

HEBREW PHILOLOGICAL NOTES (I)

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1. רוּת “Ruth”

In a recent article, E. A. Knauf suggested that the name רוּת “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 רוּה “refresh.” Knauf, however, saw a grammatical problem in such a derivation because he claimed that this root could not produce a noun רוּת (possible products are **rēwūt*, רִי (Job 37:11), and **riyyāh*, but not רוּת, according to Knauf). In this estimation he erred, however.

A morphological parallel to רוּת in Hebrew is the common noun סוּת “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 מְסוּה “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 סוּת “garment” and סוּיָה “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 סוּת, the *waw* serves merely as a *mater lectionis*.⁴

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

¹ E. A. Knauf, “Ruth la Moabite,” *VT* 44 (1994) 547–548.

² Modern dictionaries such as BDB, p. 691; and KB, pp. 541, 651, 654, similarly list both vocables from the same root סוּה (=סוּה).

³ R. S. Tombaek, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 226; and J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Part Two, *M–T* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 780–781.

⁴ For a thorough discussion see C. Cohen, “Elements of *Peshat* in Traditional Jewish Bible Exegesis,” *Immanuel* 21 (1987) 30–42, in particular pp. 35–36.

“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. זבולון “Zebulun”

The tribal name זבולון *zēbûlûn* “Zebulun” (written here doubly *plene*, 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 *á > o* and *o > u*.⁵ 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 *ā > ō* and *ô > û*. That is to say: 1) tone long /a/ shifts to /o/; and 2) etymological long /o:/, whether derived from long /a:/ via the Canaanite shift or from reduction of the diphthong /aw/, shifts to long /u:/.

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 *Χουσωρ* = *kušor*, (Sanchuniathon 11), the Hebrew equivalent is *kôšār(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 *-ân* via the Canaanite shift), the suffix of “Zebulun” is vocalized *-ûn*.⁶ 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 Israelian Hebrew as

⁵ J. Fox, “A Sequence of Vowel Shifts in Phoenician and Other Languages,” *JNES* 55 (1996) 37–47. For a briefer statement, see S. Segert, “Phoenician and Punic Phonology,” in A. S. Kaye, ed., *Phonologies of Asia and Africa*, vol. 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), p. 61.

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.⁷ Generally we are unable to identify the contour lines of these subdialects (and often not of the umbrella dialect Israelian Hebrew either). But in the present instance, I suggest that we can identify an isogloss that unites specifically the dialect of Zebulun with Phoenician.⁸ The shift of *o* > *u* (or better *ô* > *û*) occurred in both, or at least it is represented in the proper name “Zebulun.”⁹

The only Hebrew vocable which follows the same pattern of “Zebulun” is יְשׁוּרִין *yěšûrîn* “Jeshurun” (again, for the sake of clarity, written here doubly *plene*, though in the Bible it is written consistently as יִשְׂרָן, 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 Israelian Hebrew form. Deuteronomy 32 shows clear signs of Israelian composition.¹⁰ Israelian Hebrew forms abound within the blessings directed to the northern tribes in Deuteronomy 33,¹¹ 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 יְשׁוּרִין 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. נָאם “Utter”

C. H. Gordon has called attention to the problem of the root נָאם “utter.”¹² 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

⁷ The most comprehensive study is G. A. Rendsburg, *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990).

⁸ Incidentally, the root of “Zebulun,” namely *zbl*, is most likely an Israelian Hebrew feature as well. I will treat this issue in a forthcoming publication. For the data necessary to reach this conclusion, see Rodríguez, “Siete hápax en el libro del Génesis,” pp. 123–127.

⁹ The shift *á* > *o* (or better *ā* > *ō*) was more widespread in Israelian Hebrew. See Rendsburg, *Psalms*, pp. 32, 58. Since writing my book on Psalms, I have uncovered additional examples of this shift in Israelian texts; I will present the evidence in my forthcoming monograph on Israelian Hebrew features in those portions of the books of Kings devoted to the history of the northern kingdom.

¹⁰ See the classic study of O. Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses Deuteronomium 32.1–43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Psalm 78 samt einer Analyse der Umgebung des Mose-Liedes* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), especially p. 42; as well as the study of E. Nielsen, “Historical Perspectives and Geographical Horizons: On the Question of North-Israelite Elements in Deuteronomy,” *ASTI* 11 (1977–78) 77–89, especially p. 82.

¹¹ I plan to present this evidence in a future article.

¹² C. H. Gordon, “Vocalized Consonants: The Key to *um-ma/en-ma*/נָאם,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, eds. M. E. Cohen, D. C. Snell, and D. B. Weisberg (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), pp. 109–110.

unaccented short vowels in Hebrew, all that was left was *nm*, which perforce could only be written as נָם (though not to be pronounced *ně'ûm* 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 נָם, but rather always נִם (attested 33 times in the Qal, almost all of which are in the standard phrases נִמַּרְתִּי לוֹ “I said to him” and נִם לִי “he said to me”; see, for example, T. Yevamot 12:11, with two instances of each).¹³ There is no other example of a root with medial *'aleph* being treated in this fashion. One could assume a) that the form *nm* was assimilated to that of a regular hollow verb; or b) that the form *nm* continued, though orthographic conventions changed and the resultant spelling was now נִם. In either case, this piece of evidence from post-biblical Hebrew confirms Gordon's insight into the nature of the root נָם “utter.”¹⁴

4. שָׁלוּ “Quail”

More than a century ago, Max Margolis wrote a seminal article on the plural of segolate nouns.¹⁵ 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 *-îm* or *-ôt* through *Analogiebildung*). This view has been expressed by others as well,¹⁶ though Margolis' short article hardly ever is cited.

¹³ Academy of the Hebrew Language, *The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language, Materials for the Dictionary Series I, 200 B.C.E.–300 C.E.* (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1988), Microfiche 064, plates 13064–13065; and M. Moreshet, *Leqsiqon ha-Po'al she-Nithadesh bi-Lshon ha-Tanna'im* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1980), pp. 223–224.

¹⁴ Not directly relevant to the present issue, but still of interest is the following. The word נָם 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 נָם with human speech is an Israelian Hebrew 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.

¹⁵ M. L. Margolis, “The Plural of Segolates,” *Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 35 (1904) liii–liv. Note, however, that Margolis did not develop his position *de novo*, but rather built on the work of earlier scholars, all duly noted in his short note.

¹⁶ See, for example, J. H. Greenberg, “Internal *a*-Plurals in Afroasiatic (Hamito-Semitic),” in *Afrikanistische Studien*, ed. J. Lukas (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1955), pp. 198–204; C. V. Wallace, “Broken and Double Plural Formations in the Hebrew Bible” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1988); and the recent detailed treatment of R. R. Ratcliffe, “Defining Morphological Isoglosses: the ‘Broken’ Plural and Semitic Subclassification,” *JNES* 57 (1998) 81–123.

Thus, for example, a word like *melek* “king” bears the plural *mēlākîm*, which is to be analyzed as plural stem *mēlāk* + otiose suffix *-îm*. The external plural can be seen only in the construct form *malkê*,¹⁷ implying the existence, at least in theory, of an absolute form **malkîm*.

There is one Hebrew word which confirms this view, namely, שָׁלוּ “quail.” The cognates Arabic *salwā* and Syriac *salway* inform us that we are dealing with a *qatl* stem (see also the Samaritan tradition *šalwi*).¹⁸ The biblical corpus does not afford us the singular of שָׁלוּ, which we would expect to be **šelew*.¹⁹ 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 *-îm*. More interesting is the sole additional attestation of the word, the plural form שָׁלוּיִם, vocalized *šalwîm*, in Num 11:31.

These two forms provide the internal and external plural forms of a segolate noun or *qatl* form attested for no other lexeme in the Hebrew language. Comparison with Arabic is instructive: most *qatl*, *qitl*, and *qutl* nouns take the broken plural, though occasionally there is the option for the external plural also (thus, for example, *šahr* “rocks” [collective], with the plurals *šuhūr* [broken] and *šaharāt* [external]²⁰).

As typical in linguistic study, the anomalous form allows us to reconstruct an earlier stage of the language.²¹ The two unique forms שָׁלוּ *šēlāw* and שָׁלוּיִם *šalwîm* 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. שֶׁשׁ “Truth”

Continuing the above theme, in like manner, שֶׁשׁ *qōšš* “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 *qutl* form). This form

¹⁷ I do not mark vocal *shwa* here, since I consider this an example of medial *shwa*.

¹⁸ For details, see L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 1331.

¹⁹ However, note by way of comparison the word שָׁלוּ *šalwî* “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., *ʿarḍ* “land,” plural *ʿarḍūn*, *ʿaradūn*.

²¹ See G. Bonfante, “On Reconstruction and Linguistic Method” *Word* 1 (1945) 83–94, 132–161, especially pp. 133–134.

shows us the intermediate stage, after the case endings were dropped but before the anaptyctic vowel was introduced.

Most likely $q\bar{o}\check{s}e\check{t}$ was retained as an option (see also the expected $q\bar{o}\check{s}e\check{t}$ 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 /š/ + /t/ at the beginning of the word שנים "two."²²

²² See R. D. Hoberman, "Initial Consonant Clusters in Hebrew and Aramaic," *JNES* 48 (1989) 25–29.