4Q543 2 1–2 and the Verb “To Give” in Qumran Aramaic

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1 Introduction

In fragment 2 of the Aramaic text 4Q543 (Visions of Amram), the verb נתן occurs twice (in line 1 and line 2), in both cases preceded by the conjunction ו-, “and.” The lines are only partially preserved but the verbs are clearly attested:

עלמין ונתן לך חכמה

In Biblical Aramaic, as is well known, the roots NTN and YHB make up a suppletive paradigm. NTN occurs in the prefix conjugation (imperfect) and in the infinitive but is never used in the suffix conjugation (perfect). Instead, when a writer wants to use the verb “to give” in the suffix conjugation (and in the imperative and in participial form), the root YHB is used.¹

NTN occurs in Dan 2:16 (יִנְתֵּן); 4:14 (יִתְּנִנַּ); 9:29 (יִתְּנִנַּ; Ezra 4:13

YHB occurs in Dan 2:21 (יָהֵב), 23 (יְהַב), 37 (יְהַב), 38 (יִתְיְהֵב), 48 (יָהֵב), 3:28 (יְהַב), 4:13 (יָהֵב), 5:17 (יָהֵב), 18 (יְהַב), 19 (יִתְיְהֵב), 28 (יָהֵב), 7:4 (יָהֵב), 6:3 (יָהֵב), 11 (יִתְיְהֵב), 12 (יָהֵב), 14 (יָהֵב), 22 (יָהֵב), 25 (יָהֵב), 27 (יָהֵב), 3:28 (יָהֵב), 4:13 (יָהֵב), 5:17 (יָהֵב), 18 (יְהַב), 19 (יִתְיְהֵב), 28 (יָהֵב), 30 (יָהֵב), 31 (יָהֵב), 6:3 (יָהֵב), 7:4 (יָהֵב).²

A similar system of suppletion can be observed in some other varieties of Aramaic.³ On this background, the occurrences of נתן in 4Q543 would

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³ The suppletion only applies to the basic stem.
⁴ See note 3.
⁵ See note 3.
⁶ Classical Mandaic uses NTN only in the prefix conjugation (in the basic stem) and in the infinitive. See Rudolf Macuch, Handbook of Classical and Modern Mandaic (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), 292. In Syriac, the root in question is NTL rather than NTN due to assimilation with the preposition ל-, which would often follow the verb “to give”; see Carl Brockelmann, Syrische Grammatik mit Paradigmen, Literatur, Chrestomathie und Glossar, 9th ed. (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1962), 87. However, NTL occurs in the same type of suppletion with YHB as attested for NTN and YHB in Biblical Aramaic, i.e., NTL is used in the prefix conjugation and in the infinitive, YHB in the suffix conjugation. See, e.g., Jessie P. Smith, A Compendious Syriac
naturally be parsed as a first-person plural prefix conjugation, i.e. “and we will give.” This is the way Puech translates the forms in DJD 31: “[...] ta parole, et nous te donnerons. [...] les générations éternelles et nous te donnerons sagesse.” Similarly, García Martínez and Tigchelaar render the lines as follows in The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition: “[...] your word, and we will give you [...] for ever, and we will give you wisdom [...].” However, in his recent edition with translation and comments, Robert Duke translates the verbs using the simple past tense, i.e. as third singular masculine suffix conjugation: “[...] your word. And he gave to you [...] eternal generations. And he gave to you wisdom.” In contrast to Puech’s blanket statement that NTN is used only in the prefix conjugation in Aramaic, Duke correctly notes that we do find cases of NTN in the suffix conjugation in some types of Aramaic. It is clear that the suppletion known from Biblical Aramaic and other dialects is the result of a historical evolution. Folmer states: “Originally, ntn ‘to give’ was used in all the conjugations of the Pe’al. Only later was the verb restricted to the imperfect and infinitive while yhb, with the same meaning, was used in the perfect, imperative, and participle (suppletion).” Duke mentions four examples of suffix conjugation NTN and states that these are only a few “among many.”

This contribution offers a critical examination of Duke’s claim in an attempt to establish the extent of the supposedly widespread use of NTN in the suffix conjugation. It is necessary to decide which types of Aramaic attest to this usage. After a general survey of the use of the verbal root NTN in earlier types of

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Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 354. Similarly, in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, the root used for the prefix conjugation is most often NTB, the -b being possibly the result of assimilation of the original final -n with the preposition b-, according to Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press; Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 780. Alternatively, NTB might be seen as a conflation of NTN and YHB. In modern Aramaic, the suppletion known from the earlier stages of the language does not seem to be attested (and in the Eastern varieties, the verbal system has undergone a thorough reorganization, including the loss of the basic distinction between prefix and suffix conjugation; hence, a suppletive paradigm of the older type could not be maintained in these types of Aramaic).

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7 Puech, DJD 31:295.
10 Puech, DJD 31:295.