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SOME SPECIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE ADNOMINAL
PRONOUNS IN NEO-SEMITIC

1. Preliminary remarks:

In the present paper the term “adnominal” is applied to pronouns, both suffixed and independent, which are usually designated as “possessive” in grammars of the Semitic languages. The purely formal term “adnominal”, that carries no semantic connotations, seems more adequate for our purpose which is to demonstrate that the use of these pronouns goes far beyond simple rendering of possessivity. It had been suggested in the past that all the functions of nominal sentence components may be reduced to three basic cases, namely: nominative representing the subject, accusative as verb complement and genitive as the complement of nouns and prepositions¹. In the Semitic languages, ancient as well as new, all these functions may equally be rendered by means of the adnominal pronouns. Moreover, in the modern languages some new roles have further been devolved upon these grammatical elements.

The modern languages examined in the present paper belong to the peripheral branches of Semitic, i.e. to Eastern Neo-Aramaic and to Ethio-Semitic, but other languages are occasionally mentioned. Two specimens were chosen from Eastern Neo-Aramaic: Urmi Christian Neo-Aramaic from Iranian Azerbaidjan (henceforth UCNA²) which serves, since the middle of the 19th century, as a literary medium, and

¹ See Polotsky 1979: 208-209 and the bibliography on that theory since 1841 adduced there.

² Abbreviations: Am – Amharic; Ar – Arabic; Arg – Argobba; E – English; ES – Ethio-Semitic; F – French; G – Gəʿəz; Gr – Greek; H – Hebrew; IH – Israeli Hebrew; KK – Kurmandji Kurdish; M – Mandaic; NA – Neo-Aramaic; OS – Old Syriac; P – Polish; S – Semitic; Ta – Tigrinya; UCNA – Urmi Christian Neo-Aramaic; Y – Yiddish; ZJNA – Zaxo Jewish Neo-Aramaic.