



Yuqaṭṭil, Yaqaṭṭil, or Yiqāṭṭil: D-Stem Prefix-Vowels and a Constraint on Reduction in Hebrew and Aramaic

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years.¹⁶ Based on Epstein's etymology for *n^cbšn-^cābīt*, we offer yet another parallel in marriage customs:

At first they [men] used to give merely a written undertaking for the amount of the marriage contract (*k^etubbā*). Consequently, they [the men] grew old and could not take wives [women refusing to marry under such precarious conditions]... It was ordained, therefore, that the amount of the marriage contract was to be deposited in the house of her father-in-law. Wealthy women [whose amount was higher] converted it into silver or gold baskets (*qallātōt*) and poorer women converted it into vessels (*‘ābīt*) for urine.¹⁷

Ginzberg already pointed out that the context demands some small toiletry item and he was inclined to dismiss the entire phrase *‘ābīt šel mēmē raglayīm* as a corrupt text.¹⁸ Actually, as the Elephantine documents and the Talmudic source testify, *‘ābīt* in this passage is not a "vessel for

urine"¹⁹ but a small decorative container or dish which a woman would purchase with her marriage contract money or receive as part of her dowry.

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¹⁹ It may be conjectured that the words *šel mēmē raglayīm* "of urine" are a late addition based on the frequent occurrence of such a vessel in the Babylonian Talmud. *The Babylonian Talmud with Variant Readings*, Tractate Kethuboth, II (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 265, lists no *mss.* with variant readings, but does point out that several medieval commentaries did not have the words *šel mēmē raglayīm* in their texts.

We note in passing that *‘ābīt* as a urine vessel is found only in Babylonian sources; Palestinian texts refer to another vessel called a *g^eraf*. A receptacle for grapes from the root *‘BṬ* does appear in the Mishna, but this is vocalized *‘ebeṭ* in MS Kaufman. If the Talmudic passage cited from *K^etubbōt* is describing the situation in Tannaitic Palestine, as we believe, reference to an *‘ābīt* for urine is unlikely. Yehoshua Brand's description of the *‘ābīt* in his work *Ceramics in Talmudic Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 397-399, is thus incorrect. We are dealing with a single lexeme which represents different *realia* according to the date and provenance of the texts—Egypt, Palestine, and Babylonia.

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *K^etubbōt*, 82b (following the Soncino translation).

¹⁸ *Beiträge*, 60. He also remarks that the parallel passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, *K^etubbōt*, ch.III, p. 32b in the Venice edition, speaks of "cups, bowls, and trays" as the items purchased.

Yuqat̄til, Yaqat̄til, or Yiqat̄til:

*D-Stem Prefix-Vowels and a Constraint on Reduction in Hebrew and Aramaic**

The prefix-vowel of the Proto-Hebrew (and perhaps also the Proto-Aramaic) D-stem imperfect is not *u* or *a*, as is generally believed, but *i*. Evidence is adduced from the Babylonian reading tradition, and (for Proto-Hebrew only) from Amarna transcriptions (inconclusive), transcriptions of Origen and Jerome, and relic forms in the Tiberian reading tradition. The evidence is limited to the first person singular (*ʔeqat̄tel* instead of the standard Tiberian *ʔaqat̄tel*), because the first person singular prefix is the only one which begins with ʔ, the consonant which, more than any other, has protected Hebrew vowels from the ravages of reduction.

In Massoretic Hebrew, the prefix-vowel of the *piel* imperfect (*yāqat̄tel*, *tāqat̄tel*, etc.) is *ā*. Most Semitists would agree with the judgement of Gesenius, Kautzsch, and

Cowley¹ that this prefix-vowel "is weakened from a short vowel."

The controversy begins when we turn our attention to the

* I would like to thank Professors Haim Blanc, Joshua Blau, Ariel Bloch, Moshe Held, Robert Hetzron, Joseph Malone, Shelomo Morag, and Israel Yeivin for their valuable comments on some of the issues raised in this

article, which many of them have not, however, seen in written form. This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the 1975 meeting of the American Oriental Society, held in Columbus, Ohio.

¹ Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley,

quality of that short vowel (which we shall henceforth refer to as the "Proto-Hebrew"² *piel* prefix-vowel). Here we find two theories: one positing *a and the other, *u. The a-theory, espoused by Goetze,³ Beer and Meyer,⁴ Kienast,⁵ Moran,⁶ and Gordon,⁷ is based on Ugaritic forms like *abqt* "I (shall) seek," *aqrb* "I (shall) bring near," *arxp* "I (shall) soar," and *abkr* "I (shall) raise to the status of first-born," though it was actually proposed by Stade⁸ long before the discoveries at Ras Shamra. The u-theory, held by König,⁹ Bauer and Leander,¹⁰ Nyberg,¹¹ Christian,¹² Rundgren,¹³ and Murtonen,¹⁴ is based on the agreement between Arabic

tuqattil, *yuqattil*, *nuqattil*, and Akkadian *tuparris*, *uparris*, *nuparris*. This theory is problematic, however, since an initial *ʔu (first person singular prefix) would ordinarily yield ʔʕ (or ʔo) in the Tiberian tradition rather than the attested ʔā.¹⁵

The two theories mentioned above do not, of course, exhaust the logical possibilities. Proto-Hebrew, as it is commonly reconstructed, had three short vowels: *a, *u, and *i. And yet all of the scholars who have dealt with the problem of the Proto-Hebrew *piel* prefix-vowel have ignored *i—apparently with good reason. After all, *i is the only one of the three vowels which seems to be unattested in all of the languages related to Hebrew. This article will attempt to show, however, that *i is, in fact, attested in a Semitic language which everyone has neglected to check: Hebrew itself.¹⁶

The Hebrew evidence for Proto-Hebrew *i comes mainly from the Babylonian tradition, where *e* is the regular prefix-vowel of the first person singular *piel* imperfect (e.g., ʔēdābber "I shall speak," ʔesāpper "I shall tell," ʔetāher "I shall purify," ʔevāqqeš "I shall seek"),¹⁷ but it is corroborated by evidence from a number of Palestinian sources.

The earliest but most equivocal of these is Amarna letter 252, written in central Palestine in the 14th century BCE, and containing a proverb written in a mixture of Canaanite

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 140.

² The terms "Proto-Hebrew" and "Proto-Aramaic" in this article are meant to be chronologically noncommittal.

³ Albrecht Goetze, "Accent and Vocalism in Hebrew," *JAOS* 59 (1939): 436; idem, "The So-Called Intensive of the Semitic Languages," *JAOS* 62 (1942): 7.

⁴ Georg Beer and Rudolf Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1952), 2:30.

⁵ Burkhard Kienast, "Der Präfixvokal u im Kausativ und im D-Stamm des Semitischen," *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 11 (1957): 104.

⁶ William Moran, "The Hebrew Language in its Northwest Semitic Background," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. 62.

⁷ Cyrus Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965), p. 82.

⁸ Bernard Stade, *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1879), pt. 1, p. 306.

⁹ Friedrich E. König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1881), 1:189.

¹⁰ Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1922), p. 324.

¹¹ Henrik S. Nyberg, *Hebreisk Grammatik* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1952), p. 74.

¹² Viktor Christian, *Untersuchungen zur Laut- und Formenlehre des Hebräischen*, Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol. 228 (Vienna: Rudolph N. Rohrer, 1953), p. 88.

¹³ Frithiof Rundgren, "Das Verbalpräfix *yu-* im Semitischen und die Entstehung der faktitiv-kausativischen Bedeutung des D-Stammes," *OrSuec* 12 (1963): 100.

¹⁴ A. Murtonen, *Materials for a Non-Masoretic Hebrew Grammar III: A Grammar of the Samaritan Dialect of*

Hebrew, *StOr*, vol. 29 (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1964), p. 343.

¹⁵ Gordon, p. 82. This is not, of course, to deny that the D-stem prefix-vowel of Proto-Semitic was *u. At the moment, we are dealing exclusively with Proto-Hebrew.

¹⁶ The present writer believes that comparative evidence should not be adduced until internal evidence has been given a serious hearing. A similar point has been made by James Barr in *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968): "We have to overcome the heritage of that supposedly comparative approach (actually anti-comparative in its effects) which defines a Hebrew word by thinking about what 'it means' in another language" (p. 292)."

In the same vein, but somewhat farther afield, Moshe Greenberg's "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law" in *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin (New York: Bantam, 1970) advocates "insistence on understanding a given body of law in its own terms before leaping into comparisons with other law systems" (p. 20).

¹⁷ Paul Kahle, *Masoreten des Ostens* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913), p. 190; Israel Yeivin, "Ha-niqud ha-bavli u-masoret ha-lašon ha-mištaqefet mimenu" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1968), p. 423.

and Akkadian:¹⁸ *ki-i na-am-lu tu-um-ḥa-ṣu la-a ti-qá-bi-lu ú ta-an-ṣu-ku qa-ti awli^{ti} ša yi-ma-ḥa-aš-ši*. “When ants are smitten, they do not accept (it passively), but they bite the hand of the man who smites them.” The form *ti-qá-bi-lu*, taken by Albright to be the forerunner of Massoretic *tāqabbel*, would seem to show quite clearly that the original *piel* prefix-vowel in Hebrew was **i*.

Unfortunately, the matter is not quite that simple. Two objections may be raised to the above argument. The first is that *tīparrisu* is well-attested in Amarna Akkadian as both a G-stem present and a D-stem preterite,¹⁹ e.g., *ti-dab-bi-bu* “they speak” (G-stem; 138 / 49), *ti-na-ṣi-ru* “they will protect” (G-stem; 130 / 48), *ti-[da]b-bi-ru* “they will drive out” (D-stem; 138 / 69). It is true that the prefix-vowel of such forms may have been simply transferred from Canaanite counterparts, as Brovender²⁰ believes, but this possibility must be weighed against the possibility of more complex modes of Canaanite influence (e.g. hypercorrection²¹).

This first objection does not depend in any way on Von Soden’s unconvincing²² observation²³ that “*ti-ka-BI-lu* . . . kann von *kapālu* ‘wickeln’ abgeleitet werden.” There is no reason to suppose that our central Palestinian scribe was any more reluctant to combine Canaanite roots with Akkadian patterns than was the Byblian scribe who wrote (Amarna 106 / 12-3): *ša-ḥa-at-ši i-li-ú ú ṣa-bat-ši la i-li-ú* “They were able to destroy it, but they were not able to capture it.” The second objection is that cuneiform *i* in the first syllable of *ti-qá-bi-lu* may represent Canaanite *ā* rather than *i*.²⁴ This possibility is suggested by Canaanite glosses like *zu-ru-uḥ* “arm” (Amarna 286 / 12, 287 / 27) and *ti-mi-tu-na-na* “you put us to death” (Amarna 238 / 33) in

which the first vowel is etymologically incorrect. That the first vowel of the Canaanite word for “arm” was not *u* is shown not merely by the Arabic cognate *ḍirāʿun* but also by the fact that dissimilation of high back vowels is already attested at Amarna (*Gi-ti-ri-mu-ni-ma* “Gath-rimmon” < **gint rummōnima* “pomegranate (-juice) press”; 250 / 46),²⁵ not to mention Knossos (*ki-to-na* “tunic” < **kuttōn*).²⁶ It is of course possible to assume that the word for “arm” was an exception,²⁷ but it seems preferable to assume that the first *u* of *zu-ru-uḥ* rendered a reduced vowel of indeterminate or variable quality.

The same is true of the first *i* of *ti-mi-tu-na-na*. The prefix-vowel of Massoretic *tōmiθ* < **tamt* must be original; otherwise we would be unable to use the formal identity, in the imperfect, of the medial-*y qal* and the medial-*w hiṣil* to explain the transfer of several verbs (e.g. *byn* “understand”) from one category to the other—a transfer which is already evidenced in the consonantal text of some of the earliest books of the Bible.²⁸

If these Amarna forms do, in fact, show that Canaanite antepretonic, open-syllabic, short vowels were reduced to a very short vowel of indeterminate or variable quality, then the form *ti-qá-bi-lu* can obviously not be adduced as evidence for a high front *piel* prefix-vowel in the Canaanite of central Palestine.

We might also note, for the sake of completeness, that another *piel* imperfect appears as a gloss in Amarna 245 / 39 (Megiddo). The form in question is customarily read *yu-ka-bi-id* “he honors,” but this form can shed no light on the problem of the Proto-Hebrew *piel* prefix-vowel, since the sign for *yu*, as is well known, also has the values *ya* and *yi*.

Much later, but also much less controversial, are the transcriptions of Origen (early 3rd century CE) and Jerome (early 5th century CE). It is, as a matter of fact, quite customary to compare Origen’s εδαλλεγ “I (shall) jump over,” εχαζεβ “I (shall) lie, deceive,” ερωμεμεχ “I (shall)

¹⁸ William F. Albright, “An Archaic Hebrew Proverb in an Amarna Letter from Central Palestine,” *BASOR* 89 (1943):31.

¹⁹ Franz Böhl, “Die Sprache der Amarnabriefe,” *LSS* 5(1914) / 2(1909):53; E. Ebeling, “Das Verbum der El-Amarna-Briefe,” *BA* 8 / 2(1912):51,61.

²⁰ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 16:1567.

²¹ For hypercorrection in Amarna, cf. Joshua Blau, *On Pseudo-Corrections in Some Semitic Languages* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970), pp. 36-7.

²² The present writer fails to see what sense *kapālu* “roll up, form coils (trans. & intrans.)” would make in this context.

²³ Wolfram Von Soden, “Alter Orient und Altes Testament,” *WO* 4 (1967):42. I am indebted to Professor Moshe Held for calling this article to my attention.

²⁴ Similarly, Assyrian *Me-ni-ḥi-im-me* probably renders Hebrew *Mənaḥem* rather than **Mənaḥem*.

²⁵ Eduard Y. Kutscher, *Ha-laṣon we-ha-reqaʿ ha-leṣoni šel megilat yešaʿyahu ha-šelemah mi-megilot yam ha-melaḥ* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959), pp. 39-40.

²⁶ Émilie Masson, *Recherches sur les plus anciens emprunts sémitiques en grec* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1967), p. 27.

²⁷ There are exceptions in Massoretic Hebrew, but, aside from *kutton*εθ, they are mostly names, e.g., *Zāvulun*, *Yāšurun*, *Yāḏuṭun* (but K. *Yāḏiṭun* 3x), *Ḥoron*, *Šomron*. Kutscher (loc. cit.) believes that Qumran Hebrew preserves additional exceptions.

²⁸ Theodor Nöldeke, “Untersuchungen zur semitischen Grammatik,” *ZDMG* 37 (1883): 525-40.

exalt you," and *ελλελεχ²⁹ "I (shall) praise you" and Jerome's *enasse* "I (shall) test, try" with Babylonian ^ʿ*eqät̄tel*,³⁰ but no historical conclusions have been drawn from this agreement.³¹

There are also examples of ^ʿ*eqät̄tel* in texts with Palestinian vocalization, e.g., ^ʿ*ešawwaxa* "I shall command you,"³² ^ʿ*ehalāla* "let me praise," ^ʿ*ezammāra* "let me sing".³³ The latter two forms are compared by Kahle³⁴ to Babylonian ^ʿ*eqät̄tel*, but this comparison must be judged somewhat hazardous in the light of forms like ^ʿ*esiraw* "his prisoners," ^ʿ*ewonam* "their sin," ^ʿ*helalexa* "your slain," ^ʿ*eh[imelex]* "Ahimelek" collected by Kahle from the same manuscript, which show that Palestinian *e* is often reflex of Proto-Hebrew **a*, even following a laryngal.³⁵

Finally, the Tiberian tradition itself has two first person singular *piel* forms with *e* or *ē* as the prefix-vowel instead of the usual *ā*: ^ʿ*ēzorē* "I shall scatter" (Lev. 26:33, Ez. 5:12, 12:14) and ^ʿ*esōʿārem* "I shall blow them away" (Zech. 7:14). These forms are usually viewed as confluents of *piel* with another *binyan*—either *qal*³⁶ or *nifal*.³⁷ Actually, they are relic forms³⁸ which, together with the Greek and Latin transcriptions discussed above, show that ^ʿ*eqät̄tel* is not a Babylonian innovation but rather part of the Palestinian heritage of Babylonian Hebrew.

One may wonder why the first person singular form of the imperfect should be the only form to preserve the original *piel* prefix-vowel (or, at least, an unambiguous reflex of it) in Babylonian Hebrew. The answer is rather simple. The

first person singular prefix is the only one which begins with ^ʿ, the consonant which, more than any other, has protected Hebrew vowels from the ravages of reduction.

In early Babylonian texts, vowels which would normally have been reduced to *šəwə* are almost always preserved after a glottal stop.³⁹ In fact, the Simple-Sign Early Babylonian vocalization system gives the impression that such vowels (e.g., the *ā* of ^ʿ*ādōni* "my master" and the *e* of ^ʿ*elohim* "God") are as long as similar vowels in stressed syllables, but that is because this system indicates only *phonemic* distinctions.

For a more detailed picture, we may turn to the Compound-Sign ("Complicated") Early Babylonian system. This system has seven signs not found in the Simple-Sign system, which serve, according to Bendavid⁴⁰ to mark allophonic⁴¹ shortening. It is traditional to group the signs of this system into three sets, set 1 containing the six simple signs used (alongside the *šəwə* sign) in the Simple-Sign system, and sets 2 and 3 containing mostly compound signs which are reminiscent of the Tiberian *hatefīm* in that they are made up of set 1 signs with the addition of a *šəwə* sign. The compound signs of set 2 have the *šəwə* sign on top; set 3 compound signs have it underneath.

The distribution of these sets is as follows: in stressed syllables, set 1 only (e.g., the second vowel of *wāyyāʿān* "and he answered"); in unstressed syllables closed by a single consonant, set 3 only (e.g., the third vowel of *wāyyāʿān*); in unstressed syllables closed by half of a long consonant, set 2 only (e.g., the first vowel of *wāyyāʿān*). The present writer is of the opinion that the difference between sets 2 and 3 reflects a tendency to make consonant length more prominent by shortening the preceding vowel, i.e., that if set 1 = long, then set 3 = medium, and set 2 = short. But even if set 3 vowels are not longer than those of set 2, it seems clear that they are at least longer than *šəwə*, and that is really the point which concerns us here.

We may now ask which of these sets occur in open unstressed antepretonic syllables beginning with ^ʿ. Keeping in mind the fragmentary nature of the data, we may say that the reflexes of **a* and **i* (e.g., the *ā* of ^ʿ*ādōni* "my master"

²⁹ This form is emended from σελλελεχ. For other examples of confusion between σ and ε, cf. Einar Brønno, *Studien über hebräische Morphologie und Vokalismus*, AKM, vol. 28 (Leipzig: DMG, 1943), p. 434.

³⁰ Brønno, p. 74; Abba Bendavid, "Menayin ha-ḥaluqah li-tnuoʿot gedolot u-qṭannot," *Lešonenu* 22 (1957):28; Alexander Sperber, *A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 186; Yeivin, p. 423.

³¹ Thus, Yeivin (p. 289) derives Hebrew *təqät̄tel* from an original **tuqät̄tilu*.

³² Paul Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1930), pt. 2, p. 78.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 28*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ This is also true of Hexaplaric ε, but only in etymologically closed syllables. The *piel* prefix-vowel is, of course, always in an open syllable.

³⁶ Yosef Kimḥi, *Sefer Zikaron* (Berlin: M'kize Nirdamim, 1888), p. 40; Gotthelf Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1918), pt. 2, pp. 95-6.

³⁷ Ezra Z. Melamed, "Šimūše lašon ba-miqra ha-meyuḥadim ladonay," *Tarbiz* 19 (1947):10.

³⁸ Yeivin, p. 423.

³⁹ Paul Kahle, *Der masoretische Text des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902), p. 30; Yeivin, pp. 219-20, 225, 227. The Mishnaic form ^ʿ*evorim* "limbs," discussed by Yalon in *Mavo le-niqud ha-mišnah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1964), pp. 40-3, is also to be explained on the basis of this constraint on Hebrew reduction.

⁴⁰ P. 17ff. For other interpretations, cf. the literature cited by Bendavid and by Shelomo Morag, *The Vocalization Systems of Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), p. 33., n. 55.

⁴¹ For possible minimal pairs, cf. Yeivin, p. 287.

and the *e* of *ʿelohim* “God”) are set 3 vowels and are presumably medium,⁴² as is the first person singular *piel* prefix-vowel; while the reflex of **u* (e.g., the *o* of *ʿoholim* “tents”, *ʿoniyō* “ship”) is a set 1 vowel and is presumably long.⁴³ In other words, vowels which ordinarily would have been reduced to *šəwə* show up as medium or even long after *ʿ*.⁴⁴

⁴² In other words, the present writer agrees with Bendavid, p. 19, against Yeivin, *Masoret ha-lašon ha-šivrit ha-mištaqefet ba-niqud ha-bavli* (Jerusalem: Academon, 1973), p. 59, that all set 3 vowels are of the same length, but he disagrees as to what that length was. Bendavid’s position is that set 3 vowels are equal in length to set 2 vowels and hence short.

⁴³ Cf. the *o* of Tiberian *ʿoholim*, which would have been lowered to *š* had it not been long. There are, in fact, no set 2 or set 3 signs for *o*, even though it would have been a trivial matter to create them had they been needed. The present writer, like Bendavid, pp. 26-8, interprets this to mean that Babylonian *o* was always long. Yeivin, *Ha-niqud*, pp. 285, 286-7, believes that *o* had shorter allophones as well, allophones which the system was unable to express, but that is because he rejects Bendavid’s quantitative interpretation of the compound signs.

⁴⁴ One would expect that the function of such a constraint would be to prevent the formation of a phonetically difficult sequence, but the sequence *ʿə* does not seem to be a particularly difficult one. We must remember, however, that vowels which were reduced to *šəwə* following the initial consonant of an unprefixed word were reduced by the same sound change to *ə* in many prefixed forms of the same word, e.g., *rəʿuven* vs. *urʿuven* (Bab. *wirʿuven*), *birʿuven*, *lirʿuven*, *kirʿuven*; cf. Yalon, “Šewa šeʿaḥare šureq be-roš ha-milah,” *Quntresim* 1 (1937; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1963):16-9; and Yeivin, *Ha-niqud*, p. 304; and cf. also the closed-syllabic *i* used in these prefixes in the Compound-Sign Babylonian system. If this sound change had been permitted to operate on prefixed forms of words beginning with *ʿ*, it would have produced instances of *ʿ* plus syllable boundary, a sequence whose difficulty is clearly demonstrated by the fact that *inherited* instances of it were gradually eliminated from Hebrew through epenthesis (as in Tib. *ʿaʿārix* = Bab. *ʿāʿārix* “I shall lengthen,” Tib. *heʿezin* = Bab. *heʿezin* “he listened,” Tib. *ʿeʿesof* = Bab. *ʿeʿesof* “I shall gather”) and (already in Amarna) deletion of *ʿ* (as in Tib. *yoḫal* = Bab. *yoḫāl* “he will eat,” *roš* “head,” *məšəḥi* “I found,” *heveḥə* “you brought,” *məšə* “he found,” *hevi* “he brought”). As a result of these sound changes and our constraint (which constitute, in generative terminology, a diachronic “conspiracy”), there are virtually no instances of syllable-

More important than the protection afforded by *ʿ* to the *quality* of such vowels is the protection afforded to their *quantity*. The examples given above are more or less typical: **a* is preserved as *ā*, **u* as *o*, and **i*, with some exceptions (e.g., *ʿālexām* “to you” alongside *ʿele* “to,” cf. Arabic *ʿilā* “to”; *ʿāmittəxə* “your faithfulness” alongside *ʿemāḥ* “faithfulness”), as *e*.⁴⁵ It is clear, therefore, that the *e* of the first person singular *piel* prefix in Babylonian Hebrew can have no etymological source other than **i*.

What of the Tiberian first person singular *piel* prefix *ʿā*? Must we conclude that it goes back to a different Proto-Hebrew dialect than Babylonian *ʿe*—a dialect with the same *piel* prefix-vowel as Ugaritic? Such a conclusion would, in the writer’s opinion, be totally unwarranted.

We have already seen that **i* is lowered to *ā* after *ʿ* in a few Babylonian Hebrew forms. The same lowering is attested in the corresponding Tiberian forms (*ʿālexən* and *ʿāmittəxə*) and in a number of other Tiberian forms (including some with **i* only one syllable before the accent) whose Babylonian counterparts preserve *e*: Tib. *ʿādomim* “Edomites” (alongside *ʿēdom* “Edom”) vs. Bab. *ʿedomim* (cf. Gr. ἰδομῖται), Tib. *ʿāzay* “then” vs. Bab. *ʿEZAY* (cf. Tib. Aram. *ʿēdayin* “then,” Arabic *ʿidā* “when”), Tib. *ʿāvoy* “Oh!” vs. Bab. *ʿevoy*.⁴⁶ It seems, therefore, that Tiberian lowering was more general than its Babylonian

final *ʿ* in Early Babylonian Hebrew and very few in Tiberian Hebrew (e.g., *yeʿšəmu* “they will be guilty,” *yaʿdimu* “they will be red,” *leʿsor* “to bind,” *neʿdori* “glorious,” *baʿšəm* “their stench,” *maʿpelyə* “deep darkness,” and other derivatives from these same roots). For more on conspiracies, mostly from a synchronic point of view, cf. Charles Kisseberth, “On the Role of Derivational Constraints in Phonology,” Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1969 (Mimeographed); idem, “On the Functional Unity of Phonological Rules,” *Linguistic Inquiry* 1 (1970):291-306; Robin Lakoff, “Another Look at Drift,” in *Linguistic Change and Generative Theory*, eds. Robert Stockwell and Ronald Macaulay (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 172-98; Paul Kiparsky, “Phonological Representations,” in *Three Dimensions of Linguistic Theory*, ed. Osamu Fujimura (Tokyo: Tokyo Institute for Advanced Studies of Language, 1973), pp. 75-82; Charles Pyle, “Why a Conspiracy,” in *Proceedings of the Parasession on Natural Phonology* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1974), pp. 275-84; articles by Jean Aitchison, Roger Lass, and Mary V. Taylor in *Historical Linguistics II*, eds. John Anderson and Charles Jones (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1974).

⁴⁵ Yeivin, *Ha-niqud*, pp. 219-20, 225, 227.

⁴⁶ Yeivin, *Ha-niqud*, p. 225.

counterpart; and, judging from εμεθθαχ “your faithfulness” vs. Tib. ʾāmittāxō,⁴⁷ Tiberian lowering may have been more general than its Hexaplaric counterpart as well. Accordingly, it is not at all surprising that the Babylonian and Hexaplaric traditions should have been more successful than the Tiberian tradition in preserving something close to the original coloring of the *piel* prefix-vowel.

The tendency of ʾ to block vowel reduction is not peculiar to Hebrew.⁴⁸ It can be observed in several other Semitic languages in which vowels have been reduced or deleted entirely.⁴⁹ Thus Nöldeke⁵⁰ writes that in Syriac: “Ein ʾ, welches im Anlaut der Silbe nach Analogie anderer Consonanten einen Vocalanstoß [= s̄āwō nōʾ] erhalten sollte, behält dafür einen vollen Vocal . . .” Similarly, Blanc has pointed out⁵¹ that, in Jewish Baghdadi Arabic (a non-differential dialect⁵²), “Where OA /a/ was preceded by initial /ʾ/, it is usually retained even if unstressed: /abūna/ ‘our father’, /axūnu/ ‘his brother’, /akaltu/ ‘I ate’, /aftāhem/ ‘I understand’, and so on throughout; however, /ʾšil/ ‘well born’ is regular.”

Not surprisingly, Babylonian fragments of Biblical and Targumic Aramaic show the same constraint.⁵³ In fact, this constraint was used by Kahle⁵⁴ to distinguish between the

genuinely Babylonian vocalization of the Geniza fragments and the Tiberianized Babylonian vocalization of many⁵⁵ Yemenite Targum manuscripts. Here too, we find that the constraint has preserved the D-stem prefix-vowel in the first person singular of the imperfect, and that the vowel is e⁵⁶—just as it is in Syriac⁵⁷ and Mandaic.⁵⁸

The following, then, is the distribution of the three D-stem prefix-vowels in the various Semitic languages:

- u — Akkadian, Arabic
- a — Ugaritic
- i — Proto-Hebrew, Proto-Aramaic

The geographical and genealogical distance between Akkadian and Arabic would seem to ensure that any linguistically arbitrary feature shared by them goes back to Proto-Semitic. If so, then the *i of Proto-Hebrew and Proto-Aramaic must be an innovation—one of the several innovations attested in these two languages but not (or not yet) in Ugaritic.⁵⁹

This innovation, if we may judge from the analogy of other *binyanim* (*qal* passive and *hufal*), did not affect the *pual*. The prefix-vowel of the latter almost certainly remained *u. In fact, it was probably the association of *u with the passive (in the perfect of all the *binyanim*) which was responsible for the change in the first place. Speakers came to feel that *u was anomalous as the first vowel of an active verb, and so they replaced *yuqattil with *yiqattil.

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⁴⁷ Brønno, p. 273.

⁴⁸ Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Von Reuther & Reichard, 1908), 1:102.

⁴⁹ It follows that any denial of the existence of vowel deletion in Ugaritic cannot (pace Gordon, p. 30) be based on the testimony of the Ugaritic *aleph* signs.

⁵⁰ Theodor Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste Syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1898), p. 24.

⁵¹ Haim Blanc, *Communal Dialects in Baghdad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 38.

⁵² I.e., a dialect in which syncope is not restricted to short unstressed *high* vowels, but is extended to the more sonorous short unstressed *a* as well. One must be careful (as Professor H. Blanc has pointed out to me) not to adduce forms like ʾanām “I may sleep,” ʾalabbis “I may dress,” ʾabūk “your father,” ʾaxūk “your brother,” from differential dialects as evidence for the tendency of ʾ to prevent syncope.

⁵³ Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1927), p. 66; Kahle, *Ostens*, p. 215.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ For some exceptions, cf. Daniel Boyarin, ed., *Targum ʾonqelos ʿal ha-torah* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1976), p. 11.

⁵⁶ Bauer and Leander, *Aramäischen*, p. 110; Kahle, *Ostens*, p. 224.

⁵⁷ Syriac ʾqattil need not, however, go back to *ʾiqattil, since there are cases of word initial ʾe in that language which go back to *ʾa, e.g., ʾemar “he said” < *ʾamar and ʾeno “I” < *ʾanā, but cf. also ʾamir “spoken” and ʾaqim “I will set up” where initial *ʾa is retained.

⁵⁸ Mandaic ʾeqattil could, however, be the product of analogic leveling, since the first person singular imperfect of every *binyan* begins with ʾe in that language.

⁵⁹ Cf. Joseph Malone, “Wave Theory, Rule Ordering, and Hebrew-Aramaic Segolation,” *JAOS* 91 (1971): 44-66, for other examples.