HEBREW PHILOLOGICAL NOTES (I)

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1. רות “Ruth”

In a recent article, E. A. Knauf suggested that the name רות “Ruth” should be correlated with the root rwT that underlies such words as Moabite ryt “offering,” Sabaic rwT/ryt “decision.”\(^1\) Knauf also put forward the evidence of a Moabite toponym, Yārūt (attested in an 18th Dynasty Egyptian text) as additional support. Thus, according to Knauf, we have triple Moabite evidence: the name of Ruth, the common noun ryt attested in the Mesha Stele line 12, and the toponym Yārūt. With this bounty of evidence from a language so little known, Knauf stated that there is no need to look to Hebrew for an explanation of the heroine’s name.

The Hebrew evidence most commonly cited is the root רות “refresh.” Knauf, however, saw a grammatical problem in such a derivation because he claimed that this root could not produce a noun רות (possible products are *rēwūt, רֵוּת (Job 37:11), and *riyyāh, but not רות, according to Knauf). In this estimation he erred, however.

A morphological parallel to רות in Hebrew is the common noun השע “garment,” attested only in Gen 49:11. Already Abraham ibn Ezra in the twelfth century C.E. realized that the root of this noun is swy and he pointed to the noun תַּפֶּס הָעָלָה “veil,” attested three times in Exod 34:33–35, as another noun derived from the same root.\(^2\) Cognate evidence for the correctness of ibn Ezra’s view is forthcoming from Phoenician, where the forms רית “garment” and רית “veil” (?) are attested.\(^3\) Since Phoenician orthography represents only consonants and not vowels, the waw in these Phoenician forms must be consonantal, and yet in the corresponding Hebrew form הָעָלָה, the waw serves merely as a mater lectionis.\(^4\)

In short, based on the analogy of the derivation of השע “garment” from a root swy, the proper noun רות “Ruth” clearly may derive from a root rwy

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2. Modern dictionaries such as BDB, p. 691; and KB, pp. 541, 651, 654, similarly list both vocabularies from the same root רות (swy).
“refresh.” The evidence put forward here does not mean that Ruth’s name therefore must mean “refreshment” or the like, but the possibility of such an understanding cannot and should not be dismissed so readily.

2. וְבעֵלוּן

The tribal name בַּבעֵלוּן “Zebulun” (written here doubly pleine, for the sake of clarity, though it never appears that way in the Bible) contains an atypical suffix. The normal suffix on both place names and personal names is -ôn (as in Hebron, Gibeon, etc.; Samson, Gideon, etc.), but in the case of “Zebulun” the suffix is -ûn.

This suffix is to be explained via Phoenician evidence. As Joshua Fox demonstrated in great detail, a sequence of vowel shifts in Phoenician includes Ạ > ọ and ọ > Ɂ. Because he was working with Phoenician vowels, for which actual vocalic length is not known, Fox did not include the diacritical marks used to distinguish such vowels in Hebrew (or so I assume). To equate these vowels with their Hebrew parallels, we would mark them as Ạ > ḏ and ḏ > ṣ. That is to say: 1) tone long /a/ shifts to /o/; and 2) etymological long /oː/ or /uː/ via the Canaanite shift or from reduction of the diphthong /aw/, shifts to long /uː/.

The latter shift, which concerns us the more here, can be illustrated by the last vowel in alonuth “gods” (Poenulus 930), the Hebrew equivalent would be -ôt, of course; and by the first vowel in Χουσῳдр = κουσῷ (Sanchuniathon 11), the Hebrew equivalent is ñsăr(ôt) in Ps 68:7.

The suffix on the tribal name “Zebulun” reflects the same shift. While all other such suffixes are vocalized -ôn (which in turn is derived from earlier -ãn via the Canaanite shift), the suffix of “Zebulun” is vocalized -ûn. The geographical location of Zebulun provides the answer for this phenomenon. This tribal territory is the most coastal of all the Israelite tribes (especially after the migration of Dan from the southern coastal plain to Laish in the northeast). See especially the blessings in Gen 49:13 “Zebulun, by the seashore he dwells, and he is a shore to ships, and his flank is on Sidon,” and Deut 33:19 “for they suckle from the abundance of the seas, and the hidden hoards of the sand.”

As I have demonstrated in many recent studies, numerous Phoenician grammatical and lexical features are to be found in Israeli Hebrew as

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6 After completing this section, I noticed that E. Zurro Rodríguez, “Siete hápax en el libro del Génesis,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 51 (1993) 126 and n. 41, already reached the same conclusion. But he did not incorporate the angle of dialect geography as I do herein.
well, or at least in subdialects thereof. Generally we are unable to identify
the contour lines of these subdialects (and often not of the umbrella
dialect Israeli Hebrew either). But in the present instance, I suggest that we
can identify an isogloss that unites specifically the dialect of Zebulun
with Phoenician. The shift of o > u (or better ō > ū) occurred in both, or
at least it is represented in the proper name “Zebulun.”

The only Hebrew vocable which follows the same pattern of “Zebulun”
is יְשָׁרִיָּה יְשָׁרִיָּה “Jeshurun” (again, for the sake of clarity, written here
doubly plene, though in the Bible it is written consistently as יְשָׁרִיָּה, that is,
with only the second waw) appearing in Deut 32:15; 33:5; 33:26; Isa 44:2.
Possibly this poetic term is an Israeli Hebrew form. Deuteronomy 32
shows clear signs of Israeli composition, Israeli Hebrew forms
abound within the blessings directed to the northern tribes in Deuteronomy
33, suggesting the possibility that also the framework of this chapter
(including vv. 5 and 26 with the two references to “Jeshurun”) is northern
in origin. In Isa 44:2, the prophet selected the term “Jeshurun” for reasons
that I am unable to determine. But regardless of how the four attestations
of יְשָׁרִיָּה are to be explained, the vocalization of “Jeshurun,” parallel to that
of “Zebulun,” and in conformity with the Phoenician vowel shift, suggests
that it originated in the northern regions of Israel.

3. בָּא “Utter”

C. H. Gordon has called attention to the problem of the root בָּא:
“utter.” He reconstructed an original *nma, with a vocalic nun at the head
of the word. Eblaite en-ma is derived from this very clearly; one must
assume assimilation in Akkadian to produce um-ma. With the loss of final

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8 Incidentally, the root of “Zebulun,” namely zbl, is most likely an Israeli Hebrew feature as well. I will treat this issue in a forthcoming publication. For the data necessary to reach this conclusion, see Rodríguez, “Siete hapax en el libro del Génesis,” pp. 123–127.
9 The shift ō > o (or better ō > ū) was more widespread in Israeli Hebrew. See Rendsburg, Psalms, pp. 32, 58. Since writing my book on Psalms, I have uncovered additional examples of this shift in Israeli texts; I will present the evidence in my forthcoming monograph on Israeli Hebrew features in those portions of the books of Kings devoted to the history of the northern kingdom.
11 I plan to present this evidence in a future article.
unaccented short vowels in Hebrew, all that was left was ηm, which perforce could only be written as ב (though not to be pronounced nēʔûm as the graphemes suggest).

The correctness of this approach is bolstered by the appearance of this word in Mishnaic Hebrew. In Tannaitic sources the root is never ב, but rather always ב (attested 33 times in the Qal, almost all of which are in the standard phrases רֵיחַ וּכְלָיו “I said to him” and רֵיחַ וּכְלָיו “he said to me”; see, for example, T. Yevamot 12:11, with two instances of each). There is no other example of a root with medial aleph being treated in this fashion. One could assume a) that the form ב was assimilated to that of a regular hollow verb; or b) that the form ב continued, though orthographic conventions changed and the resultant spelling was now ב. In either case, this piece of evidence from post-biblical Hebrew confirms Gordon’s insight into the nature of the root ב: “utter.”

4. חַלָּל “Quail”

More than a century ago, Max Margolis wrote a seminal article on the plural of segolate nouns. Therein he proposed, correctly in my opinion, that the plural of segolates should be viewed as an internal or broken plural, to which has been added the usual plural suffixes (either -im or -ót through Analogiebildung). This view has been expressed by others as well, though Margolis’ short article hardly ever is cited.

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14 Not directly relevant to the present issue, but still of interest is the following. The word ב occurs typically with divine speech in the Bible, and only in four contexts (Num 24:3–4; 24:15–16; 2 Sam 23:1; Ps 36:2; Prov 30:1) with human speech. In Mishnaic Hebrew, it is used commonly with human speech. Elsewhere I have argued that the use of ב with human speech is an Israeli feature; see G. A. Rendsburg, “The Northern Origin of ‘The Last Words of David’ (2 Sam 23:1–7),” *Biblica* 69 (1988) 115–116; Rendsburg, *Psalms*, pp. 39–40; and G. A. Rendsburg, “The Galilean Background of Mishnaic Hebrew,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), pp. 232–233.


Thus, for example, a word like melek “king” bears the plural mēlākīm, which is to be analyzed as plural stem mēlāk + otiose suffix -īm. The external plural can be seen only in the construct form malkē, implying the existence, at least in theory, of an absolute form *malkīm.

There is one Hebrew word which confirms this view, namely, ṣēl “quail.” The cognates Arabic salwā and Syriac salway inform us that we are dealing with a qatil stem (see also the Samaritan tradition šalwī). The biblical corpus does not afford us the singular of ṣēl, which we would expect to be *šēlew. What the Bible does show is the vocalization šēlāw (Exod 16:13; Num 11:32; Ps 105:40), treated as a collective (feminine according to the verbs in Exod 16:13), but clearly of the same pattern as mēlāk without the suffix -īm. More interesting is the sole additional attestation of the word, the plural form ṣalām, vocalized šalwīm, in Num 11:31.

These two forms provide the internal and external plural forms of a segolate noun or qatil form attested for no other lexeme in the Hebrew language. Comparison with Arabic is instructive: most qatil, qitil, and qatil nouns take the broken plural, though occasionally there is the option for the external plural also (thus, for example, sahr “rocks” [collective], with the plurals suhūr [broken] and saharāt [external]).

As typical in linguistic study, the anomalous form allows us to reconstruct an earlier stage of the language. The two unique forms šēlāw and šalām provide us with the raw data for positing a period in early Hebrew when the plural of segolate nouns could be either internal (thus confirming Margolis’ position) or external.

5. מָשַׂה “Truth”

Continuing the above theme, in like manner, ṣēp qōṣṭ “truth” in Prov 22:21, without helping vowel, allows us to see an earlier stage in the historical development of the segolates (in this case a qatil form). This form

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17 I do not mark vocal šwa here, since I consider this an example of medial šwa.
19 However, note by way of comparison the word ʿalw “my repose” in Ps 30:7.
20 My thanks to Alan Kaye of California State University at Fullerton for providing me with this example. While on the subject of Arabic, note that the norm in Hebrew, whereby the external plural ending is attached to a broken plural, occurs occasionally in Arabic, e.g., ḥārij “land,” plural ḥāriṣ, ḥāriṣān.
shows us the intermediate stage, after the case endings were dropped but before the anaptyctic vowel was introduced.

Most likely אֵלָּפֵי qōṣṭ was retained as an option (see also the expected qōṣēt in Ps 60:6) because of the ability of Hebrew speakers to pronounce the final consonant cluster comprised of sibilant plus dental. Even in languages which do not normally permit consonant clusters, a case such as this is more easily pronounceable. As a parallel, note that Hebrew tolerates the very similar consonant cluster of /ʃ/ + /t/ at the beginning of the word שְׁתֵּה “two.”