

# REVIEWS

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## THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

N. J. C. KOUWENBERG:

*The Akkadian Verb and Its Semitic Background.*

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Wide-ranging, informed by linguistic theory and cross-linguistic evidence, studded with excellent contrastive examples, and rich in discoveries of all kinds and sizes, this strikes me as one of the most brilliant and important works in Akkadian grammar and linguistics which I can remember reading. It is a comprehensive investigation of the Akkadian verb, and its strong emphasis on historical development will do much to renew interest in Semitics among Assyriologists (hopefully, also vice-versa!). It is an essential acquisition for any library or individual interested in Akkadian, or Semitics at large.

For this reviewer, the most striking feature is how Kouwenberg treats irregularity. Most Akkadian grammarians devote little attention to the irregular, and tend to present exceptions as irritating distractions. Kouwenberg, by contrast, takes great interest in them, and in his expert hands they cease to be isolated oddities, emerging instead as the outcomes of tugs of war between competing forces. A small-scale example is provided by *mahāṣu* and *ṣabātu*, which have unusual imperatives for verbs of the *a*-class (*PaRaS* instead of *PiRaS*): Kouwenberg (p. 74) points out they also distinguish themselves from other verbs of their class through higher transitivity. This in turn fits into a broader pattern, newly chartered by Kouwenberg, of different degrees of transitivity affecting many aspects of verbs' behaviour. What emerges from such observations is a more complex and nuanced way of thinking about Akkadian as a whole.

Another of Kouwenberg's great innovations is to study the Akkadian verb as a *system*. Central to his analysis is the contention that the present/imperfective *iPaRRaS* is a secondary formation, which supplanted the original *yiPRiS* (distinguished from the past/perfective only by its vowel). From this idea, Kouwenberg derives knock-on effects for many branches of the verbal paradigm. The arguments he makes are wide-ranging and complex, reaching well back into Proto-Semitic. I am not competent to assess them all, and indeed I suspect that it will take a long time for the field to digest them.

Especially fascinating (and, in my view, persuasive) is the account of the history of the Gt stem (§ 14.4): originally it had a detransitive function, but it gradually fell out of use, and its various forms were dismembered and integrated into new paradigms – the Gt preterite (which Kouwenberg calls the perfective) became the G perfect; prefixed forms of the Gt were eschewed, to save confusion with perfects and Gtn forms, while non-prefixed forms multiplied in elevated style; *taPRiS(t)*-nouns gave rise to the  $\dot{S}t_2$  stem (§ 14.6.2.2).

A sample of other ideas and observations which excited me: the strictest incompatibility rules pertain to the first two root letters, because they are most often adjacent (p. 130, fn. 12). Outside regular verbal paradigms, Akkadian tends to avoid *u* and *i* in the same word (135, fn. 33). The reason for the ousting of the preterite by the perfect was the latter's greater expressiveness (pp. 153–4). “In non-verbal clauses with a pronoun the subject is verb-final” (p. 165). Explanation for the rarity of active statives of high-transitivity verbs (pp. 171–2). *itti* can introduce the agent in passive constructions (p. 257). Unlike *sahāru* G, *sahāru* N is only used with animate subjects

(p. 297). The N stem's coupling of passive and ingressive functions is mirrored by English *get* and German *werden* (p. 299). The literary use of the Š stem in place of the D stem is confined to compositions dating from after the OB period (329, n. 14). Excepting *izuzzu*, II-*voc.* verbs whose first radical is a sibilant do not form a Š stem (p. 486). Ntn forms are common for verbs from II-*gem.* roots (p. 429).

Inevitably, not everybody will agree with everything in this enormous book. Here are some instances where I found myself dissenting: p. 163, fn. 7: in Neo-Assyrian, *nap-ha-ta* can painlessly be interpreted as /naphat/ (ditto for *nap-ha-ta-ni* in the same letter), without ventive ending. p. 168: Kouwenberg attributes the absence of feminine *t* in statives of nouns to the notion that they are a secondary development from statives of adjectives. But could the two cases not result from a common principle, e.g. mutual exclusivity of feminine *t* and stative *-at* on the grounds that they share what is historically the same *t*? p. 196: Re the two exceptional plural infinitives, could *šina ši-tu-li ukīn* "I have considered two alternatives" (ARM 28, 2:5) instead super-literally be something like "I fixed my doubting at two", with possessive rather than plural *-t*? And could *da-ma-qi-šu-nu idammiq le-mé-ni-šu-nu ilemmin* "il jouira de leurs joies, il souffrira de leurs peines" (ARM 8, 1:4–5) use the adverbial *-t* of GAG § 113 k? p. 201: Is *akālu* Š really "lexicalised to such an extent that it has the status of a basic verb"? pp. 207–8: Kouwenberg's suggestion that the function of the infix *-ān-* in participles is to strengthen their association with the finite verb is plausible, but perhaps not definitive. p. 230, fn. 65: the idea (rejected by Kouwenberg) that nominalization is somehow active in the history of the subordinative suffix seems to me to be supported by the complete overlap between prepositions and subordinators in Akkadian; more specifically, by the absence of subordinative suffix in Neo-Assyrian *kīma* clauses: *kīma* has ceased to be a preposition in Neo-Assyrian, hence it is no longer necessary to nominalize clauses governed by it. pp. 242–3: Since ventive *-nim*: accusative *-ni* = dative *-šum*: accusative *-šu*, part of the explanation behind *-nim* may be analogical pressure. pp. 272–4: The view that D stems are never causative strikes me as un-compelling: "causative" seems to me a natural enough label for the D stem of e.g. *tāru*, *malū* and *halāpu*. p. 400: I would rather connect *tahluptu* "armour" with the D stem, cf. p. 399, fn. 150. p. 485: Though *mušimmu/mušīmu* and *mudikku/mudīku* might well have originated as D forms, in the absence of finite D forms of their parent verbs, and given the likely interchangeability in meaning between the D and G stems here, one presumes that functionally they would have been perceived as G forms. There is therefore some merit in the von Soden/Kienast view. p. 494: Though some II-*gem.* roots are "dubious" as regards repetitive character, they are all non-punctual. p. 495: Kouwenberg holds that II-*gem.* verbs referring to iterative events "come from genuine triradical roots with identical R2 and R3, not from biradical roots that were secondarily adapted to the triradical paradigm", because in them "reduplication is iconic and therefore an inherited feature of their form". One might equally suppose that the iterative meaning is a secondary development from the basic, non-iterative meaning of an original biliteral root. p. 499: Kouwenberg suggests that final root vowels in III-weak verbs were "in all likelihood" shortened, "if only to create a contrast with vowels that are long through vowel contraction" (e.g. *imnu* 'he counted' vs *imnū* 'they counted') – but this contrast would be weaker if contracted vowels were pronounced bisyllabically.

It remains to thank the author for this masterly display of linguistic and philological virtuosity, which we will all consult and learn from for many years to come.

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