Morphological Variation in the Imperfect of hewâ in Onqelos and Jonathan

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Long ago, G. Dalman ¹ called attention to the fact that Targum Onqelos preserves two types of the peal imperfect for the verb hewâ, one form with the waw of the root, for example yih-weyan ², and one with the syncopation of the waw of the root, for example yehôn ³. He observed that the feminine plural always uses the waw form and that the first common singular uses it occasionally. Dalman observed this phenomenon in Targum Onqelos only, but drew no conclusions from it, apart from gender distinction in the plural.

Dalman failed to note that Targum Jonathan to the Prophets also attests these forms. Together with this, he failed to observe

¹ This essay originated as a presentation delivered at the Aramaic study session of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, Nov. 24, 1996. Discussions with and suggestions by S. A. Kaufman, E. M. Cook and D. M. Gropp have helped improve its content.
² G. DALMAN, Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch (2nd ed. Leipzig 1905; reprint Darmstadt 1960) p. 353.
³ E. M. COOK, «A New Perspective on the Language of Onqelos and Jonathan», in The Bible in Aramaic, Targums in their Historical Context, eds. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara (JSOTS 166, Sheffield 1994) pp. 142-156: p. 152. Cook observes that while a full vowel follows the preformative of the unsyncopated forms (e.g. yiḥwēl), a shewa normally follows the preformative of the syncopated forms (e.g. yehē). There is some variation in the syncopated form of the ICS, however, where some MSS read 'ehe' with pere after the initial aleph while others read 'ehe' with shewa after the initial aleph.
that *waw* forms of the second masculine singular, third masculine singular and third feminine singular also appear, together with their syncopated counterparts, howbeit marginally. In recent literature, E. M. Cook has remarked that these syncopated forms are unique to the language of Onqelos and Jonathan 4.

In the second and third person plural, as correctly observed by Dalman, the two morphological types distinguish gender. The *waw* forms are used for the feminine, while the syncopated forms are used for the masculine. For example:

2FP  ... דָּבָכְתָּם מְלִלָּהָם (Exod 1:16)
    when you assist the Jewish women in giving birth ...

2MP  נָלַשׁוּ דָּבָכְתָּם חַדְלַתָּם (Lev 19:30)
    and you shall be reverencing my sanctuary

3FP  נְשִׁיטָה שָׁבֹעָהוּ דָּבָכְתָּהָם (Num 35:11)
    they shall be cities of refuge for you

3MP  זוֹן רוּפְךָם לִבְלָב הנִימָמָה (Deut 28:40)
    you shall have olive trees (lit. there shall be olive trees for you) throughout your territory.

In the first common plural, only the syncopated form *nehê* is attested (e.g. Ezek 20:32).

In the second and third person singular, the two morphological types do not distinguish gender. For the 3MS both *yehê* and *yihwê* appear; for 3FS, both *tehê* and *tihwê*; and for 2MS both *tehê* and *tihwê*. In the second feminine singular, only the syncopated form *tehan* appears (e.g. Ezek 23:32). For 1CS, both *'ehê* (vocalized with either *sere* or *shewa* after the initial aleph) and *'ihwê* = *'ehwê* (Vat. 448) appear 5.

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4 Cook «Perspectives» p. 152 observes that the syncopated *waw* form is also attested in Palmyrene. Theres both forms are attested in the same document without any apparent functional or contextual conditioning. Cf. F. Rosenthal, Die Sprache der Palmyrenischen Inschriften und ihre Stellung innerhalb des Aramäischen (Leipzig 1936) p. 41. Some syncopated forms also appear at Murabaat and in Targum Neofiti and express the jussive, perhaps under the influence of Mishnaic Hebrew.

5 For the phonological variation of *patah* and *hiriq* in closed, unaccented syllables, see Elisha Qimron and Daniel Sivan, «Interchanges of *patah* and *hiriq* and the Attenuation Law», Leshonenu 59 (1995-1996) pp. 7-38.
In this essay, I will explore the usage of the two morphological types in the 1CS, 2MS, 3MS and 3FS in Onqelos and Jonathan and propose a working model for explaining their coexistence. First, I will consider their numerical distribution in the corpus; then, their contextual distribution. I used the edition of A. Sperber collated against MS Vat. 448 for Onqelos and against the editions of E. Martinez Borobio for Joshua – 2 Samuel, and of J. Ribera Florit for the Latter Prophets. The relevant readings of the new Babylonian editions where extant agree with those found in Sperber without exception. Only relevant variants are cited in the material quoted.

I. STATISTICS

A statistical computation of the one type over against the other is useful. Because of multiple MSS, some of which contain the counter-form as a variant and some of which contain midrashic pluses not found in other MSS, the exact statistical count may vary, depending on how one counts cases. However, the big picture is clear. For the 1CS, there is about an equal amount of 'ehe"s as 'ihwe"s. In Onqelos, 'ihwê appears more

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6 A. SPERBER, The Bible in Aramaic, Vol. I: The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos (Leiden 1959); Vol. II: The Former Prophets according to Targum Jonathan (Leiden 1959); Vol. III: The Latter Prophets according to Targum Jonathan (Leiden 1962); and The Pentateuch with the Masorah Parva and the Masorah Magna, and with Targum Onkelos: Ms. Vat. Heb. 448, Facsimile Edition (Jerusalem 1977). E. MARTINEZ BOROBIO, Targum Jonatan de los Profetas Primeros en Tradición Babilónica, Vol. I: Josué - Jueces (Madrid 1989), and Vol. II: I-II Samuel (Madrid 1987). J. RIBERA FLORIT, Biblia Babilónica: Profetas Posteros (Targum) (Salamanca 1977), Targum Jonatan de los Profetas Posteros en Tradición Babilónica: Isaias (Madrid 1988), and Jeremias (Madrid 1992).

The following abbreviations are used as in Sperber: b = Bombberg’s first Rabbinic Bible (Venice 1515-1517); c = MS p. 116 of the Montefiore Library, Jews’ College, London; d (in Onqelos) = MS Solger No 2 of the Stadtbibliothek, Nuremberg; d (in Jonathan) = prophetae priores (Leira 1494); f = Codex Reuchlinianus; g = Bombberg’s second Rabbinic Bible (Venice 1524-1525); h = Biblia Hebraica, shelf mark I 1363, University Library, Freiburg i. / Br., Germany; i = BM MSS Or. 2228, 2229 and 2230 = one MS in three volumes; j = MS Sassoon 332; k = Biblia Hebraica (Lisbon 1491); l = Biblia Hebraica (Hijar 1490); n = Biblia Sacra Complutensis (1516-1517); o = The Antwerp Polyglot (1569-1573); w = BM MS Or. 1471; y = BM MS Or. 2371.
often than 'ehe' by a ratio of about 2:1, but in Jonathan the ratio is reversed. All together, there is a slight preference for the waw form over against the syncopated form for the ICS. By contrast, the 3MS yehê is the preferred form, appearing about 99% of the time in our corpus. Only 6 cases of yihwê appear (Gen 18:18; Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7; 29:12; 2 Kgs 2:10 var; 7:2 var). The same can be said for 3FS tehê and 2MS tehê, each of which appear about 98% of the time. Only 4 cases of 3FS tihwê appear (Num 30:7; 2 Sam 12:12 var; 24:17; Ezek 1:12 var), while only one case of 2MS tihwê is found (2 Sam 5:2).

In summary, while there is a slight preference for the waw form of the ICS over against its syncopated counterpart, the waw forms of the 3MS, 3FS and 2MS are marginal as compared to their syncopated counterparts.

2. CONDITIONING

How can one explain this phenomenon? An analysis of the cases of the singular with the waw forms reveals conditioning in its usage to a large extent. That conditioning seems the same, regardless of person or gender. Functional opposition does not appear to explain its appearance. Rather, the choice appears to be stylistic in most of the cases.

The unsyncopated waw forms of the singular appear in the following contexts:

1) In the covenant formula in reference to God. In Onqelos, 1CS 'ihwê only appears in the covenant formula: «and I will be to them a God» (Gen 17:8; Exod 29:45); «and I will be to you a God» (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12),
though each time 'ehe' appears as its variant in some witnesses, mostly prints. MS Vat. 448 reads the 'ihwê type in all four cases, which reading is to be preferred. In Jonathan, 'ihwê is the exclusive form in the covenant formula: אֶלֹהִים לֶכֶת אֶלֹהֵי (Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7 respectively; cf. Jer 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech 8:8; cf. Jer 31:1 «I will be a God to all the clans of Israel»); no variants are found. In the only case of 3MS, yihwê appears in the best witnesses, although some poorer witnesses—mostly prints—read yehê: אֹהִּיוֹתֵי (b δ g k l n) «and he shall be to you a God» (Deut 29:12). Historically, the waw form is the older form, attested in Old Aramaic, Imperial Aramaic and Biblical Aramaic, and seems to be used in Onqelos and Jonathan to give an impression of solemnity, as the speaker of English might use «thou» in reference to God.

2) In the Lord’s solemn promise to King David concerning his offspring: אָבַי אָבָא יְהוֹאָה (b) אָבַי אָבָא יְהוֹאָה יְהֹוָה בּ (2 Sam 7:14). The variant 'hy found only in the first Biblia Rabbinica published by Bomberg in Venice in 1515-1517 (= witness b) is surely secondary, since it stands alone against the MSS. It is interesting to observe that in this example the waw form 'ahwê appears in reference to God, while the syncopated form yehê appears in reference to David’s son. Structurally, this example is similar to the covenant formula.

3) In the prohibition against having another god apart from Yahweh in the ten commandments, which, too, is structurally similar to the covenant formula: אָלֶכֶת אֶלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי (Exod 20:3 = Deut 5:7) «You shall not have another god apart from me». Witnesses k, l, and n to Exod, and witness i to Deut read the syncopated form yehê, which reading is certainly secondary. In both

7 Only the prints Biblia Hebraica (Hijar 1490) and Biblia Sacra Complutensis (1516-1517) contain the variant of the 'ehe' type in Gen 17:8 and Exod 6:7, while the former witness alone contains the variant of that type in Lev 26:12. In Exod 29:45, Biblia Hebraica (Hijar 1490) is joined in reading the 'ehe' type variant by MS Sassoon 282 and BM MS Or. 9400. These are inferior witnesses to the text of Onqelos.

8 So, too, is the variant yhyh (a Hebrew form) found in witness h = Biblia Hebraica to Deut 5:7.
places, MS Vat. 448 reads the yihwē type as do the other good witnesses.

4) Immediately after the infinitive absolute:
   a) In an oath: *Gen* 18:18 «and Abraham shall surely become a numerous and powerful people».
   b) In a conditional clause: *Num* 30:7 «and if she should indeed marry (lit. and if she should indeed be to a man) ...». Contrast the following similar case where there is no immediately preceding infinitive absolute, where tehê is used: ... «now, as for the daughter of a priest, if she should marry a layman (lit. if she should be to a layman) ...» (*Lev* 22:12).

These are the only two cases where a singular form of the imperfect of hewâ appears immediately after the infinitive absolute in the corpus. While one might therefore claim syntactic conditioning, solemnity characterizes both of these contexts, so that the choice of the one form over against the other may have been stylistic.

To summarize, roughly two thirds of the cases of singular waw forms fall into the four categories described above. Their usage in these environments gives the impression of solemnity to the reader/hearer.

5) In other instances where the unsyncopated waw form appears (Jonathan only):

The following cases do not fit into this stylistic scheme so easily. All but one of the following cases come from the Former Prophets.

a) Six instances should be excluded from consideration due to poor attestation:

1) *Josh* 1:5 var. יִרְאֶה מַעֲשֶׂךָ «I will be with you», instead of יִרְאֶה מַעֲשֶׂךָ «my Word will be your help». The Lord speaks to Joshua. This variant, a different set of words, is attested in two prints, the First Rabbinic Bible of 1515-1517 (= witness b) and the Leira print of the former prophets of 1494 (= witness d), but is not found in any MS. Its origin, then, may have been external to Onqelos and Jonathan.
2) 2 Sam 12:12 plus 

«And because you said, Let him repay four times, so it will be». These are the words of Nathan to King David in his reproof of David for his sin with Bathsheba. Responding to the allegation about a rich man taking a poor man’s lamb, David had said that the rich man should repay the lamb he stole fourfold (v. 6). David’s fourfold repayment would be the lives of four of his sons. Only witness c (= MS p. 116 of the Montefiore Library, Jews’ College, London) contains this midrashic plus. In all probability, this case does not belong to the early Jonathan tradition, but entered later from the outside. Consequently, it should be excluded from consideration. In his study of targumic toseftot, R. Kasher classifies the language of this addition as mixed.

3) 1 Kgs 22:22 var. 

«I will go out and become a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets». An evil spirit is speaking to the Lord. Only witnesses y (= BM MS Or. 2371) and b (First Rabbinic Bible, Bemberg, Venice 1515-1517) support the waw form.

4) 2 Kgs 2:10 var. 

«if you see me when I am being taken from you, it will be so to you; but if not, it will not be». Only the first instance of yehê has the variant yhwy, attested only in witness f (= Codex Reuchlinianus).

5) 2 Kgs 7:2 var. 

«If the Lord would open the windows and cause goodness to descend from heaven, would there be as this matter?». The form appears in a rhetorical question. Only witness j (= MS Sassoon 332) attests the waw form, which appears to be secondary.

6) Ezek 1:12 var. 

«and the creature was going forward, to the

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9 R. KASHER, Targumic Toseftot to the Prophets (Jerusalem 1996) p. 114,
#63.

10 KASHER Targumic (p. 136, #90b) reads w’h'. His full text reads: ‘pwr w’h’ rwh sqr bs'dy'th br kn'n'h wb’s’r nhy’ sqr’ «I will go out and be a false spirit in Zedekiah son of Chenaanah and in the rest of the false prophets».

11 KASHER Targumic p. 197, #128, reads the participial form dhwy.
place where it was (var. would be) pleasing to go it was going».
Only the prints b (= First Rabbinic Bible) and g (= Second Rabbinic Bible) read the imperfect *thwy*, which reading is certainly secondary, in place of the participle *hawê*.

b) Five instances are well documented and need explanation:

1) *Jdg* 11:9: «if you are restoring me to wage war against the Ammonites and the Lord should deliver them before me, I will become a chief to you!». Jephthah speaks to the elders of Gilead. *'Ahwê* appears in the apodosis of a conditional sentence. Structurally, this sentence is similar to the covenant formula and has the independent personal pronoun as subject in initial position. Contrast: «and (that) you might become a chief to us» (v. 8), while similar in structure, lacks an initial independent personal pronoun. Further, contrast: «and he will be to them a leader» (*Ezek* 34:23), and «and he will be to you an interpreter and you will be to him a chief» (*Exod* 4:16), both of which contain the independent personal pronoun as subject in initial position.

2a) *Jdg* 16:7 «if they bind me with seven wet cords which have not dried, then I will become weak and be like one of the mortals».

2b) *Jdg* 16:11 «if indeed they bind me with new ropes with which work has not been performed, then I will become weak and be like one of the mortals».

2c) *Jdg* 16:17 «if I shave, my strength will pass from me and I will become weak and be like any mortal». Samson speaks to Delilah. *'Ahwê* appears in the apodosis of a conditional sentence. Contrast: «and you will be as one of the fools in Israel» (2 *Sam* 13:13), which is similar but not identical in structure.

These four cases are the only instances where the 1CS imperfect of *hewâ* appears in Judges.

3) *1 Sam* 23:17: «you will rule (var.: you will be king) over Israel and I
will be second to you». Jonathan speaks to his friend David. This instance has the same structure as the covenant formula, of the type with the introductory connective waw and independent personal pronoun as subject. Cf. Jdg 11:9 above and the counter examples cited there.

4) 2 Sam 5:2 «you shall lead Israel and you shall be king over Israel». The people are reminding David what the Lord had said about him. An independent personal pronoun immediately precedes the waw form tihwê. However, this does not appear to be a conditioning factor. Contrast: «and this shall be their punishment» (Ezek 21:16), which is syntactically similar.

5) 2 Sam 24:17 «let now your stroke be against me and against my father’s house». This example appears in David’s prayer that the Lord would be merciful to the people and would punish him alone. Syntactically, the waw form functions as a jussive and is immediately followed by the adverb ke’an = Hebrew na’.

Compare the following similar examples, which appear to negate syntactic conditioning: 2 Sam 14:17; «let now it be dry on the fleece alone, but on all the ground let there be dew» (Jdg 6:39).

These five cases all appear in the Former Prophets (Judges, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel). Two of them are similar in structure to the covenant formula, which may have led to the choice of the waw form over the syncopated form. All instances of 1CS in Judges are the waw type.

3. SUGGESTED RESOLUTION

In sum, the difference between the singular of the type yehe and its counterpart yihwê in the language of Ongeles and Jonathan is not functional, but stylistic. To a large extent, the seldom appearing waw forms of the singular imperfect of hewê appear for the purpose of giving the impression of solemnity. This is particularly clear from its consistent use in the covenant
formula, in the divine promise to David, in the prohibition against having any god apart from Yahweh in the ten commandments and its use directly after the infinitive absolute. The handful of cases where no clear stylistic conditioning is apparent and the fact that the waw type is the only form attested in Old Aramaic, Imperial Aramaic and Biblical Aramaic suggest that these forms are left overs from the proto-targum which were left unrevised. It is not without significance that the examples of the waw type lacking stylistic conditioning appear in the Former Prophets, which may have been less studied, and so less revised, than the Torah and the Writing Prophets.

RESUMEN

Dos esquemas morfológicos del imperfecto del verbo hewâ aparecen en Onqelos y Jonatán: yihwê y yehê. Aunque los dos esquemas presentan en el plural formas distintas para diferenciar el género, no sucede lo mismo en el singular. Según las estadísticas, el esquema con waw se utiliza poco en la 2.ª y 3.ª persona del singular, pero está bien atestiguado en la 1.ª persona del singular. Parece ser que el uso del esquema con waw en el singular lo determinan razones estilísticas y se usa para trasmitir una impresión de solemnidad. Se sugiere que el esquema con waw refleja el lenguaje del prototargum que se ha seguido manteniendo.

SUMMARY

Two morphological types of the imperfect of the verb hewâ appear in Onqelos and Jonathan, namely yihwê and yehê. While the two types distinguish gender in the plural, they do not do so in the singular. Statistically, the waw type is marginal in the second and third persons singular, but well attested in the first person singular. The use of the waw type in the singular appears to be conditioned by stylistic considerations, being employed to give the impression of solemnity. It is suggested that the waw type reflects the language of the proto-targum from which it was retained.