

The Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* and the Evidence of the Amarna Letters from Canaan

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1. THE PREFIXED PRETERITE IN SEMITIC PHILOLOGY

If there is anything absolutely certain in the historical understanding of the Semitic verbal system, it is the reconstruction of a short prefixed form with the perfective meaning, used typically as the past tense in the indicative and as the directive-volitive form. Such an understanding is based on the existence and uses of the parallel forms of the short prefix conjugation in two major branches of the Semitic family: in East Semitic—the Preterite *iprus* and the Precative *liprus*; in West Semitic—various reflexes of the *yaqtul* conjugation, chiefly the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*.¹ In the development of the West Semitic verbal system, the original perfective prefixed form was replaced by the suffixed form which eventually acquired the perfective meaning too.² What is uncertain is when exactly this development took place. In relation to *wayyiqtol* and the use of the Preterite *yiqtol* without the conjunction *wə* in the Hebrew Bible, two questions remain without a satisfactory answer: what the evidence for the

¹ Andersen 2000: 13–14, 17–20; Hasselbach and Huehnergard 2008: 416; Kouwenberg 2010: 587; Andrason 2011: 35–43; Cook 2012: 256–65, Hackett 2012: 111. In spite of their apparent linguistic sophistication, recent attempts to define the meaning of *wayyiqtol* as other than Preterite (Hatav 2004, Robar 2013) are not persuasive. See Cook 2014: 85–86. Robar 2013 is especially deceptive as she interprets several biblical passages in her own way and claims that they counterweight the constant pattern of the use of *wayyiqtol* as Preterite. I fully endorse Cook’s assessment of Robar’s paper: “Her appeal to Neo-Aramaic is unconvincing and her theory presents no significant advance over Driver’s (1998: 72) nineteenth-century analysis of *וַיֹּאמֶר* as ‘and-he-proceeded-to-say.’” (Cook 2014: 86, n. 5). For an excellent linguistic discussion of *wayyiqtol* see Cook 2012: 256–65, and for a handy overview of its contextual usages see Joosten 2012: 164–91.

² This process was already described by Kuryłowicz in a paper largely overlooked by scholars working on Biblical Hebrew verbal system. See Kuryłowicz 1949: 48–52.

Preterite *yiqtol* which become fossilized in *wayyiqtol* is, and when the pattern of its use for historical narrative emerged. The Amarna letters (*EA*) from Canaan are often called in as pieces of evidence that prove the origin of *wayyiqtol* from the original West Semitic *yqtul* conjugation. This paper re-evaluates their evidence and calls attention to several passages of the letters which clearly parallel the use of Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*.

2. THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE FROM THE AMARNA LETTERS FROM CANAAN

There are important caveats which must be kept in mind when dealing with the Amarna letters from Canaan. If these are not properly understood, there is a serious risk that data will be misinterpreted and thus linguistic reconstructions will not be accurate.

Most crucial is the realization that the Amarna letters do not provide direct evidence of the usages in the contemporaneous Canaanite dialects because of the nature of the linguistic system they employ. Without entering into the intricacies of theoretical approaches used to analyze this system, it suffices to say that the Amarna letters are not written in a natural language which was spoken by a vast population; it was employed by limited scribal circles. It is a mixed system: generally speaking, the Old Babylonian matrix is the source of writing conventions, lexicon, and nominal morphology, while the Canaanite component is especially clear in verbal morphology and semantics as well as the word order.³ While this description appears straightforward, things become more complicated when it comes to deciding the nature of a particular morpheme or syntactic construction. Although the features which are not Akkadian are usually classified Canaanite, they may be common Semitic elements (a possibility which demands serious consideration because of a relative closeness of the Semitic languages in comparison with other linguistic families) or ad-hoc innovations developed by the scribes.

The mixed, Akkadian and Canaanite, nature of the language of the letters bears two important consequences for its use as linguistic evidence. First, there is no “Amarna Canaanite.” This designation is a dangerous misnomer because it creates the false impression that the letters provide us with a snapshot of an actual language spoken in Canaan in 14th cent. B.C.E., a language from which other Canaanite languages, including Biblical Hebrew, descend. In reality, the letters do not

³ For grammatical descriptions of the Amarna letters from Canaan see, for example, Rainey 1996, Izre’el 1998, and Tropper and Vita 2010. According to the majority of scholars, their linguistic system should be classified as a mixed language (Rainey 2010; Andrason and Vita 2014). For a sophisticated argumentation in defense of this classification see Izre’el 2012. A dissenting voice is E. von Dassow who in a series of contributions (2004, 2010) argued that the Amarna letters from Canaan attest to an alloglottographic writing system.

attest to any natural language which was spoken on daily basis by a particular population and transmitted from one generation to another. They represent raw data, a source for extrapolations and inferences about some features of Canaanite dialects which are presumed to be native languages of the scribes. Consequently, any reference to a “Canaanite” feature in the Amarna letters implies not only raw data but a scholarly interpretation. Second, the letters are the product of the scribes. They not only follow scribal conventions but naturally contain scribal mistakes, hypercorrections, misunderstandings of Akkadian morphology and semantics, intuitive or conscious renderings of Canaanite words and constructions, and ad-hoc creations which have no parallels in neither Akkadian nor Canaanite. Consequently, a non-Akkadian feature does not necessarily entail a Canaanite construction.

Another feature which limits the usefulness of data provided by the letters is the content, more specifically, a restricted number of topics and repetitive formulas as well as concentration on certain types of speech, in particular on short reports and requests. As a result, the letters privilege a limited repertoire of verbal forms, especially directive-volitive ones, while under-representing others, principally those used in narrative.

3. THE PROBLEM OF IDENTIFICATION OF *YAQTUL* IN THE AMARNA LETTERS

Although the late A. F. Rainey repeatedly and forcefully argued that the Amarna letters prove the existence of the short conjugation *yaqtul* which is reflected in the Biblical Hebrew *w'ayyiqtol* and “orphaned” cases of *yiqtol* with a past reference outside of a narrative,⁴ his claim has not won a universal acceptance. There seem to be two main reasons of limited confidence in Rainey’s arguments among scholars. First, Rainey’s thesis on the *yaqtul/yiqtol* conjugation is a part of a comprehensive reconstruction of the Amarna verbal system, and by extension, of the North-West Semitic verb too. It is based not only on the letters themselves but also on the comparative evidence. Rainey’s reconstruction of the prefix conjugations was partially rejected and modified by various scholars and so happened to his claim about *yaqtul*.⁵ The second objection is more difficult to answer because it is based on the correct observation that the Amarna linguistic system had a mixed nature and that the scribes might know and partially follow the Akkadian usage too. Since both Akkadian and Canaanite languages have a short conjugation used as a past tense, *iḫrus* and *yaqtul* respectively, the Amarna short prefixed forms may not attest to a Canaanite form but to the normative Akkadian use. Hence, it is impossible to argue on the sole basis of the morphology that the Amarna forms are

⁴ Rainey 1975, 1986, 1990, 2003.

⁵ Tropper 1997–1998: 135–37; von Dassow 2003: 213–14; Korchin 2008.

a result of the transfer of the Canaanite *yaqtul*.⁶ In my opinion, such a transfer is very likely because the Amarna verbal system shows a systemic use of the Canaanite-like forms with their proper semantics. In other words, since various verbal forms (suffix conjugation, long prefix conjugation, energetic forms) correspond to the Canaanite forms and, by and large, are systematically used instead of the Akkadian ones, the same case of a systematic transfer is also plausible in the case of the short past conjugation *yaqtul*. On the one hand, this argument based on the coherence of the Amarna verbal system should be given serious consideration. On the other hand, it cannot be taken as a definite proof that the Amarna letters attest to a short Canaanite Preterite *yaqtul* because it argues from analogy and as such is hypothetical, not certain.

Since I too believe that the morphology of the Amarna *yaqtul* cannot provide a definitive answer to its nature and origin,⁷ I would like to propose another argument in favor of the identification of this form with its Canaanite counterpart. This argument is based on the syntax of several passages which have a narrative style.

4. THE PASSAGES OF THE AMARNA LETTERS WITH A *WAYYIQTOL*-LIKE SYNTAX

As explained above, because of their genre and function, the Amarna letters in general do not contain narrative passages. As a consequence, the Canaanite narrative verbal forms and their syntax are not well reflected by the letters. In other words, even if the Canaanite dialects would have used a chain of alternating verbal forms similar to the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* sequence, this use would still have been largely absent from the letters. However, in the course of my research on the Amarna letters, I have identified several passages which, in my opinion, attest to

⁶ For a similar, skeptic assessment of the Amarna evidence of *yaqtul* see Pardee 1999: 314 and Cook 2012: 115–16, 118. Notarius (2015: 248) is more positive, but is also aware of the difficulties.

⁷ There is an additional morphological argument which, to my knowledge, has not been emphasized. There are several *yaqtul* forms which cannot be considered as the instances of the genuine Akkadian *iḫrus*. The form *ú-ra-ad-šu* (EA 147: 42) derives from an Amarna lexical innovation *warādu* “to serve.” Because this verb is not attested in Akkadian, this form cannot be considered an Akkadian *iḫrus*. However, it comes from one of the Tyrian letters which in general do not conform to the verbal usages attested in the Amarna letters from Canaan (Tropper and Vita 2010: 23). It should be, therefore, interpreted within the idiosyncratic usages of this epistolary corpus, rather than as a secure case of the Canaanite *yaqtul*. The secure attestations of the Canaanite *yaqtul* with the preterite meaning are provided by the internal passive forms, which are unknown in Akkadian. Examples of such forms are: *ʾ[ū]-ul-qé* “was taken” (EA 91: 8) and *tu-da-nu* “were given” (EA 137: 6; 138: 43).

such narrative verbal sequences. Of course, it is difficult to argue that the passages presented here contain historical narrative because they are part of diplomatic letters, a different and independent literary genre. Nevertheless, they do not simply report an event in answer to another party's query or in support of an argument but they link one past event to another and thus form a chain of past events.⁸ Also, in my opinion, the author of each passage shifts his perspective and narrates them as a story in the past rather than providing background information about the current state of affairs. Thus, without claiming that these passages are true narratives, I think that they are examples of what comes closest to narrative in the Amarna letters. The syntax of these passages does not represent an idiolect of a scribe because each passage is written by a different scribe.⁹ In the following passages the verbs in the *yaqtul* conjugation and the conjunction *u* "and" are marked in bold.¹⁰

Text no.	Text and translation
1	<p>¹⁵ù <i>a[n-n]u-ù i-šī-me a-na</i> ¹⁶<i>a-wa-te</i>.MEŠ-<i>ka</i> ù <i>ú-wa-š[ir-šū]</i> ¹⁷ù <i>uš-ša-am re-qú-tám</i> ¹⁸ù <i>i-šī-me-e ú ia-nu-um</i> [ER]ÍN.MEŠ ¹⁹<i>it-ti-šu</i> ù <i>te-ni-pu-[u]š</i> ²⁰<i>urubāt-ru-na a-na ša-šu</i> ²¹<i>ù</i> ERÍN.MEŠ SA.GAZ.MEŠ <i>ù</i> ²²<i>ša-ki-in₄ i-na ŠÀ-bi</i> ²³ù <i>la!</i> (AD) <i>i-nam-mu-šū-nim</i> ²⁴<i>[š-tu pí KÁ.GAL urubki</i> (<i>EA</i> 87: 15–24, scribe 2 from Byblos)¹¹</p>

⁸ Following C. Smith, I distinguish five basic discourse modes: narrative, description, report, information and argument. For their introductory overview, and especially the distinction between narrative and report, see Smith 2003: 8–21.

⁹ Of similar opinion is Notarius. With regard to text no. 6, she observes: "this corpus does not attest the discourse mode of narrative in the full sense of the word" (2015: 249).

¹⁰ The original text of the letters is compiled by me on the basis of Knudtzon 1915 and Rainey 2015, available hand-copies (Bezold and Budge 1882; Schroeder 1915), and textual notes in Moran 1992. All translations are my own. They are based on these in Moran 1992 but they are adjusted by me to reflect closer the original instead of using idiomatic English.

¹¹ The information on the scribes I give in parentheses relies on Vita 2015 and uses his numbering.

And [s]o I listened to your words and I se[nt him] and he came out empty-handed and he heard that there were no [tr]oops with him and so Baʿruna was join[e]d to him and he stationed chariots and the hosts of the ʿApiru in the middle (of it) and they did not move [f]rom the entrance of the gate of Gubla.

- 2 ¹⁰[. . .] *ù i-na-an-na* ¹¹ KÚR-*kùr-tum*.MEŠ *ma[s]š-šī-ik-tum i[š]-ti-[ia] i-na-né-pu-uš* ¹²*ù aš-tap-pár* DUB-*pí-ia* *ù* L[Ú] KIN-*ia* ¹³*a-na ma-ḥar* LUGAL BAD-*ia* *ù* L[UGAL] ¹⁴*a-na-te*.MEŠ DUB-*pí-ia* *ù* L[Ú] KIN-*ia* ¹⁵*la yi-šī-mi* *ù* *mi-na ip-p[u-s]u-[n]a* ¹⁶*ù aš-tap-pár* LÚ KIN-*ia* *a-na* LUGAL BAD-*[ia]* ¹⁷[UGU U]RU.KI.ḤI.A-*ia* *ša il-qé* ^{18m}İR-*aš-ra-ti* *ù iš-[mé]* ^{19m}İR-*aš-ra-tum i-nu-ma ka-šī-id* ²⁰LÚ-*ia iš-tu ma-ḥar* LUGAL BAD-*ia* ²¹*ù i-šī-mé* *ù ia-nu-um m[i-š]m-ma* ²²*ù i-nu-ma ia-nu-um* LÚ.MEŠ *ti-ḥ[a-ḥ]am s[a a]-[s]a-at* ²³*a-na ia-a-šī* *ù a-nu-ú i-ti-e[ḥ]-[ḥ]a* ²⁴[i]-*na-an-na a-na še-ri-ia* (92: 10–24, a scribe from Byblos)

And now, an ev[i]l war [ha]s been waged a[ga]inst [me] and I sent my tablet and m[es]senger to the king, my lord, but the k[ing] did not listen to the words of my tablet and my messenger. So what am I t[o d]o? And I sent my messenger to the king, [my] lord [in regard to] my [c]ities that ʿAbdi-ašrati took. And ʿAbdi-ašrati hea[rd] that my man arrived from the king my lord and he heard that there was no[th]ing (with him). And since there was no auxiliary f[or]ce th[at c]ame out to me, he has now move[d u]p against me.

- 3 ⁵*aš-tap-pár aš-ta-ni* *a-n[a* ERÍN.MEŠ *ma-ša-ar-ti]* ⁶*ù la-a tu-da-nu [ù la-a]* ⁷*yi-iš-mi* LUGAL *be-li-ia* *a-wa-ḥ[e] İR-šū* ⁸*ù i-wa-šī-ir* LÚ.DUMU *š[ip-ri-ia]* ⁹*a-na É-ti É.GAL* *ù i[a-tur-ur]* ¹⁰*ri-ḡú-tam i-ia-nu* ERÍN.MEŠ *ma-ša-a[r-tam]* ¹¹*a-na ša-a-šu* *ù ti-mu-ru* L[Ú].M[EŠ URU]-*ia* ¹²*i-nu-ma la-a na-di-in* KÙ.BABBAR *tī-iš-la* ¹³*a-na ia-šī kei-ma* LÚ.MEŠ-*ḥa*.MEŠ-*ša-ni* ŠEŠ.MEŠ-*ia* ¹⁴*ù ti-na-i-šū-ni* [. . .] (137: 5–14, scribe 1 from Beirut on behalf of Rib-Hadda of Byblos)

I wrote repeatedly fo[r a garrison] [and] it was [not] granted, [and] the king, my lord, did [not] heed the word[s of his servant]. And I sent a me[ssenger of mine] to the palace and h[er]

returned] empty-handed; he had no garri[son]. **And** the m[en] of my [city] **saw** that no money had been given. Like the mayors, my brothers, **they did** me *injustice* and despised me.

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²⁸*i-nu-ma yi-iš-bat* ^{uru}š[u-mu]r-ri ^{29m}İR-aš-*ra-ti* **ù** *a-na-[ša-a]r-mi* ³⁰URU-la.KI *a-na [l]-di-<ni>-i[a] i-i-anu* ³¹LÚ.MEŠ *ma-ša-ra-tam it-ti* **ù** *aš-pu-ur* ³²*a-na LUGAL be-li-ia [ù] tu-ša!* (A) ERÍN.MEŠ ³³[ù] *ti-il-qé* ^{uru}š[u-m]u-ri **ù** ³⁴[^mİR-a-š*i-ī*]r-ti **ù** *a-[nu-m]a i-nan-na* ³⁵[*a-qa uru*š]u-m[u-ri ^m]a-zi-ru ³⁶**ù** *ti-mu-[t]u* L[Ú.M]EŠ ^{uru}[g]ub-[u]b-[l]i ³⁷*a-di ma-ti ni-ka-š-i-šu* DUMU ^mİR-[*a-š-i-ir-ti*] ³⁸*ga-mi-ir* KÙ.BABBAR-*pu-na a-na nu-ku-ur-ti* ³⁹**ù** *ti-na-mu-šu* UGU-*ia* **ù** *a-du-uk-šu-nu* ⁴⁰**ù** *ti-iq-bu* *a-di ma-ti te-du-* ⁴¹*ku-nu [a]-ya-mi ti-il-qú* LÚ.MEŠ *a-na a-ša-bi* ⁴²*a-na [U]RU.KI* **ù** *aš-pu-ur a-na É.GAL* ⁴³*a-na ERÍN.MEŠ* **ù** *ú-ul tu-[d]a-nu* ERÍN.MEŠ *ia-š*i** ⁴⁴**ù** *ti-iq-bi* URU.KI *i-zi-[bu-šu* ⁴⁵*ni-te-pu-uš-mi a-na* ^m*a-zi-ri* **ù** ⁴⁶*aq-bi* *ki-i i-ti-pu-šu a-na ša-šu* ⁴⁷**ù** *i-zi-bu* LUGAL *be-li* **ù** *yi-iq-bi* ⁴⁸ŠEŠ-*ia* **ù** [*yī*]-[*t*]-*mi* *a-na* URU.KI ⁴⁹**ù** *ti-dáb-bi-bu* [ù] LÚ.MEŠ BAD URU.KI ⁵⁰[*ni-t*]-*e-pu-šu-mi* *a-na* DUMU.MEŠ ^mİR-aš-*ra-ti*] ⁵¹**ù** [*a*]-*la-ak-mi* *a-na a-na* ^{uru}A.PÚ.KI.M[EŠ] ⁵²*a-na da-[ba-b]i a-na ma-ḥar* ^m*ḥa-mu-ni-[ri]* ⁵³**ù** *ni-pu-[uš* *ki]-tam aš-šum-ma* ^m[*ḥ*]-*a-[mu-ni-ri]* ⁵⁴*i-nu-ma [...]* -[*n*]u **ù** ⁵⁵*iš-tu* *a[š-]* ⁵⁶URU.KI [. . .] *a[i-la-a]k-m[ī]* ⁵⁷*a-na-ku* **ù** [. . .] UG[U URU].KI ⁵⁸*ú-ul na-a[d]-nu-ni [i-r]i-ba* ⁵⁹*la-qí* LÚ *ar-ni* LU[GAL L[Ú.ERÍN.ME]Š ^m*a-zi-ri* ⁶⁰*ša-ka-an a-na* Š[À-bi U]RU.[KI] **ù** ⁶¹*ti-mu-ru* URU.KI [i]-*nu-m[a* ER]ÍN.MEŠ *ša-nu* ⁶²*a-na* URU.KI **ù** [*i-m*]-*a-ga-t[u]* *a-ša-bu* ⁶³*ri-bi a-na* U[RU].KI **ù** [*t*]-*iq-bu* ⁶⁴*a-na ša-a-šu a[l]-lu-ú-mi* BA.ÚŠ ⁶⁵*be-ḏ-nu* *ki ta-aq-bu mi-it* ^{66m}*ri-ib-ad-di* *ki-ka-nu iš-tu* ⁶⁷ŠU.MEŠ *qa-ti-š[u]* *la-a-mi [ia-a]š-pu-ra* ⁶⁸*a-na* KUR.MEŠ *mi-iš-ri* **ù** *yi-ī[ā]-qa-nu* ⁶⁹*qa-du* DUMU.MEŠ-*nu* **ù** *ti-[dā]-bi-ru* ⁷⁰ERÍN.MEŠ ^m*a-zi-ri iš-t[u]* URU.KI (138: 28–70, scribe 4 from Byblos, sent from Beirut)

When ‘Abdi-Ašrati **seized** Š[umu]r, **(and)** **I** **gu[ard]ed** the city by [m]yse[lf]. There was no garrison with «me», **and** so **I** **wrote** to the king, my lord **[and]** troops **came out [and] took** Šu[m]ur and [‘Abdi Aš]irti. N[o]w Aziru has taken Šumur, **and** the p[eo]ple of [G]ub[la] **s[a]w** this, (and they said), “How long shall we *contain* the son of ‘Abdi-[Aširti]. Our money is completely gone for the war.” **And they moved** against me **and I smote**

them. And they said, “How long can you go on smiting us? [W]here will you get people to live in the [c]ity?” And I wrote to the palace for troops and no troops were [gi]ven ‹to› me and the city said, “Ab[an]don him. Let’s join Aziru!” And I said, “How could I join him and abandon the king, my lord?” And my brother spoke and [s]w[or]e to the city. And they had a discussion [and] the lords of the city [were jo]ined to the sons of ‘Abdi-Ašrati. And [I] myself went to Beirut for a dis[cuss]ion with Hammuni[ri], and we ma[de] an alli]ance so that [H]a[mmuniri], when , and from W[e] went, . . . and I, t[o] the ci]ty. They did not p[er]mit me to en]ter. The rebel against the ki[ng] had taken [troop]s of Aziru; he had stationed (them) i[n] the c]ity, and the cit[y] saw [t]ha[t] there were foreign [tr]oops i[n] the cit[y]. And the residents f[av]or[ed] my entering the c[it]y, and they s[a]id to him, “(You say), ‘B[e]hold, our lord is dead.’ How can you say, ‘Rib-Addi is dead, and so m[an]y are out of h[is] control?’ Let him not [wri]te to Egypt or he will t[a]ke us and o[ur] children.” And they d[ro]ve the troops of Aziru fro[m] the city.

- 5 [. . .] *ù me-ia-te a-na-ku* I[GLIMIN] ⁶İR *a-na ia-ši-ia a-na-me* LUGAL *gáb-bu* ⁷*yi-mur-ma* ^m*bi-ri-da-aš-wa ip-ša an-na* ⁸*ù ya-<MAŠ>-na-mu-uš* ^{uru}*ya-nu-am-ma* UGU-ia ⁹*u yi-du-ul* KÁ.GAL *a-na EGIR-ia* ¹⁰*ù yi-il₅-qé* ^{gis}GIGIR.MEŠ *i-na* ^{uru}*aš-tar-te* ¹¹*ù ya-di-in₄-š_u-ni* *a-na* LÚ.MEŠ SA.GAZ ¹²*ù la-a ya-di-in₄-š_u-ni* *a-na* LUGAL EN-ia ¹³*yi-mur-ma* LUGAL ^{uru}*bu-uš-ru-na* ¹⁴*ù* LUGAL ^{uru}*ha-lu-un-ni* ***u te-pa-š_u*** ¹⁵*nu-kúr-ta it-ti* ^m*bi-ri-da-aš-wa* ¹⁶*a-na mu-ḥi-ia u te-eg-bu-na* ¹⁷*al-ka-am-mi nu-du-uk* ^m*bir₅-ia-wa-za* ¹⁸*ù la-a ni-wa-aš-ši-ru-š_u* *a-na* ¹⁹ [. . .]-še ***ù i-pa-tar*** *a-na-ku iš-tu* ²⁰*[qa-ti-š₃]u-nu* ***ù iz-zi-iz*** *i-na* ²¹[. . .] ^{uru}*di-maš-qa i-nu-ma* ²² [. . .] *[k]i-i ur-ru-d[u]* ²³[LUGAL EN-ia *ù*] *te-eg-bu-n[a]* ²⁴[İR.MEŠ LUGAL.MEŠ ^{kur}*ha-a*] *t-te ni-nu* ²⁵*ù a-na-ku iq-bu* İR LUGAL ^{kur}*mi-iš-ri*] ²⁶*a-na-ku* ***ù yi-la-ak*** ^m*ar-sà-wu-ya* ²⁷*a-na* ^{uru}*gi-š₃-sà*] ***ù yi-il₅-qa*** ²⁸ERÍN.MEŠ ^m*a-zi-ri* ***ù iš-ba-at*** ²⁹^{uru}*ša-ad-du* ***u ya-di-in₄-ši*** *a-na* ³⁰LÚ.MEŠ SA.GAZ ***u la-a ya-di-in₄-ši*** ³¹*a-na* LUGAL EN-ia [. . .] (197: 5–31, scribe 3 of Mušihuna on behalf of Biryawaza of Damascus)

And who am I? My (only) *purpose* is to be a servant. Everything belongs to the king. Biridašwa

saw this deed **and moved** Yanuamma to rebellion against me. **And he barred** the city gate against me, **and he took** chariots from Aštartu **and gave** both of them to the ‘Apiru **and did not give** both of them to the king, my lord. The king of Bušruna with the king of Ḫalunnu **saw** (this), **and they waged** war with Biridašwa against me, constantly saying, “Come, let’s kill Biryawaza, and we must not let him go to” **And I got away** from them **and stayed** in . . . Dimašqa, for [by myself] how can I serv[e the king, my lord]? They kept say[ng, “We are servants of the king of Ḫa]tti,” and I kept saying, “I am a servant of the king of Egypt[.]” **And** Arsawuya **went** to Gi[ssa], **and took** (some of) Azir[u’s] troops, [and] **captured** Šaddu. **And he gave it** to the ‘Apiru **and did not give it** to the king, my lord.

6 ⁸ *ù tu-sà-ah-me* \ *tu-ra* ^{9mi}ANŠE.KUR.RA-*ia* ¹⁰ *ù iz-zi-iz-me* ¹⁰EGIR-šú \ *ah-ru-un-ú* ¹¹ *ù ir-ka-ab-mi* ¹² *it-ti* ^{mya-aš-da-ta} ¹³ *ù a-di ka-ša-di-ia* ¹⁴ *ù da-ku-šú* \ *ma-ah-šú-ú* ¹⁵ *ù al-lu-ú-me* ^{mya-aš-da-ta} ¹⁶ *IR-ka* ¹⁷ *ù šu-ú-te* ¹⁷ *yi-ru-ub-mi* *it-ti-[i]a* ¹⁸ *i-na* ^{MÈ} *ta-ḫa-ṣ[i]* ¹⁹ *ù lu-ú* *yi-na* [. . .] ²⁰ *TIL.LA-at* *LUGAL-ri* *EN-i]a* ²¹ *[i]* *li-pa-a[š-š-i-iḫ]* ²² *[gá]b-ba* [*i-na* KUR.KI.ḪI.A] ²³ *LUGAL-ri* *EN-ia* ²⁴ *ù* ^{mṣu-ra-t[a]} ²⁵ *yi-il-qé-me* ^{mla-[ab-a-ia]} ²⁶ *iš-tu* ^{urru} *ma-gid₆-da[ki]* ²⁷ *ù yi-iq-bi* *a-na* *ia-a-š[i]* ²⁸ *i-na-me* ^{ŠÀ} ^{gš} *MÁ* \ *a-na-yi* ²⁹ *ù ta-aš-ša-ru-uš-šú* ³⁰ *a-na* *LUGAL-ri* ³¹ *ù yi-il-qé-šú* ^{mṣu-ra-ta} ³² *ù yu-ta-šar-šú* ^{32iš-tu} ^{urru} *ḫi-na-tu-na^{ki}* ³³ *a-na* ^{É-šú} ³⁴ *ù la-qí-mi* KUG.BABBAR.ḪI.A *ip-ti-ir-ri-šú* (EA 245: 8–34, scribe 1 from Megiddo)

And my mare **has been put out of action**: *tu-ra* (has been shoot), **and I took my place** behind him: *ah-ru-un-ú* **and rode** with Yašdata. But before my arrival they had struck him down: *ma-ah-šú-ú*. And behold, Yašdata is your servant, **and he it was that entered** with me into battle. May . . . the life of the king, my lord, that he may bring peace to everyone in [the lands of] the king, my lord. **And** (it was) Zurata (who) **took** Lab’ayu from Magidda **and said** to me, “I will send him to the king by boat: *a-na-yi*.” **And** Zurata **took** him **and he sent him** from Ḫinnatunu to his home, for it was Zurata that had accepted from him: *ba-di-ú* his ransom.

Three characteristics of the verbal morpho-syntax link these passages to the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*-chain: the clause-initial (usually pre-verbal) conjunction “and” (*u*/*wa*), the short conjugation (*yaqtul*//historically short *yiqtol*) and the typical use to narrate successive events which advance a story. Since the Akkadian *iprus* is not attested in similar narrative sequences, I submit that the use of *yaqtul* in these passages originates from the transfer of a similar usage in Canaanite dialects. If so, these passages support two points. First, the *yaqtul* of the Amarna letters indeed reflects a short Canaanite prefix conjugation and not the Akkadian *iprus*.¹² Second, the *wayyiqtol* narrative pattern was not formed as an archaism when the distinction of the two prefix conjugations was lost but it originated in an earlier, similar narrative pattern.

Two characteristics indicate the non-Akkadian character of the verbal syntax in these texts. The first non-Akkadian feature is the conjunction *u* “and” which is used to introduce new clauses rather than to paratactically connect them with the preceding clauses. This usage is especially clear when the conjunction *u* marks return to the main narrative after direct speech, as in *EA* 138: 39.45.47.69 (text no. 4), *EA* 197: 19.26 (text no. 5), and *EA* 245: 30 (text no. 6). The second clue to the non-Akkadian syntax of these passages is the word order. In Akkadian prose, the verb is the last constituent in the phrase, while the Amarna texts presented here are distinguished by a marked tendency to place the verb immediately after the conjunction *u*.¹³ This tendency makes the Amarna narratives similar to the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* narrative chain. However, there is an important difference between the two systems: in Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* occurs only at the beginning of a clause, while in the Amarna letters the sequence *u-yaqtul* may be broken by the negation (*EA* 87: 23, 138: 43, 197: 12), an adverb (*EA* 92: 23) or the subject (*EA* 245: 16). It appears that the sequence of the conjunction followed by the verb, being the most common, constitutes the unmarked word order, while other word orders can be freely used to mark the informational structure of the text. This usage is exemplified by the variation of word order in text no. 6: ²⁴*ù* ^m*zû-ra-t[a]* ²⁵*yi-il₅-qé-me* ^m*la-[ab-a-ia]* “and (it was) Zurata (who) took Lab’ayu” (*EA* 245: 24–5) vs. *ù yi-il-qé-šu* ^{31m}*zû-ra-ta* “And Zurata took him” (*EA* 245: 30–1). The verb may also occur at the end of a clause, as in Akkadian (*EA* 92: 1–11.13–5, text no. 2). More importantly, the *yaqtul* verb may also come at the beginning of an independent clause without the conjunction *u*, as it happens in *EA* 137: 5.12 (text no. 3), *EA* 138: 42 (text no. 4), *EA* 197: 7.13 (text no. 5), and it may occur in a subordinate clause too, as in *EA* 138: 28 (text 4). These clause initial and subordinate uses of *yaqtul* are poten-

¹² This is a general conclusion which does not exclude the possibility that individual scribes were familiar with the Akkadian *iprus*, its morphology and semantics, and used it according to the native Akkadian patterns.

¹³ On the Akkadian word order, see Deutscher 2000.

tially very significant. Should these uses in the Amarna letters faithfully reflect the Canaanite usage, it can be concluded that the *yaqtul* in Canaanite was an unrestricted preterite, capable both of initiating and continuing a narrative, as well as occurring both in independent and subordinate clauses.

5. FROM THE CANAANITE TO BIBLICAL HEBREW FORMS

In historical linguistics, the form which is reconstructed as anterior may be, but usually is not, identical with a form attested in a later phase of the language. Rather than being identical, the anterior form should possess the potential for generating the newer form and for explaining some features of it (Hock 1991: 532–41). The behavior of *yaqtul* in the passages discussed above has the potential of generating and explaining the usage of the prefixed conjugation in Biblical Hebrew with the preterite meaning both occurring in the *wayyiqtol* chain and independently. In turn, these passages indicate that these two usages of the prefixed conjugation *yiqtol* in Biblical Hebrew originate historically from the earlier short prefixed conjugation *yaqtul*.

The cases of “free” preterite *yiqtol* in Biblical Hebrew, attested mostly in archaic poetry (Notarius 2015: 239–41), are directly comparable to the occurrences of *yaqtul* at the beginning of an independent clause without the conjunction *u* or after a constituent other than the conjunction *u* (a noun, an adverb). In these cases, the Biblical Hebrew *yiqtol* is clearly an archaic form which preserves the syntax and the meaning of the earlier *yaqtul*.

The sequential narrative pattern observed in the Amarna texts also provides an origin for the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*. In the Canaanite dialects, at the stage documented by the Amarna letters, the preterite meaning of the prefixed conjugation was marked by the zero ending (in opposition to the long imperfective *yaqtulu* conjugation), while the conjunction *wa* overtly marked the events expressed by the *yaqtul* forms as forming a sequential narrative chain.¹⁴ At this stage, the narrative chain permitted the appearance of a constituent (a noun, an adverb) between the conjunction *wa* and the prefixed conjugation because its preterite meaning was clearly marked by the zero ending, exactly as was the case with the unrestricted preterite, for example, at the beginning of an independent clause without the conjunction *u*. With the fall of short final vowels at the end of the II millennium B.C.E. (Hasselbach and Huehnergard 2008: 412), the morphological distinction between the two prefixed conjugations was largely lost and,

¹⁴ The syntactic and semantic prominence of the conjunction *wa* in Early Semitic seems to have influenced the Sumerian language. This point is made by Civil 2008 and deserves further investigation with attention to the texts from Ebla. For now, see provisionally Gordon 1983, and Kogan 2014.

consequently, the zero ending did not mark the preterite meaning any longer. At this stage, the conjunction *wa* became the morphological marker of the preterite meaning of the prefixed conjugation and as such it became the part of the new verbal form, *wayyiqtol*.¹⁵ This development of *wa* from the conjunction to a grammatical marker is an instance of grammaticalization, a process well described in various languages, including the Semitic family (Rubin 2005). The archaic character of the new born form *wayyiqtol* is transparent in the preservation of not only the preterite meaning of the *yaqtul* conjugation but also the original vocalization of the conjunction as *wa*, rather than *wə*, and its allomorphs *wi* and *u*.¹⁶ Since the new form *wayyiqtol* is an organic unity, it does not admit insertion of a constituent after the conjunction, unlike its Amarna antecedent construction. The passage from an unrestricted syntactic availability of the preterite *yaqtul* in Canaanite to its limited distribution in the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* is something expected in the case of the development of a newer form which preserves another archaic form (Hock 1991: 610–11).

The last question which requires an explanation is the origin of the doubling of the prefix consonant in the *wayyiqtol* form (Cook 2012: 258–60). The reason for this doubling is phonetic. Since the archaic and distinctive phonetic shape of the grammaticalized preposition *wa* became the marker of the meaning of the *wayyiqtol* form, it had to be preserved from phonetic changes which affected the language and resulted in the reduction of the vowel from *wa* to *wə*. The doubling of the prefix consonant in the *wayyiqtol* form prevented such a reduction.¹⁷ In my opinion, it is impossible to establish whether the doubling appeared as a phonetic development already in Proto-Hebrew or in Hebrew spoken in biblical times, or whether the Masoretes created it as an artificial device to keep the *wayyiqtol*

¹⁵ Blau 2010: 195: “the short prefix-tense not only has a jussive sense but may mark the past as well. This is clearly reflected in the preservation of the short prefix-tense in the sense of the past after the so-called ‘conversive’ *waw*. As already stated, the *waw* is not historically ‘conversive’; rather it preserves the ancient usage of past reference.”

¹⁶ For an alternative explanation of the vocalization of the conjunction *wa*, see Blau 2010: 190. He explains only the vowel of the conjunction on purely phonetic grounds. The solution I propose is superior to Blau’s because it ties together in one organic process the development of *wayyiqtol*, the vocalization of the conjunction, and the origin of the doubling.

¹⁷ A different phonetic origin of the doubling was proposed by Lambdin. According to him, the doubling in *wayyiqtol* is a case of junctural gemination, a phenomenon which occurred at a specific close juncture between a noun and certain short words. See Lambdin 1971: 322–25. This explanation of the doubling in *wayyiqtol* remains a valid solution for those who accept the existence of junctural gemination as advocated by Lambdin on broader grounds.

pattern distinct. Being that I am unsure about the Masoretic origin of the doubling, I subscribe to the explanation provided by Loprieno thirty-five years ago.¹⁸ Since his observations have not received enough attention among scholars working of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system, I quote them in full. Speaking about the vocalization of the conjunction in *wayyiqtol*, he says:

It shows, in my opinion, that this form is a remnant from an older linguistic stage, a stage in which the short unstressed vowel *a* had not yet undergone the phonetic evolution to *ā*, as it is common in Hebrew in pretonic position if not directly preceding the stressed syllable. In order to understand the strange reduplication of the pronominal prefix, I suggest that this was the only device the Masoretic system could use to keep the full /a/ phoneme, present in that form as inherited from older times. The Tiberian vocalization system does not allow a short vowel in an open unstressed syllable; by the reduplication of the following consonant the syllable became closed, and the /a/ phoneme could be properly kept. If the following consonant did not bear reduplication, this phoneme could not be kept in the system, and /ā/, having the closest phonetic realization, was used in order to replace it.

The reason for trying to keep the [a] sound in past sequential forms was that *wayyaqom* was an old morphological formation, specialized in Hebrew in a new function unknown before. As I suggested above, Ugaritic shows in its verbal system a form of the prefix conjugation used to express past events: *ybk* [yabkī < yabkiy] (perfect) vs. *ybk̄y* [yabkiyu] (narrative present). The first is precisely the form kept in Hebrew and specialized in sequential use with the conjunction *wa-*, pronounced like in the older stage; the second will eventually become the regular prefix conjugation of Hebrew, keeping the present-future reference but losing the narrative one (with the mentioned exceptions) (Loprieno 1980: 10).

¹⁸ Loprieno's paper is methodologically exemplary because it adopts a typological perspective. Earlier studies on *wayyiqtol* and the Egyptian verb (Young 1953; Sheehan 1971) often based their argument on etymological and historical considerations. The Egyptian verb, despite the antiquity of its attestations, is highly innovative within the Afro-Asiatic family in that it abandons completely the prefixed conjugations in favor of the suffixed ones. It should be therefore clear that the Egyptian suffixed forms cannot be historically related to *wayyiqtol*, which is a prefixed form.

6. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

The texts presented above have been neglected in the discussion of the historical development of the West Semitic verbal system, in particular about the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*.¹⁹ In my opinion, these are persuasive pieces of evidence in favor of the existence of the short prefixed conjugation *yaqtul* with preterite meaning and its narrative use in the fourteen century Canaanite dialects. The purpose of this paper is to call attention to these texts in order that they be evaluated independently.

As explained in section 2 of this paper, the evidence of the Amarna letters is limited and requires a cautious approach. Its main limitation with regard to the study of the verbal system is preference for certain forms and the under-representation of others because of their content and epistolary genre. The mixed, Akkadian and Canaanite, character of the linguistic system of the letters cautions against direct identification of all forms as Canaanite. These two difficulties occur together with regard to the recognition of the past *yaqtul* conjugation. The mixed linguistic system does not permit one to confidently identify forms of the Amarna short prefix conjugation as reflecting the Canaanite *yaqtul* rather than Akkadian *iprus*. The scarcity of narrative passages hinders a comprehensive description of all verbal usages. Yet, in my opinion, the syntax found in the six narratives presented here resembles the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* closely enough to suggest the compelling conclusion that the latter preserves an ancient Canaanite pattern which employed the short *preterite yaqtul*.

¹⁹ For example, they are absent from a detailed discussion in Cook 2012: 110–18. Another recent historical study of the Biblical Hebrew verb refers only to *EA* 245 (text no. 6 above) but does not compare its syntax to the *wayyiqtol* narrative chain. See Notarius 2013: 313–14. In her more recent contribution, again quoting *EA* 245: 8–45, Notarius comes close to my analysis. She observes that the preterite forms in this text are mostly clause-initial and preceded by the conjugation *u* and that they “tend to form long narrative chains within a well-shaped sequential temporal pattern” (Notarius 2015: 249). In spite of these pertinent observations, she fails to connect the *yaqtul* narrative sequence in the Amarna letters to the Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*. In all fairness, these fine scholars (Cook and Notarius) are not to be blamed for the omission of the passages I discuss because they rely on secondary literature on the Amarna letters where these passages are not highlighted in the way they deserve.

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