

Diptotic Geographical Feminine Names in the Hebrew Bible

Stanislav Segert (Los Angeles)

This short article deals with a rather limited topic, the use of the feminine ending *-th*, in the Tiberian vocalization */-ā́tā́/*, in certain geographical names. Only those names which in their basic, “nominative” form exhibit *-h* */-ā́/* (< **/-at/*) are dealt with, while names with nominative form on *-t* */-ā́t/*, such as *ʾprt(h)* and *hmt(h)*, are excluded.

The scope of this short article is much narrower than that of the thorough and detailed study devoted to the use of the „*h*-locale“ by Jacob Hoftijzer¹. He studied all instances of this *-h*, whether with words of feminine or masculine type, including general nouns, geographical names and adverbs. Also forms functionally corresponding to those with *-h* but not exhibiting this ending are dealt with in his book. Hoftijzer’s approach is basically synchronical. In so far as he arranges his rich material diachronically, he does it within the limits of Classical Hebrew².

In the following some relations to similar phenomena in other Semitic languages are mentioned, which may help explain two different functions of *-th* */-ā́tā́/* with Hebrew geographical names of feminine gender.

The forms of feminine geographical names ending on *-th* */-ā́tā́/* are frequent and conspicuous in the story of Samson³. The form *ʾzth* */ʾazzā́tā́/* appears twice (Jdc 16:1 and 21), the form *tmnth* */timnā́tā́/* five times at the beginning of Jdc 14 (v. 2, twice in vv. 1 and 5).

Forms with *-th* */-ā́tā́/* following verbal forms from *h-l-k* “to go” and *y-r-d* “to descend” can be explained as nouns with the adverbial ending *-h* */-ā́/* which indicates direction: *wylk* . . . *ʾzth* “and he went to Gaza” (Jdc 16:1); *wywyrdw* *ʾwtw* *ʾzth* “and they brought him down to Gaza” (Jdc 16:21); *wyrd* . . . *tmnth* “and he descended to Timnah” (Jdc 14:1 and 5). These forms of geographical nouns with directional markers appear at the end of verse subdivisions and are provided with distinctive accent signs, in Jdc 16:21 with *r^ebī^a*, in three other forms with *ʾatnā́h*.

The form */timnā́tā́/* appears also in Gn 38:12 and 13, following forms of the verb *ʿ-ly* “to go up”. Similar forms with the directional marker are used for feminine geographical names with the article: *hgb^ʿth*, *hmspth*, *hrmth*, especially in the books of Judges and Samuel⁴. This ending is used also for a name outside Palestine: *rbllth*.

¹ J. Hoftijzer, *A Search for Method: A Study in the Syntactic Use of the H-Locale in Classical Hebrew*, Leiden 1981.

² Cf. *ib.*, 249–253.

³ Cf. S. Segert, *Paronomasia in the Samson narrative in Judges xiii–xvi*, VT 34 (1984) 454–461, esp. 454, n. 20.

⁴ Cf. *hgb^ʿth* Jdc 20:4, 14; 1S 10:10; 23:19; 26:1; *hmspth*: 1S 7:5, 6, 7; Jer 40:6, 8, 12, 13; 41:1; *hrmth* 1S 1:19; 2:11; 7:17; 8:4; 15:34; 16:13; 19:18, 22; also *hs^ʿyrth* Jdc 3:26. – Names

The direction can also be indicated by geographical names without the directional marker *-h /ā/*. After forms of the verbs *y-r-d* “to descend” and *h-l-k* “to go”, the feminine name *q’ylyh* in IS 23:4 and 5 indicates direction, “to Keilah . . .”; cf. also feminine names in Jos 19:29.

There are altogether 41 instances of feminine geographical names with the ending *-th /-ātā/* in the directional function. They appear mostly in the books of Judges (9 times), of Samuel (1S 16 times, 2S once), in the Book of Jeremiah (9 times), and in Genesis (twice). One occurrence can be found in each of the following books: Ex, Dt, Jos, and 1R.

These forms with *-th /-ātā/* can be considered archaic accusatives of direction, in which the original case ending **-/a/* was preserved⁵.

The directional *-h /-ā/* appears also with geographical names of masculine type and with those of pluralic form. Also some general nouns, such as *ʾrsh* “toward the earth” with such an ending are attested.

While this use of directional *-h /-ā/* can be explained by similar use of nouns in the accusative case in other Semitic languages⁶, the Ugaritic words such as *arsh*⁷ – most probably with consonantal *-h* – may point to another analogy, Akkadian *-iš*⁸.

The Ugaritic directional affix developed probably from “Proto-Semitic” **-/iš/*, the consonant of which changed – like those in the personal pronouns of the third person – to */h/*⁹. It can be supposed that the laryngeal */h/*¹⁰ affected the pronunciation of the preceding vowel toward */a/*¹¹. The resulting form */-ah/* differed from the accusative with */-a/* only in the final laryngeal. As final */-h/* in Hebrew endings was eliminated¹², the directional form became identical with the form of noun preserving the ending */-a/* of the adverbial/accusative case.

Either of the above mentioned explanations is sufficient for the directional function

without article, besides those mentioned in the text, are: *gw'th* Jer 31:39; *mrth* Ex 15:23; *prth* Jdc 9:5; *šrrth* Jdc 7:22; *rbth* 2S 12:29; *tršth* 1R 14:17.

⁵ Cf. GKa 259 (§ 90a); BLe 527–529 (§ 65n–x); P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome 1923), 222 (§ 93e).

⁶ Cf. Brockelmann-VG 338–341 (§ 226); W. Fischer, *Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch* (Wiesbaden 1972), 173 (§ 378); GAG 200 (§ 146b); 162 (§ 113b).

⁷ R. Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik II* (Berlin 1969), 49–50 (§ 45.3c), interprets this form as an accusative to which the deictic element **-/hā/* was added. Cf. also M. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology* (Romae 1965), 33.

⁸ E. A. Speiser, *The Terminative-Adverbial in Canaanite-Ugaritic and Akkadian*, IEJ 4 (1954) 108–115 = *Oriental and Biblical Studies* (Philadelphia 1967), 494–505. – Cf. W. von Soden (v. n. 6), 88–90 (§ 67). – Cf. S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1984), 76 (§ 55.2).

⁹ Cf. Speiser, 112–113.

¹⁰ For the consonantal character in Ugaritic cf. F. Rosenthal, *Review of Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, Ihjā' an-nahw*, Or 7 (1938) 165–169, esp. 167, n. 1; in Hebrew cf. B. Stade, *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig 1879), 35, quoted by Speiser, 108, n. 2.

¹¹ For similar changes cf. Segert (v. n. 8), 37 (§ 38.41). – Speiser, 115, has no explanation for the divergence of vowels between Akkadian *-iš* and Ugaritic */-āh/* (paralleled by Ethiopic */-hā/*), but makes it clear that the consonants and not the vowels are distinctive in this instance.

¹² Cf. *l(y)lh* */laylā/* < **/lēlah/*, R. Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik I* (Berlin 1966), 96 (§ 22.3b).

of *-th* /-*ātā*/ in feminine geographical names, but for their adnominal/genitival functions another explanation must be found.

The only instance of such a form in the nominative function, *wtmnth* in Jos 19:43, in a list of towns, may be considered an incorrect analogy to the more frequent forms in the indirect cases. Some versions reflect the correct shorter form, cf. *Thamna* in some Septuagint manuscripts¹³.

Feminine geographical names ending with *-th* /-*ātā*/ appear in eight instances after prepositions and in three instances after nouns in the construct state. Both nouns in the construct state and the prepositions – from the syntactical viewpoint equivalent to nouns – were followed by nouns in the adnominal/genitive case.

The construction *btmnt* /b^e-*timnātā*/ “in Thimna” appears twice at the beginning of Jdc 14, in vv. 1 and 2. Opposite the single occurrence of *brblth* “in Ribla” in Jer 52:10 there are four simple forms *brblh*, in Jer 39:6, 52:27; 2R 23:33; 25:21. The same name appears with the directional ending *-th*, as *rblth*, five times: Jer 39:5; 52:9, 26; 2R 25:6, 20. The form *wbyn šrdth* “and between Seredah” in 2C 4:17 is isolated¹⁴. The short form appears in *mn ḥšrdh* “from Seredah” in 1R 11:26.

In the list of stations through which Israelites travelled in the desert (Num 33:5–49) the geographical names appear twice, first with the preposition *b-* “in”, then with *mn* “from”. Among them are eight feminine names written with *-h* /-*ā*/ and only two names with *-th* /-*ātā*/: *bqhlth* and *mqlth* (33:22 and 23), and *byḥth* and *myḥth* (33:34). The same name is written *mn yḥh* /*min yāḥā*/ in 2R 21:19.

The name *tmnh* “Thimna” appears with the ending *-th* twice, in the Samson story in Jdc 14:5 *‘d krmy tmnh* “unto the vineyards of Thimna”, and in Gn 38:14 *‘l drk tmnh* “on the road of Thimna”. This second instance can be also interpreted as an adnominal adjunct, “on the road (that) to(ward) Thimna”. In Ez 6:14 the reading *mmḏbr ḏblth* may be emended with the support of the variant in the Codex Petropolitanus to *rblth*¹⁵ “from the desert of D/Riblah”. This emendation does not affect the ending.

If the same form can serve in both adverbial and adnominal function, expressed in the original inflectional system by the accusative and the genitive case respectively, connections with forms indicating both these functions in other Semitic languages may be sought.

While the Arabic triptotic inflectional system uses most nouns in the singular three cases, nominative on /-u/, genitive on /-i/ and accusative on /-a/, for names of the feminine type the diptotic inflection is used, with /-atu/ for the nominative and /-ata/ for the genitive/accusative¹⁶. The sacred city of Mecca is usually quoted as an example: nominative *Makkatu*, genitive/accusative *Makkata*.

At least some traces of the diptotic inflection of feminine geographical names are attested in Ugaritic: *ša māt (āl) ū-ga-ri-ta* “of the land of Ugarit”¹⁷ (beside *ū-ga-ri-ti*

¹³ Esp. in the Codex Alexandrinus (A); the longer form *Thamnatha* is attested by the Codex Vaticanus (B).

¹⁴ In the parallel, supposedly original, passage 1R 7:46 the name is given as *šrtm*, “Sartan”.

¹⁵ This instance is not listed among many mix-ups between r and d collected by F. Delitzsch, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament* (Berlin/Leipzig 1920), 105–107 (104a–c).

¹⁶ W. Fischer, v. n. 6, 82 (153d).

¹⁷ RS 6.198:5, Syria 16 (1935) 189, 191; cf. Segert, v. n. 8, 50–51 (§ 52.41).

with */-i/* of the triptotic inflection¹⁸ and of *ú-ga-ri-it* without ending¹⁹); most probably also [*š*]a (*ál*)*uš-na-at-t[a]* “of Ušnatu”²⁰ (beside *uš-na-ti*²¹).

The comparison of Hebrew forms of feminine geographical names exhibiting forms with *-th /-āṯā/* in adnominal/genetival function allows to interpret them as remains of diptotic inflection. The strongest argument for this interpretation is the practically exclusive use of these forms for the “indirect” case, while for the nominative the forms are written with *-h* as vowel letter for */-ā/*.

Some further questions may be asked: Are not the forms with *-th* used in the adnominal/genetival function rather incorrect analogies to the forms correctly used in directional/accusative function? The quantitative relationship may suggest a positive answer to this question for the names *tmnth* and *rblth*.

Can the concept of residual diptosis be extended to some masculine geographical names or even to some general nouns? The diptotic inflection of some Ugaritic geographical names, especially those with the affirmative */-ān/* and the similar phenomenon, from the morphological viewpoint, of the Ugaritic and Arabic personal names with the same affirmative may require further investigation.

Abstract

This article deals only with those names which end in the “nominative” on *-h /-ā/* and in the “genitive/accusative” on *-th /-āṯā/*. They appear after verbs indicating direction. The directional ending *-h /-ā/* may be related to the accusative ending **/-a/*, or to the Akkadian terminative *-iš* and Ugaritic directional **/-ih/ > /-ah/ -h*. The use of forms on *-th /-āṯā/* after prepositions and nouns in the construct state points to their genitival function. For use of such forms in both accusative and genitival function, analogies may be seen in diptotic geographical feminine names in Ugaritic (*ugarīta*) and Arabic (Makkata).

Anschrift des Autors:

Prof. Dr. St. Segert, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90024, U.S.A.

¹⁸ PRU III, 131:15. 122:14.

¹⁹ Ib., 45:16. 140:3.

²⁰ PRU IV, 73:17. 335:38.

²¹ PRU VI, 42:3.

Additional bibliographical notes:

M. Liverani, Antecedenti del diptotismo arabo nei testi accadici di Ugarit, RSO 39 (1963) 131–160, esp. 131¹. 155. 159f.

A. Lek'iašvili, Das diptotische System im klassischen Arabisch, ArOr 38 (1970) 57–69, esp. 59. 69.