BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

Lulav versus *lu/law: A note on the conditioning of *aw > ù in Hebrew and Aramaic

In a valuable study of “Asseverative *la and Hypothetical *lu/law in Semitic,” 1 J. Huehnergard concludes that both *lù and *law must have coexisted as doublets in Proto-Semitic. Huehnergard’s justification for that reconstruction is as follows: 2

Given the evidence of Hebrew, Aramaic (ʾillù), and Sheri, we must posit an independent particle *lù for PS. On the basis of usage, Arabic law is identical with this particle, as is usually assumed; but the two forms cannot be reconciled phonologically, in that Hebrew and Aramaic ù and Sheri u are not the normal reflexes of PS *aw, while PS *ù is not normally diphthongized to aw in Arabic. . . . Despite this unresolvable discrepancy, these particles obviously reflect one PS form. Now, it is generally advisable to think twice before reconstructing doublets for a proto-language, unless, as sometimes happens, 3 the doublets are attested together in one or more of the daughter languages. Our example is a case in point. Huehnergard’s argument for reconstructing PS *lù does not stand up to careful scrutiny. First of all, it must be said that Huehnergard is mistaken about Sheri. It simply is not true that “Sheri ʿ [is] not the normal reflex . . . of PS *aw.” In Bittner’s material, we find three examples of u < *aw (qum “Trupp, Leute” < *qawm, lum “Tadel” < *lawm, and yum “Tag, Sonne” < *yawm) vs. only one example of o < *aw (hor “Bucht, Flussmundung” < *hawr). 4 In Thomas’ material, we find one or two examples of u < *aw (yüm “day” and eyum, yuhm “sun”) but no examples of o < *aw. 5 And in Johnstone’s material, we find four or five examples of u < *aw (ywm, yuhm “day,” yum “sun; light, sunlight,” lum “blame,” lam “kind” < *lawn, and šuhm “fast, fasting” < *šawm) with no examples of o < *aw. 6 The Sheri form, then, can be derived from *law just as easily as it can from *lù.

Huehnergard is on firmer ground when he states that “Hebrew and Aramaic ù . . . are not the normal reflexes of PS *aw”; but, to mind, this is only part of the story. There is one environment in which Hebrew and Aramaic ù ARE the normal reflexes of PS *aw, viz., following l. Thus, we find four cases of Arabic aw corresponding to Hebrew and Aramaic ù in that environment (lawh = iah’ 7 tablet, board,” lawz 8 = lub “almond tree,” lawlab “spiral” = lubh 9 “spout, References

2 Ibid., p. 573.
6 Th. Nöldeke, Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen (Leiden, 1886), p. 145; Th. Nöldeke, Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft (Strassburg, 1910), p. 43, but the explanation offered by Nöldeke (loc. cit.) for the alteration of the vowel is not convincing.
7 This word is sometimes cited with ù in the first syllable, rather than ʿ, e.g., C. Brockelmann, Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1908), 1:247; K. Beyer, Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer (Gottingen, 1983), pp. 117, 616. Such a vocalization is, indeed, attested in the Babylonian tradition and in its offshoot, the Yemenite tradition, but it is decidedly marginal. Even within the Babylonian tradition, it occurs only in the inflected form lobb-; which competes with lābb-; the uninflected form is always vocalized lābb (I. Yevin, Masoret halakson
palm branch," and, of course, law = là, illà “if”) but no cases of Arabic aw corresponding to Hebrew and Aramaic ò there.

The form làlah is particularly significant because its reduplicated form leaves no room for doubt about the diphthongal origin of û. Clearly we have *lablab > *lawlab > làlah marching side by side with *kabkab > *kawkab > kākāh “star” until the last stage, when the influence of l is felt in the former but not the latter.

How are we to explain this influence? Did Hebrew and Aramaic—or their common ancestor—have a velarized l, at least in initial position? We will probably never know for sure. The fact remains that û is the regular reflex of *aw following l in Hebrew and Aramaic. There is no reason to reconstruct a PS *lù.

Richard C. Steiner

Yeshiva University