

**The particle *den* – a diachronic and a synchronic analysis**  
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Lexical and grammatical descriptions of the Syriac particle *den* usually propose the Greek particle δε as its origin, and therefore assume that its main function is discursive: to indicate contrast between clauses. While the fact that Greek played some significant role in the meaning and the syntactic behaviors of this particle (second position in the sentence, and occasional contrast with *man*) is undeniable, it is clear that this etymology does not exhaust the analysis of the particle, either synchronically or diachronically.

- 1) At the diachronic level, one should consider the relationship between this particle and the West-Semitic temporal conjunction 'iḏay, attested in Official Aramaic as 'ēdayn, and still represented by the Syriac adverb *hayden*.
- 2) At the synchronic level, it seems that besides the contrastive function of this particle, it is more often used as a marker for a shift of the discourse-topic.

I will first demonstrate this last statement in texts from different genres; Second, I will examine whether this is a Syriac innovation or an inheritance from the Greek; and finally I will discuss the conceptual relationship between a focal marker and a marker of a shift of discourse-topic, illustrating this phenomenon in other languages as well.