǧidḍān “(thorn) tree” or with Arab. ḥadara “to conceal” and Syr. ḥadar “to surround”.

Since Arabic is one of the languages that distinguishes the pharyngeals and since it has a large text corpus attesting many roots, further research on Arabic etymologies might help to get a better understanding of the language history of Arabic and its relation to other Semitic languages. Moreover, the comparisons also have some relevance for Gəzəz. Thus, Gəzəz ḥasra “to be disgraced” and Gəzəz ḥasra “to be wasted” is usually considered to be only one root, because ḥasra can occur as a mistake for ḥasra. However, since ḥsr is attested in Arabic and Sabaic with a comparable difference in meaning, one might argue for two roots in Gəzəz.

Furthermore, one can assume that Arabic has a number of inner-Semitic borrowings, such as from Aramaic, South Semitic and Akkadian, at a very early stage. Due to the specific sound correspondences and phonetic peculiarities of the respective languages, one can expect certain rules or correspondences in these loanwords. Moreover, assuming that there was some kind of bilingualism, semantic interference is not improbable. Another research topic is the inner-Arabic semantic development.

With the present article the author hopes to have contributed to a small number of these Arabic and Semitic etymologies and the wider questions that are involved in these comparisons, i.e. the question of loanwords and semantic interference, but also the question of inner-Arabic semantic development. The presented preliminary list of roots is to be complemented and amended in further articles.

Bibliography


63 Cf. KOEHLER 1967: I: 817f.
65 An example would be the proposed theory that the primary meaning of Arab. Ǧidḍ is rather “tree” than “thorn tree”, but that the term was narrowed down to the second meaning, because it was put by the lexicographers in direct opposition to Ǧidḍ “pricking bush”.

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