Eblaite Ū-MA and Hebrew WM-

GARY A. RENDSBURG

Eblaite ū-ma, the conjunction followed by enclitic ma, occurs sporadically in the Tell Mardikh tablets. Of the materials published so far, it is attested seven times in TM.75.G.2420 and once in TM.75.G.2268.¹ During his visit to New York in February, 1983, A. Archi confirmed that it appears in other texts as well.²

In light of these occurrences, it is appropriate to resurrect and reinvestigate the suggestion of F. I. Andersen more than a decade ago that a cognate construction occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Writing in the days before the publication of the Ebla tablets, Andersen already proposed that several seemingly inexplicable wwm- forms be parsed as conjunctive waw with mem enclitic. He thought wmmhr in Gen 41:32, wmpõ in Judg 13:19, wmsrpw in Amos 6:10, and wmt in Ruth 4:5 were sure occurrences of waw plus mem enclitic, and that possible examples of this construction are present in 2 Sam 16:5, Job 6:22, 7:14, 10:14, 19:26, 21:20.³

Before progressing to a discussion of these passages, we should commend Andersen for his ingenuity, having isolated Hebrew wmm- without the impetus of a cognate language. (One need only compare the method by which most recent advances in Hebrew grammar have been made: usually a usage is clarified in another Semitic language, e.g., Ugaritic, and only then is its appearance in Hebrew revealed.) It should be noted, therefore, that the examples to be presented below can stand on internal analysis alone. If I have adduced the Eblaite evidence first and have included Eblaite ū-ma in the title, it is because (a) these attestations have served as the springboard of my research, and (b) they supply the desired Semitic cognate most often sought by Hebrew linguists.


² In the Ebla texts published so far, enclitic ma is never affixed to the conjunction wa, only to ū. The exact differences between the two Eblaite conjunctions are still to be worked out; cf. D. O. Edzard, “Neue Erwägungen zum Brief des Enna-Dagan von Mari (TM.75.G.2367),” SEd 4 (1981) 89–90, n 4.

Of the proposed examples, Ruth 4:5 is the most important, for the entire story hinges on this difficult and crucial verse. Andersen suggested that Masoretic ùmēʾēt rūt should not be read ‘from Ruth,’ but rather as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, the accusative indicator ʾet, and then the personal name Ruth. He states that “the field is not to be acquired from Ruth as well as from Naomi; rather, when the field is acquired from Naomi, Ruth must be acquired with it, and is the object of the following verb.”

C. H. Gordon has recently taken up the problem again, independent of Andersen’s work and now with Eblaite ù-ʾma as a Semitic cognate to bolster the proposal for a Hebrew wmʾt. Gordon’s analysis of wmʾt is the same as Andersen’s, though whereas the latter implies reading the Qere qnyt (2 m.s. perfect), the former accepts the Ketiv qnyty (1 s. perfect). Gordon therefore translates the verse, “Boaz said: ‘On the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, (well and good); but I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the deceased, to raise the name of the deceased on his estate.’” Boaz is telling Mr. So-and-So that although he (Mr. So-and-So) may redeem the land, he (Boaz) has already obtained Ruth, a fact known to the reader of the story from the secret tryst in 3:6–14. Gordon invokes the Mishnaic law in Qiddushin 1:1 which states that one of the methods of acquiring a bride is sexual intercourse, and thus Boaz is legally correct in claiming to have acquired Ruth already.

Another clear instance of enclitic mem following conjunctive waw is Amos 6:10: ēnēšāʾō dōdō ēmēṣērēpō lēhōṣī ʾāšāʾîmin min habhayit. Commentators have long recognized the difficulties of wmrspw, but the difficulties disappear when the word is parsed as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, the root srp, and pronominal suffix ŏ. The root srp must be a byform of ṣrp, ‘burn.’ The burning of the deceased’s bones, while usually considered a heinous crime in the Bible (see Amos 2:1), can be an honorable act as well (see 1 Sam 31:12–13; cf. Iliad 23:208–25, 24:786–87). More important for our present purposes is the observation that Masoretic ēmēṣērēpō is the only Piʿel of ṣrp/srp in the Bible. Elsewhere, this root occurs only in the Qal; in Lev 10:16 ʾōrāp should be read as passive Qal. Accordingly, wmrspw in Amos 6:10 should be revocalized as a Qal, most probably as a perfect parallel to ēnēšāʾō, and be read ēmēṣērēpō. If

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7 See H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, 1977) 280, n. h, for a brief discussion.
this be the case, then Gordon may be correct in analyzing *wmsrpw* as a *waw* conjunctive with the perfect, with *m* interposed, to be translated ‘and he shall burn him.’”

Andersen’s two other primary examples are not as clear, though in one instance there is enough evidence to defend his analysis. Andersen has carefully classified the independent participial clauses of the Pentateuch and notes that *ūmēmahēr hā-‘ēlōhim la-‘āšōtō* in Gen 41:32 is the only one which begins with *waw* and participle. Since we expect *hinneh* as an auxiliary predicator, Andersen concludes, “The explanation probably lies in the survival (masquerading as the participle) of *wm-mhr*, that is, the conjunction has enclitic *mem*, and the ‘perfect’ verb is used as a consecutive future—‘and God will hasten to do it.’”

The fourth example deduced by Andersen is the famous crux in Judg 13:19, *ūmaplī‘ la-‘āšōtō*. His argument that this participle is otherwise unknown is correct per se, but faulty in that enough Hiphîl perfects, imperfects, and infinitives of the root *pl* occur to admit the possibility of the form *maplī‘*. In other words, while this argumentation may have worked for *wm-srpw* in Amos 6:10, it will not work for *wm-plī‘* in Judg 13:19. Moreover, G. F. Moore defended the passage on the basis of similar vocabulary in Isa 29:14, Joel 2:26, and 2 Chr 26:15. Perhaps it is best to conclude, then, that the text either should be accepted without difficulty or should be emended according to any number of suggestions.

Turning now to Andersen’s secondary list of passages, i.e., where “other examples of enclitic *mem* with *w-* may be present,” only 2 Sam 16:5 deserves serious consideration. The final clause reads *yōṣē‘ yāšō‘ ūmēqallēl*. The use of a participle after an infinitive absolute is most extraordinary, for the usual usage calls for a second infinitive absolute or perhaps a finite verb. S. R. Driver commented, “The type is unusual: *yōṣē‘ yāšō‘ wēqallēl* would be the ordinary one.” Both Driver and P. Joüon noted that Jer 41:6 *hōlēk hālōk ūbōkeh* offers a suitable parallel, but it also must be pointed out that some manuscripts point *wbbkh* as the infinitive absolute *ūbōkēh*. It is not good linguistic practice to expunge anomalous forms from the corpus, but in light of variant manuscripts for Jer 41:6, we may wish to admit *wmqll* in 2 Sam 16:5 as another example of conjunctive *waw* and enclitic *mem* and read *qallēl* as infinitive absolute. Of the remainder of Andersen’s proposals, all from Job, none is compelling, even though *ūmibbēšārī* in Job 19:26 has elicited much discussion.

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11 Gordon, “The ‘Waw Conversive’: From Eblaite to Hebrew,” 89. See the next example, Gen 41:32, as well.
18 See the apparatus in *BHS*.
But there are still other vocabularies in the Hebrew Bible which are to be analyzed as conjunctive waw with mem enclitic. Ps 147:3 reads hârîpê' lišêbûrê lêb ūmêhabbêš lê'aśsebôt'am. The expression ūmêhabbêš, 'and binds,' seems unproblematic at first glance, but since this verb is not used as a Pi'el in Hebrew,\textsuperscript{20} the pointing is suspect. Indeed, in Hos 6:1 and Isa 30:26 hâš occurs in the Qal parallel to rp, 'heal.' Since these two verbs are also parallel in Ps 147:3, we should read consonantal wnhrân as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, and a Qal form of hâš. Presumably we should read a Qal participle hûbêš, since rîpê' appears in the parallel stich.

In actuality, there is an exception to the above statement that hâš is not used in the Pi'el. In addition, there are two instances where the biblical text has hâš in the Pu'al. All three require comment. In Ezek 30:21 hûbbêšâã should be read as passive Qal, especially in light of the Qal infinitive lêhôbšâã earlier in the same verse. In Isa 1:6 hûbbâšû should be similarly interpreted as passive Qal. The only other Pi'el of this root is hûbêš in Job 28:11. This word has elicited endless discussion, with all sorts of interpretation being offered. The most common solution is to adduce a b/p interchange and to treat the word as akin to hîpâš, 'searches.'\textsuperscript{21} Regardless, it seems certain that hûbêš is not our word 'bind' and therefore we may reaffirm the conclusion that hâš is only a Qal and should be read as such in Ps 147:3.

Through similar methodology we may recover another wn- form. Nah 2:13 reads 'aryêh tôrêp bêdê gôrôtâw ūmêhannêq lêlib âtâw. Elsewhere in the Bible, the root hânq 'strangle' occurs in the Qal, or in the case of 2 Sam 17:23, the Niph' al. In Job 7:15 the nominal form mahânaq occurs, which also implies a Qal form of the verb (ep. ma'âkal from 'kl in the Qal). In the cognate languages, this verbal root appears in the corresponding G-stems; note especially Akkadian hanâqu\textsuperscript{22} and Arabic hanaqa (the root occurs also in derived conjugations with derived meanings).\textsuperscript{23} In light of this cumulative evidence, consonantal wnhrân in Nah 2:13 should not be read as a Pi'el participle, but rather as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, and a Qal form of hânq, presumably the participle hûnêq parallel to tôrêp in the first stich. Accordingly, in three instances—Amos 6:10, Ps 147:3, Nah 2:13—the received text preserved wn- forms followed by Qal verbs, which the Masoretes pointed as Pi'el participles.

Still another passage where a wn- form may be recognized is Num 23:10, mî mânhâ 'ápâr ya'âqôb ūmispâr 'et rôbâ' yišrâ'êl. Exegetes long ago reached

\textsuperscript{20} This holds not only for Biblical Hebrew but for Rabbinic Hebrew as well; cf. M. Jastrow, 
\textit{A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature} (New York, 1903) 423.


\textsuperscript{22} \textit{CAD H}, 77.

\textsuperscript{23} H. Wehr and J. M. Cowan, \textit{A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic} (Ithaca, NY, 1976) 263.
the consensus that Masoretic ʾāmispāʾ is to be emended to ʾāmī sāpar “in agreement with Sam[aritan] and G[reek], to say nothing of the parallelism” with mī mānāh in the first stich.  

However, in light of Eblaite ʾū-ma and with a growing respect for at least the consonantal portion of the Masoretic Text, we may now retain wmspr without emendation. This form preserves conjunctive waw with enclitic mem, followed by the revocalized verb sāpar. The meaning of emended ʾāmī sāpar and that of revocalized ʾūmāsāpar are hardly very different, but this example illustrates well how new evidence can always controvert even the most accepted solutions to textual and philological enigmas.

Returning now to prose texts, we may note three wms- forms in wmsprʾ in Ezek 48:16 and wmʾḥz in Ezek 48:22 (bis). The Masoretes pointed these words respectively as ʾūmīppēʾat and ʾūmēʾāḥuzzat, i.e., they treated the mem in each instance as the preposition ‘from.’ Most commentators realize the impossibility of this interpretation and simply delete the mēms; in the first instance, they at least defend their emendation with the textual support of six variant manuscripts. However, the Masoretic Text may once again be reaffirmed if we analyze these forms as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, and construct noun.

Another example of a wm- form in prose is consonantal wmʾʾi in Neh 5:11, vocalized ʾāmēʾʾar ‘and a hundred of’ by the Masoretes, but surely to be analyzed as conjunctive waw, enclitic mem, and the accusative marker ʾet, exactly as in Ruth 4:6. This passage is treated elsewhere in this volume by C. Wallace, so there is no need to enter into detailed discussion here.

Finally, we come to 1 Kgs 14:14 with what many consider an intrusive ʾūmeh. A typical solution is that adopted by NAB which omits the word based on dittography from the preceding ʾwyrʾām (note the consonants ḫwwm wnḥ). But the received text, even with its problems, may be accepted if we analyze ʾūmeh as waw conjunctive and mem enclitic. Most enclitic mēms in the Bible are


27 C. Wallace, “ʾwm- in Nehemiah 5:11.”

28 Textual Notes on the New American Bible, 353.

29 The entire end of the verse is problematic; see the discussion by J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, Kings (ICC; Edinburgh, 1951) 272.
affixed to the preceding word, but occasionally we do have 
*mh appearing as enclitic mem,*
30 ṭumeh in 1 Kgs 14:14 would be another example.31

At this stage it is worthwhile to summarize the evidence, and then to
proceed to the question of whether Hebrew *wm-* has any special syntactic
function and how it should be translated. Eblaite ḫ-ma, the conjunction and
enclitic *ma,* has led to the search for cognate forms in the Hebrew Bible. Our
investigation has turned up ample passages, in both poetry and prose, where a
consonantal *wm-* in the Masoretic Text should be interpreted as conjunctive
waw and enclitic *mem.* In poetic texts there are four examples, *wmrsrpw* in
In prose texts there are seven or eight examples, *wm ṭ* in Ruth 4:5, *wmhr* in
Gen 41:32, *wmp ṭ* in Ezek 48:16, *wm ṭhzt* in Ezek 48:22 (bis), *wm ṭ* in Neh 5:11,
*wmh* in 1 Kgs 14:14, and possibly *wmqlt* in 2 Sam 16:5.

That Hebrew *wm-* has a special syntactic function becomes apparent from
a closer look at three of the four poetic examples. In the verses below, *wm-*
serves to introduce the second of the parallel stichs:

Ps 147:3 who heals the brokenhearted
*wm-* binds their wounds

Nah 2:13 the lion preys for its cubs
*wm-* strangles for its lionesses32

Num 23:10 who has counted the dust of Jacob
*wm-* has numbered the dustcloud of Israel33

In view of these examples, I am inclined to consider *wm-* as an emphasizing
conjunction and translate it, depending on the context, as ‘indeed, even, verily,
yea.’ In other words, *wm-* cannot and does not occur as a simple conjunction.
One would not use it, for example, in a merism (e.g., ‘heaven and earth’), in a

30 E.g., in Num 24:22; cf. Albright, 222; and Wenham, 181, n 2. Oddly, this example is
missing from the most thorough treatment of enclitic *mem* to date, namely, D. A. Robertson,
*Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (Missoula, MT, 1972) 79–110. Two other
examples of *mh* as enclitic (Ps 21:2, Prov 30:13) are proposed by D. H. Hummel, “Enclitic Mem
in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *JBL* 76 (1957) 99, 102, but neither is particularly
compelling; see Robertson, 102–3; and M. Dahood, *Psalms I* (AB; Garden City, NY, 1966) 131.

31 It is possible that another example of “unattached” *wm-* is to be found in ṭūmāḥ in
Mal 2:15. However, since this passage is “one of the most obscure verses in the entire O.T.” (thus
R. C. Dentan, “Malachi,” *IB* 6 [1956] 1136), I refrain from any detailed discussion. See, however,
J. M. P. Smith, *Malachi* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1912) 59, who feels that the entire problem may be
cleared up by deleting ṭūmāḥ.

32 Parenthetically, one may note that the prophet’s knowledge of nature is somewhat
deficient; it is the lioness who provides food for her mate and cubs, not the lion who hunts prey.
On the other hand, since Nahum intends the king of Assyria, the metaphor of ṣaryēḥ is certainly
more apropos than ḫāḏīr.

33 For a complete discussion of ṭōḇat “dustcloud” see H. R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena
hendiadys (e.g., 'love and mercy'), or in a long list of items, unless there was a special desire by the author to stress a particular point.

This understanding of the function of \textit{wm-} also explains the fourth poetic example, Amos 6:10 \textit{ûnēšā-ô dōdō ūnasērōpō} (revocalized \textit{wmsrwp}), 'his kinsman is to carry him, even to burn him.' As discussed earlier, under extraordinary circumstances the burning of the deceased was an honorable act in the biblical world. To accentuate this exceptional situation, the prophet utilizes the emphasizing conjunction \textit{wm-} instead of the simple conjunction \textit{w-}.

We can observe the same syntactic role for \textit{wm-} in the prose texts. In each of the following cases, \textit{wm-} serves to emphasize what follows, coming right after a simple declarative statement or at the end of a lengthy speech.

\textbf{Ruth 4:5}  
Boaz said, "Today you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, \textit{wm-} I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the deceased, to raise the name of the deceased on his estate."

As alluded to earlier, Boaz has set up this climactic scene in the book and has manipulated Elimlech's closer kinsman brilliantly. He saves his revelation till the end, that no matter what happens to the field, his marriage to Ruth is \textit{a fait accompli}. The author's use of \textit{wm-} to introduce Boaz's disclosure is an effective climax to what is by all accounts a masterly-woven tale. Moreover, the Masoretic accentuation is effective too, since \textit{wm-} follows the \textit{`atnāh}, where Boaz's declaration comes to a momentary rest. Since the second clause of Ruth 4:5 stands adversatively to the first clause, we may add for \textit{wm-} the meanings 'but, however.'

\textbf{Gen 41:32}  
As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been affirmed by God, \textit{wm-} that God will hasten to carry it out.

In this instance, \textit{wm-} introduces the final clause of Joseph's lengthy interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams\textsuperscript{34} and is appropriately used to emphasize the point that the pair of seven-year periods is imminent.

\textbf{Ezek 48:16}  
And these are its dimensions: the north side 4500 cubits and the south side 4500 cubits, \textit{wm-} the east side 4500 cubits and the west side 4500 cubits.

Here \textit{wm-} divides the verse, again coming immediately after the \textit{`atnāh}. The prophet first lists the northern and southern boundaries, then climactically the eastern and western boundaries. Just as the second lines of parallel poetry are introduced by \textit{wm-}, so too the second halves of parallel prose lines.

\textsuperscript{34} Joseph's speech actually continues for four more verses, but the dream interpretation ends here. See the paragraph divisions in \textit{NJPSV} and \textit{NAB}.
Ezek 48:21-22 (bis) The sacred portion and the Temple sanctuary shall be in the middle of it; \textit{wm-} the property of the Levites \textit{wm-} the property of the city shall be in the middle of that belonging to the prince.

There are three areas which were geographically located in the middle of the prince’s property according to Ezekiel’s description of the land. The last two listed are introduced by \textit{wm-}. Whether the prophet intended some special emphasis here is difficult to determine, but it is not unlikely given other usages of \textit{wm-}, including six verses earlier by the same author. It should also be pointed out that the twofold correlative use of \textit{wm-} is paralleled by \textit{ṭ-ṣm-} in Eblaite (TM.75.G.2420 rev. viii 9 [=line 439]).

Neh 5:11 Please return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, \textit{wm-} the money, the grain, the wine, and the oil that you have lent them.

Again \textit{wm-} comes after an \textit{ṭ-nāḥ} and again it is prefixed to the final clause of a lengthy speech. Nehemiah ends his plaint to the nobles with the plea to return to the plebeians what is rightfully theirs and moreover to cancel the debt of owed money and goods. Accordingly, the use of \textit{wm-} here is most appropriate.

1 Kgs 14:14 this day \textit{wm-} even now

Once again \textit{wm-} follows an \textit{ṭ-nāḥ}. The author must certainly have wished to emphasize the imminence of Ahijah’s statement that the house of Jeroboam would fall. He not only utilized \textit{wm-} but the emphatic particle \textit{gām} as well.

2 Sam 16:5 As King David approached Bahurim, there came a man from Saul’s clan named Shimei ben Gera, cursing as he came.

In the discussion on \textit{wmqllf} above, we were unsure on morphological grounds whether to admit the presence of a \textit{wm-} form. On syntactic grounds, the evidence is equally ambiguous; however, the author may have used the emphasizing particle \textit{wm-} to stress the severity of Shimei’s sin, namely, cursing the king. If this be the case, then the use of \textit{wm-} here is most fitting.

It is evident that Hebrew \textit{wm-} had a specific syntactic function. This morpheme was an additional item in the arsenal of emphasizing particles available to Hebrew writers both of prose and of poetry. Whether or not its Eblaite cognate \textit{ṭ-ṣm-} had the same or similar function in the Tell Mardikh tablets is hard to determine due to the difficulty of interpreting the texts. But this is a detail which might be investigated as Ebla research progresses. Finally,

\footnote{For emphatic \textit{gām}, see R. J. Williams, \textit{Hebrew Syntax} (Toronto, 1976) 63.}
another avenue of inquiry which might be pursued is the possible if not probable use of \textit{wm-} in other Northwest Semitic literatures, especially Ugaritic.\footnote{M. Dahood, “Additional Notes on the \textit{MRZH} Tablet,” in L. R. Fisher, ed., \textit{The Claremont Ras Shamra Tablets} (Rome, 1971) 53, has proposed reading \textit{wm} in RS.1957.702 obv. 6 as conjunctive \textit{waw} plus enclitic \textit{mem}. This suggestion was offered independently of Andersen’s proposal for Hebrew and, needless to say, several years before the discovery of the Ebla tablets. Dahood has been followed by B. Halpern, “A Landlord-Tenant Dispute at Ugarit?” \textit{Maarav} 2 (1979–80) 138. However, R. E. Friedman, “The \textit{MRZH} Tablet from Ugarit,” \textit{Maarav} 2 (1979–80) 193–96, is correct in rejecting this interpretation and analyzing \textit{wm} as a dialectal form of \textit{hm}, ‘they.’ As Friedman astutely notes, there are three such instances in RS.1957.702 where \textit{w} occurs for \textit{h}.

It has not escaped the attention of the writer that more than a millennium separates the attestation of this particle in Eblaite and its appearance in Hebrew. Moreover, a good number of the biblical passages cited are late (e.g., Ezekiel, Nehemiah). But this is not unparalleled, for various Late Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew characteristics find their reflexes not in earlier stages of Hebrew or in Aramaic but in earlier Canaanite and Ugaritic usage. See further E. Y. Kutscher, \textit{A History of the Hebrew Language} (Jerusalem, 1982) 85, 128. The same holds for vocabulary items; cf. B. A. Levine, \textit{Survivals of Ancient Canaanite in the Mishnah}, unpublished dissertation, Brandeis University, 1962.}