

### A finer look at the Christian Urmi verbal stems

Most modern grammars of Northeastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) seem to use roughly the same approach to analyzing the systems of verbal *stems* (also called *patterns*, *binyanim*, *classes*) in these languages. Coghill (2003), Khan (2007), Fox (2009), Lyavdansky (2009), Greenblatt (2011), and Khan (2016a) to name a few, distinguish three main verbal stems (usually labeled as I, II, and III) for verbs that have trilateral roots and sometimes other stems for quadrilateral verbs (e.g. QI and QII in Christian Urmi). In this talk, I will argue that such descriptions might be simplified, at least for some NENA varieties, by looking at the verbal system of Christian Urmi from a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

To define the morphosyntactic status of the Urmi verbal stems, I first analyzed the existing grammar (Khan 2016a) and dictionary (Khan 2016b), after that the additional data was elicited in the village of Urmiya (Krasnodar Krai, Russia).

Formally, there are only two inflectional verbal classes in Christian Urmi (see a similar approach in Nöldeke 1868: 211), because stems II, III, QI, and QII have the same vowel patterns in all inflectional forms and are opposed to stem I. The former four stems differ in the arrangement of the consonants, but it can be described as an automatic process inside the one inflectional class (Khan 2016: 262-263), and in the occurrence of the prefix *m-* in stems III and QII. As I am going to show in my talk, this prefix can be analyzed not as a marker of a distinct inflectional class, but as a causative morpheme that is regularly used to increase verbal valency.

G. Khan distinguishes the five stems on the semantic grounds and treats stems II, III, and QII as morphological causatives. To compare the productivity of these stems, I counted the number of dictionary entries in each stem. As can be seen from the results (see Appendix below), stem II is much less productive than stem III. Furthermore, only half of these verbs (57 entries) contrast with a verb of the same root in stem I and have causative meaning. This number is even smaller according to the elicited data, because the speakers of Urmiya haven't confirmed the existence of some verbs in stem II, tending to use stem III instead. Stem III, in turn, is very productive and indeed can be analyzed as a morphological causative, because it has an explicit marker *m-* and encodes typologically expected meanings (distant causation, causatives from transitives and agentive intransitives, and so on), that I am going to discuss in detail in my talk.

There are also some diachronic comments on the history of these stems in the grammar (Khan 2016a: 262), “Pattern I is the descendant of the *pəʿal* pattern of earlier Aramaic, pattern II corresponds to the erstwhile *paʿel* and pattern III to the erstwhile *ʿapʿel*”. However, the situation might be more complex and heterogeneous. As already was mentioned by Nöldeke (1868: 213) and Talay (2008: 251), past templates in stems II (*qutal-*) and III (*muqtal-*) cannot be derived from the *paʿel* and *ʿapʿel* passive participles of earlier Aramaic (cf. Syriac *mqaṭṭal* and *maqṭal* respectively). They must be the descendants of so-called inner passive, that is known, for example, from Hebrew *puʿal* and *hofʿal* stems, but is very rare in Old and Middle Aramaic (Kalinin & Loesov 2022).

Thus, I suggest that from a synchronic perspective, the verbal stems traditionally described for Christian Urmi and other NENA varieties have different morphosyntactic status. One should distinguish only two inflectional verbal classes in Christian Urmi. Inside the second class there is a small semantic class of unproductive causatives (partly stem II in G. Khan's system) and a productive *m-* derivation. From a diachronic perspective, a detailed analysis of the history of Aramaic passive stems is needed to describe Neo-Aramaic verbal stems and their origins.

## References

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**Appendix.** The number of verbs of different stems according to dictionary (Khan 2016b)

Stem	I	II	III	QI	QII	SUM
Verbs	533	109	277	399	22	1340
%	40%	8%	21%	30%	2%	100%