The Etymology of hištaḥwāh*

Two explanations of hištaḥwāh have been advanced. First, it was once generally agreed that it was the hitpaʿlel of šāḥāh, from a root šhw. Second, it has more recently been thought that it is the hishtaphʿal of a verb *ḥāwāh, from a root ḥwy. The purpose of the present article1 is to examine the arguments for and against the two theories.

The more recent explanation of hištaḥwāh was first, as far as I know, put forward in 1875 by Martin Hartmann, who suggested that it was a reflexive of the shaphʿel of *ḥāwāh, “sich winden”.2 The theory seems to have been ignored...

* List of some of the works cited:
Dozy, R., Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes, Leiden 1881.
Hammershaimb, E., Das Verbum im Dialekt von Ras Schamra, Copenhagen 1941.

1 I am indebted to Professor S. Morag for reading an early draft and for making a number of suggestions, and to Mr J.V. Kinnier Wilson and Professor W.G. Lambert for discussing several Assyriological questions with me. I am also grateful to those who made contributions to the discussion after the article was read as a paper in Leuven on 31 August 1976, especially to Professors P.R. Ackroyd, K.R. Veenhof, and A. van Selms, and to Professors J.C. de Moor and J. Hoftitzer, who are mentioned in other footnotes.

2 M. Hartmann, Die Pluriliteralbildungen in den semitischen Sprachen mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Hebräischen, Chaldäischen und Neusyrischen. Erster Theil: Bildung durch Wiederholung des letzten Radicals am Schluss und des ersten nach dem zweiten, Inaugural Dissertation, Halle 1875. I have not had access to Hartmann’s work, and my knowledge of...
by most scholars until it was advanced again, perhaps independently, after the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, in which the forms yštḥwy and tštḥwy are found in contexts suggesting a meaning identical with that of the Hebrew verb (CTA 1.iii 25; 2.i 15, 31; 3.iii 7, vi 19; 4.iv 26, viii 28; 6.i 38—and in several places where the word is damaged). W.F. Albright claimed in the Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society 12 (1932), p. 197, note 41, that the “orthography [sc. of the Ugaritic verb] shows” that the Hebrew verb “is derived from a stem” *ḥāwāh, and he compared Arabic ḥawā(y), of which the V theme means “coil, of a serpent, etc.” His explanation of the Ugaritic evidence has been accepted in such standard works as E. Hammershaimb’s dissertation on the Ugaritic verb, pp. 53, 221–2; G.R. Driver, Canaanite Myths and Legends, Edinburgh 1956, p. 139; J. Aistleitner, Wörterbuch, no. 912; and—with a different opinion about the etymology—C.H. Gordon, Grammar, § 9.39, and Glossary, no. 847. The same explanation of the Hebrew verb is given in a number of recent works, including L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament 1, 3rd edn, Leiden 1967, pp. 283–4; and R. Meyer, Hebräische Grammatik II, 3rd edn, Berlin 1969, §§ 72.1 (d), and 82.5 (c). In F. Zorell, Lexicon hebraicum et aramaicum Veteris Testamenti, fasc. 1–9, reprinted in Rome 1968, pp. 832–3, the Hebrew verb is derived from šāḥāh but the Ugaritic from ḥwy.

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Before the arguments for and against the two theories are examined, the place of the theme of the verb with prefixed Št or St in Semitic languages will be briefly considered. In Accadian, the causative theme begins with š and the element t is used primarily to express the reflexive idea, and the reflexive of the causative is the Št theme. In South Semitic languages, the Arabic X theme, ʾistafʿala, is the reflexive of the causative IV theme, and corresponding themes are found in Ethiopic and Epigraphic South Arabian.3 The t plainly represents the reflexive idea, and the sibilant the causative; and it may be observed that,

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3 it is derived from the review by T. Nöldeke in ZDMG 30 (1876), pp. 184–8. Nöldeke rejects (p. 186) the theory because the development in meaning from “sich winden” is difficult, because the related šāḥāh “läst sich ferner nicht als Secundärbildung fassen”, and because the shaphʿēl of the verb from which Hartmann derives hišṭāwāh is not attested—and, indeed, Hebrew does not have a shaphʿēl.