NOTES ET DOCUMENTS

ON CLASSICAL ARABIC LĀ SIYYAMĀ

BY

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Hardly any particle in Classical Arabic is more complex than lā siyyamā if one is to judge by the treatment of the noun following it and by the wide variety of possibilities for syntactic function of siyy and mā as proposed by the Arab grammarians. Apart from a number of rare and irregular usages of this particle1, it enjoys a high degree of stability in form and meaning. This, however, is counterbalanced by the variety of options the speaker has in the noun that follows it, as it can assume any of the three cases, namely, nominative, accusative, and genitive, if it is indefinite, and either nominative or genitive if it is definite.

The Arab grammarians’ preoccupation with ta’il, especially for case endings, is obviously behind the utter confusion in their explanation of siyy and mā as well as their differences over a number of issues in constructions with lā siyyamā2. Barring the less accepted explanations, the grammarians are in general agreement that lā is for tabri’a (i.e. nafy al-gins), and that siyy is its noun3, with the predicate elided, presumed to be: mawgüd or the like. Less agreement is encountered in their explanation of mā and the noun

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1 As in the forms lā tsiyyamā, tā siyyamā and lā siyyamā. The omission of the conjunction wāw which precedes it is also considered irregular, as is the omission of lā itself (Ham’ al-hawāmi’, Cairo, 1909, I, 234). To the rare examples the grammarians produce as evidence for the omission of the lā may be added the line: siyyamā li-man qad gāza mā’araka l-radā; cf. volume 22 of al-Wāfi bi’t-wafayāt, edited by the present author (Wiesbaden-Beirut, 1983), p. 60, and n. 3, and Ganda’ni’s expression: siyyamā wa-l-qal al-lad dakarahu muḥtall; cf. Sirāfī, Šarh abyāt Sibawayhi (Damascus, 1979), I, 60. It is strange that the grammarians consider the examples which lack the wāw as irregular. Out of sixteen examples of lā siyyamā which I found in Ibn Rašíq’s ‘Umda (2nd. ed., Cairo, 1955), only two are preceded by wāw (II, 64, 77), while the others are not (I, 75, 195, 222, 230, 241, 275, 285, 288, 292, 304; II, 17, 56, 176, 249). That Ibn Rašíq, a famous balb, does not use the wāw here should be enough evidence for the permissibility of such usage. Also to be noted is that in nine out of the sixteen examples, lā siyyamā is followed by wāw, a usage of which there is no mention by the grammarians. Cf. also K. Gazzī’s observations on the rarity of lā siyyamā in a number of sources he examined (Kalima fi ‘wa-lā siyyamā’; awwal man qālahā. RAAD, 6, 1926, 300).

2 It should be noted that very little is said of lā siyyamā in the early sources of grammar (cf., for example, Sibawayhi’s Kitāb, Būlāq ed., I, 298, 350). I rely in this note on the later authors who discuss this construction exhaustively.

3 Even this explanation is not unanimously approved, as Fārisi is reported to have suggested that the expression has the sense of circumstancial accusative rather than denying the genus; cf. Ibn Hišām, Muqīn l-labīb (Cairo, 1356 A.H.), I,140. Whether lā is for tabri’a or otherwise, and whether or not the fatha of siyya is that which accompanies the noun of lā as the grammarians say is of no concern to us here. It may be pointed out, however that the

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following it, but the most common of these can be tabulated as follows, where Imru' al-Qays’s *wa-lá siyyamá yawmn/an/in bi-Ddrati Gulguli* stands as the model, especially as *yawm* is indefinite, thus allowing for all three possibilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>siyya</th>
<th>mà</th>
<th>yawm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nominative</td>
<td>construct⁴</td>
<td>relative (genitive of the construct)</td>
<td>predicate of an elided noun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accusative</td>
<td>«absolute»</td>
<td>restringent</td>
<td>specificative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genitive</td>
<td>construct</td>
<td>redundant</td>
<td>genitive of the construct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Far from using *lá siyyamá* as a model for examining the validity and coherence of Arab grammatical theory, the purpose of this article is, more modestly, to try to determine the function of *má* which, itself, determines the case ending of the following noun. The assumption here is that *má* could have, at least when this construction was first introduced, no more than one function, and that the noun that follows it is most likely to have been restricted to one case ending. The complex picture that developed later cannot be traced to one factor, but is probably due to three concurrent factors: (1) the usual process of change or even corruption, (2) dialectal variations, and (3) grammarians’ attempts at systematization of linguistic material.

In determining the nature of *má* in a construction like *wa-lá siyyamá yawmn/an/in*, we can resort to two sorts of constructions of similar nature, but where *má* is more easily explicable:

1. a construction in which *má* is followed by a verb. Although this construction is rare—and perhaps archaic—it has the advantage of a clear correspondence in its deep structure to a construction in which *allađi* is used. Thus *lá siyya má yuniluka*⁵ (with *siyya* and *má* intentionally separated here) is directly related to *lá mițla allađi yuniluka*, both in structure and meaning.

2. a construction in which *má* is not preceded by *siyy*. This is in the expression *lá iara má Zaydun*, the *taqdir* of which, according to Suyūtī is: *lá tubsir ... allađi huwa Zaydun*. Applying the same criterion, the construction *lá mițla má Zaydun*, which Suyūtī mentions, should be equivalent to *lá mițla allađi huwa Zaydun*. Furthermore, the similarity in deep structure of *lá siyya má* and *lá mițla má* can also be shown by the *taqdir* applied by grammarians for another particle, *ka-*, which is similar in meaning to *mițl* and *siyy* but does not idiometrically appear after *lá*, and is therefore not discussed by the grammarians with *lá siyya má*. Here we are told that *iğ'al laná itáhan ka-má lahum últátun*⁷ is equivalent to *ka-alláđi huwa huwa últátun*⁸.

resemblance between *siyyamá* and *mițlamá*, both with a *fatḥa* although the latter is not necessarily preceded by *lá*, argues against the *fatḥa* being that which accompanies the noun of *lá*.

⁴ The distinction between construct (*mu'daf*) and «absolute» (*gaffür mu'daf*) is a distinction between *mu'rāb* and *mabná*, and is taken from constructions like *lá rağula 'indaná* and *lá rağula hayrin 'indaná* where grammarians say that the noun of *lá* is *mabná* in the first example but *mu'rāb* in the second.


⁷ Qur'ān 7:138.

⁸ *Mugni l-labib*, I, 177.