DOES A T- PREFORMATIVE THIRD PERSON
MASCULINE PLURAL VERBAL FORM EXIST IN
BIBLICAL HEBREW?¹

by

ROBERT RATNER
Wellesley, Massachusetts

In 1933, H. L. Ginsberg elucidated a passage from the Ugaritic Baal epic (KTU 1.6 [CTA 6] iii, 6-7) by suggesting that a t- preformative third person masculine plural imperfect verbal form existed in Ugaritic, just as it had in the language of some of the scribes who wrote the Amarna letters (including those from Byblos, Gezer, Jerusalem, etc.).² Further Ugaritic texts employing this form were discussed by A. Herdner some five years later.³ The existence of this morpheme in Ugaritic is now virtually certain. With the connection made between forms found in the Canaanite of both Amarna and Ugaritic, it was only natural that scholars would go searching for attestations in the largest body of “Canaanite” literature, namely the Bible. The biblical passages alleged to con-

¹ This essay is a completely revised and rewritten version of a short appendix to my unpublished doctoral dissertation, Gender Problems in Biblical Hebrew (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1983), pp. 63-5 (hereafter referred to as Gender Problems). I would like to thank the Memorial foundation for Jewish Culture, National Foundation for Jewish Culture, and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for their generous support during 1982-3.


tain examples of this morpheme have never before been closely scrutinized.

**Proposed Evidence**

Cyrus Gordon was the first to uncover examples of the t- preformative third person masculine plural verbal form in Biblical Hebrew. He suggested:

1. Dt. xxxiii 3
   \[w\text{hēm tukkū l'rāglekā\]}
2. Dt. v 20 (23)
   \[wattigr'būn ʔēlay kōl-rāʔē šibtēkem wʔziqnekem\]
3. Ezek. xxxvii 7
   \[wattigr'bū ʔżāmōt ʔeśem-ʔ el-ʔāsmō\]
4. Job xix 15
   \[gārē bētī wʔamhōtay lʔzār tāḥi̇būnī\]

Three scholars who followed Gordon proposed:

5. Nah. i 5b
   \[wattīssē hāʔārēs mippānāw wʔtēbēl\]
6. Prov. i 22
   \[ʾad-mātay pṭāyim tʔēhōbū petī\]
7. Ps. lxviii 3
   \[kʰhindōp ʔāšān tīndōp\]
8. Ps. lxviii 14
   \[ʾim-tīskbūn bēn ʾēpptāyīm\]
9. Ps. cviii 38
   \[wattehnāp hāʔārēs baddāmīm\]
10. 1 Chr. x 10
    \[wʔet-gulgoltō tāqʿū bēt ḏāgōn\]

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4 \textit{The New Amarna Tablets}, OR, NS 16 (1947), pp. 1-21, especially p. 10.
6 Moran, \textit{The Hebrew Language ...} (see n. 2 above), p. 71, n. 108. He states: “Nah. 1:5, however, might be noted. Albright has clarified the passage (\textit{CBQ} 7 [1945], pp. 22-23), but instead of rejecting the waw (\textit{bi} W kl), one may see here an indication that the correct reading is the plural form tebalū.”
7 M. Dahood, \textit{Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology} (Rome, 1963), pp. 5-6, states: “The apparent shift from the second person, in the first colon, to the third, in the second and third cola, has occasioned the deletion of the final two cola in Kittel’s apparatus. From Amarna and Ugaritic, however, we learn of a third masc. plur. teqṭūlū in addition to yaqṭūlū. Hence tʔēhōbū may be parsed as third masc. plur., balancing ham’dū and yiš’n’ū.” I am grateful to J. A. Emerton for this reference.
8 Examples 7-9 derive from M. Dahood, \textit{Psalms III.} (Garden City, 1970), p. 387. Concerning Ps. lxviii 3, he states: “they are driven. Vocalizing tinnāḏēpū (MT tīndōp), niphal third person masculine plural; UT, par. 9.14. W. F. Albright in \textit{HUCA} 23 (1950-51), 12, 17, prefers the singular pointing tinnāḏēp, explaining the plural subject ‘foes’ as collective in meaning. While his analysis is possible, the El Amarna evidence points to a plural vocalization of the tqṭīl form in Ugaritic when the subject is formally masculine.” (\textit{Psalms II} [Garden City, 1968], p. 135).
9 W. G. E. Watson, \textit{Archaic Elements in the Language of Chronicles}, \textit{Biblica} 52 (1972), pp. 191-207, especially p. 199, where he states: “The root in Chr. may not be tq, ‘to fasten, affix’ but yq hiphil, ‘to expose’, in which case the form can be explained as 3rd masc. plur. with a preformative t-.”