THE TWO NEGATIVES \{n\} AND \{m\} IN EGYPTIAN AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN DISTANTLY RELATED LANGUAGES

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Joining in the tribute to the esteemed Werner Vycichl, although only to a small extent does my research overlap his, I offer a paper based partly upon a section from the chapter on syntax, in the sequel that I am writing to Semitic and Indo-European: The principal etymologies, with observations on Afro-Asiatic (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995).

The difference between the two kinds of negation in Egyptian is illustrated by\{n rHF\} ’he does/did not know’ (Gardiner 1957:
\{m snd\} ’do not fear’ 260, 376).

The most exact parallel to the Egyptian distinction is found in Indo-Iranian: [(Rigveda 1.7.7)
Sanskrit \{na vind\"e asya sus\'titim\} ’I don’t stint his praise’
\{ma t\’at kar indra\} ’don’t do that, Indra’ (8.45.31). Avestan makes the same distinction between \{na\} and \{ma\}.
\{na\} has cognates too in various IE languages, and so has \{ma\} but not in the same ones (Pokorny 1959:703, 756–757); e.g.
Latin \textit{nescit ‘he/she doesn’t know’} (Plautus, \textit{Bacchides} 334, etc.) but \textit{noli ir\'arsier ‘don’t get angry’} (Capti\'ui 840),
Goth. \{barei biubos ni u\:'graban\} ‘where thieves don’t dig up’ but also \{ni huzdjai\'b\} ‘don’t hoard’ (Matt. 6:19–20).
Greek \textit{t\'od’ o\'i k\'ompo\'i l\'eg\'o ‘this I don’t say with a boast’ but \mu\'i t\'uto l\'ex\'h\i ‘don’t say that’}.

The Arabic negative \{ma\}, unlike either the Egyptian \{m\} and the Sanskrit \{ma\} = Greek \textit{mu\'h}, is restricted to certain \textsc{indicative} constructions:

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\textsuperscript{1} Euripides, \textit{Helen} 393, \textit{Iph. Aul.} 361. Like the Latin \textit{ne- as a prefix of adjectives (nescius ‘unknowing’, etc.), \textit{ne-}, as a prefix, occurs vestigially in Greek adjectives: \textit{niketosn ‘incurable’ (< \textit{ne- + akeistosn ‘curable’}; cf. the imperative verb \textit{auk }\sigma\alpha\i ‘cure, heal’), \textit{nelees ‘pitiless’ (but cf. o\'u o’ e\'le\'se\i ‘he will not pity you’, \textit{Iliad} 24.207).}
{mā yuzakkā(velopment) (development) 'the man is not [= no man is]
declared righteous' (Caspari – Wright 1898:20);
{wa|mā kafara sulaymānu} ‘and Solomon did not disbelieve’
(Qur’ān 2.102). If the Qur’ān were translated into Sanskrit, the
negative would be {nā}, not {mā}.²

The close correspondence here between Egyptian and certain Indo­
European languages is odd, but not unique; cf.

Egyptian {ḥnty}: Latin ante, Sanskrit {āntī} ‘in front {of}’.

In the Semitic family, Hebrew syntax employs two negatives with
nearly the same distinction as in Sanskrit (among IE languages) and
in Egyptian:
{lo’ tūrā} ‘I shall not fear’ (Ps. 56:5,12, etc.)
{ʔal tūrā} ‘do not fear’ (masc. sing., Deut. 1:21, etc.).³

Biblical Aramaic likewise distinguishes
{lō yəḥophōdā”n} ‘they shall not destroy’ (Dan. 2:18) from
{ʔal təḥophōdēd} ‘do not destroy’ (2:24).

{lō’/lā’} is possibly cognate to the Egyptian {n}, since Egyptian
seems to have lacked a liquid consonant of this quality. Neither is
{l} found in Avestan, and it is rather rare in Sanskrit, although fre­
quent in Latin and nearly throughout IE otherwise. Obviously {lo’
/lā’} is cognate to Akkadian and Arabic {lā}; these Semitic lan­
guages, however, use {lā} also where Hebrew and Aramaic have
{ʔal}—e.g. the Arabic translation of Deut. 1:21,
{lā tāhaf} ‘do not fear’, while ‘and I do/shall not fear’ is
{wa/lā ?aḥāfu} (Qur’ān 6.81;
{lā ḥāf} in the Arabic version of Ps. 56:5,12).

With indicative verbs Arabic uses either {lā} or {mā}; the differ­
ence between them is fine indeed (Caspari – Wright 1898: 300).⁵

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² Ehret 1995:301, #572, posits cognates of Arabic ma, Egyptian m in proto­
Cushitic “*ma- ‘to avoid’” and proto-Chadic “*may-(a) ‘hunger’ . . .”
³ Greek ovd ‘instead of’. Hittite {ḥa-an-ti} ‘apart’ may admit of the meaning
‘in front’, according to some but not all authorities (Pokorny 1959:49–50, Illich­
Svitych 1965:354). Egyptian {sn.t/s.t} ‘hundred’ resembles these IE forms: Lithuanian
šimt’as (aside from the masculine singular case-ending), Sanskrit {śatām}, Avestan
{satam}, Ch. Slavonic {sato}—more than Latin centum, Gr. εκατόν, etc. See Levin
⁴ Also {lo’ tūrā} ‘she’ or ‘you (masc. sing.) shall not fear’ (Pr. 31:21, Ps. 91:5, etc.).
⁵ A rule of syntax common to Semitic and, in part, to the ancient IE languages
is the exclusion of the imperative from negative commands. Indo-Europeanists call
the Skt. {kar} in {mā kar} injunctive, while the equivalent term of the Semitists