Vocative expressions in the history of Aramaic

Aramaic is a Northwest Semitic language with 3,000 years of documentation. Besides in its earliest attestations, Aramaic lacks morphological cases, thus the absence of a vocative case.

In my paper I will portray the various strategies in which this language throughout its long history marked the addressee as the party to whom the collocation is directed. Thus, this paper has a twofold goal: First, to provide for the first time such an overview for this language. Second, I will examine what is the mechanism used for this function in each period, and how each device interacts with the rest of the "grammar". As will become clear the line between the "language system" and the "language use" is not evident. In this abstract I will briefly survey some of these ways and will add more in the paper.

I. Different stress
Obviously this can be revealed only in the contemporary spoken dialects. For example one can find a phonemic distinction in the dialect of Barwar (North-East-Neo-Aramaic[=NENA], where the vocative has a antepenultimate stress while the canonical stress is in the penultimate syllable.

II. Vocative Particles
1) Egyptian Aramaic (Official -500 BCE) and Qumran (Middle Aramaic -200 BCE): *ya* - found also in other Semitic languages, among them Arabic and Ugaritic. The same particle is found 2000 years later in the NENA dialects.
2) Syriac (Late-Eastern Aramaic): *'o* ("O!") - found also in the NENA dialects as well

III. Exploiting of other grammatical devices
A. Use of pronominal pronouns
1) Nominative independent pronoun - In Official Aramaic especially in the Egyptian material (-500 BCE) when addressing someone by his name or by his title ("King") the nominative independent pronoun *'anta* ("you") appears before the name or the title ("You-King, please give us food".)
2) Genitive pronominal suffix – In various periods we encounter the use of the possessive pronouns to mark the addressee, with expression such as "my son" etc. In Syriac, especially in some specific genres we encounter the use of the plural form instead of the singular form ("our master" instead of "my master") for the vocative.

B. Definiteness
In dialects with a morphological distinction between definite and indefinite nouns the vocative tends to be in the definite form. Thus, it appears as something like: "The child, come here!". This is for example reflected in the Aramaic sentences embedded in the Greek text of the New-Testament.

C. A very interesting phenomenon occurred in the Eastern Dialects of the late periods, especially in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (300-700 CE.). In order to describe this phenomenon I should introduce three other phenomena:
a. In these dialects the old distinction between the indefinite and definite nouns was lost. Thus instead of having both *mlak* ("a king") and *malka* ("the king") it had only *malka* for both. The old indefinite forms remained in the grammar for other functions.
b. Apocopation of final open syllables.
c. As we saw, in many dialects the way to express the vocative was with to add the pronominal possessive pronoun. (*malki* "my king=oh king!).

Combining these facts, in these eastern dialects the original form for "my king" *malki* apocopated and became *malk* thus we encounter very often a unique form for the vocative, which in many words, but not in every, is similar to the original indefinite form (ktābā= the/a book ktāb=my book, oh book (originally "a book). Thus we can follow the grammaticalization of a vocative form in these dialects of Aramaic.