

Father, brother, and father-in-law as III-w nouns in Semitic

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that the Semitic kinship terms $*^{\prime}ab$ -‘father’, $*^{\prime}ah$ -‘brother’, and $*ham$ - ‘father-in-law’ originally ended in a *w*, which left traces in several of their forms. In the singular, the *w* contracted with the case vowels leaving a distinctive pattern of short and long vowels in the unbound, bound, and suffixal forms. In the plural, the *w* was retained in several languages due to the insertion of an *a*-vowel between the final two root consonants, a common Afro-Asiatic pluralization strategy: $*^{\prime}abw$ - > $*^{\prime}abaw$. I further suggest that the West Semitic plural morpheme *-aw* was derived by analogy with the plurals $*^{\prime}abaw$ and $*^{\prime}ahaw$, and is not, as commonly suggested, an inherited Semitic or Afro-Asiatic plural marker.

Keywords: Proto-Semitic, Kinship terms, III-w nouns, Bi-consonantal roots, Broken plurals

I. Introduction

The words for ‘father’, ‘brother’, and ‘father-in-law’ are considered some of the quintessential bi-consonantal nouns in Semitic.¹ As such, they have featured prominently in the debate over the extent of bi-consonantal roots in Proto-Semitic.² Yet they exhibit several morphological peculiarities that betray their tri-consonantal nature. All three nouns take long vowels in the bound and suffixal forms and have derivatives that contain a glide in several Semitic languages. It is unclear, however, whether this behaviour is original or a Procrustean adaptation to a predominantly tri-consonantal system. In this paper, I will argue that these features have a common, phonological origin: $*^{\prime}ab$ -, $*^{\prime}ah$ -, and $*ham$ - were originally III-w forms in Pre-Proto-Semitic and, like many *qvtl*- nouns, formed the plural by ‘a-insertion’.

This suggestion is not entirely new. Jacob Barth (1887), Theodor Nöldeke (1910), and Rainer Voigt (2001) have all suggested that these words originally

- 1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 224th annual American Oriental Society meeting in Phoenix. I would like to thank the members of the audience for their questions and critiques. I would also like to thank Na‘ama Pat-El, John Huehnergard, the two anonymous referees, and the managing editor of *BSOAS* for reading and commenting on earlier incarnations of this paper. Any remaining errors are my own.
- 2 For an extensive survey of this discussion see del Olmo Lete 2008: 53–78, especially pp. 59 and 69.

Table 1. The unbound, bound, and suffixal forms of $*^{\prime}ab-$, $*^{\prime}ah-$, and $*ham-$ in Semitic

Language	Unbound form	Bound form	Suffixal form
Akkadian	<i>abvm</i>	<i>abī</i> N/ <i>abū</i> N	<i>abv̄</i> -
Classical Arabic	$^{\prime}abv\bar{n}$	$^{\prime}ab\bar{v}$ N	$^{\prime}ab\bar{v}$ -
Ge'ez	$^{\prime}ab/\prime aba$	$^{\prime}aba$ N	$^{\prime}abu-/\prime abā-$
Biblical Hebrew	$^{\prime}āb$	$^{\prime}ābī$ N	$^{\prime}ābī-$
Proto-Semitic	$*^{\prime}abvm$	$*^{\prime}ab\bar{v}$ N	$*^{\prime}ab\bar{v}$ -

ended in a third, consonantal *w*, but their conclusions have not found widespread acceptance. The reluctance to adopt their position is, I believe, motivated by the phenomenon of root extension, the addition of a weak consonant like *w*, *y*, or *h* to bi-consonantal roots in the plural. In several daughter languages, Semitic speakers expanded these roots to fit the predominant tri-consonantal paradigm: Biblical Hebrew $^{\prime}āmā$ ‘maidservant’, for example, becomes $^{\prime}āmāhōt$ in the plural, while Classical Arabic *sanatun* ‘year’ becomes *sanawāt*, and so on (Steiner 2011: 43). It is conceivable then, that the *w* associated with $*^{\prime}ab-$, $*^{\prime}ah-$, and $*ham-$ is a root extension and not a root consonant, a possibility which Barth, Nöldeke, and Voigt do not address. But, as I will demonstrate, the final *w* goes back to Pre-Proto-Semitic before root extensions can be detected. I will further argue that this *w* gave rise to the West Semitic plural marker *-aw*.

II. Analysis

The initial clue that $*^{\prime}ab-$, $*^{\prime}ah-$, and $*ham-$ ended in a glide comes from their case vowels in the singular. In several Semitic languages, these vowels are short in closed syllables like the unbound form and long in open syllables such as the bound and suffixal forms (Table 1).³ Classical Arabic retains a full declension for all three forms (Fischer 1987: §150). Other languages have lost the case distinction in certain environments. In Akkadian, for example, case vowels dropped from the bound form early on, but were retained in other environments.⁴ The bound form of father and brother typically end in a final \bar{i} or a final \bar{u} in Old Akkadian prose and Old Babylonian poetry, remnants of the genitive and nominative cases respectively (von Soden 1995: §64 a, c). Ge'ez, on the other hand, preserves a distinction between accusative and non-accusative cases in the unbound and suffixal forms – nominative-genitive $^{\prime}abu-$ alternates with accusative $^{\prime}abā-$ – yet lost all case markings in the bound form (Dillmann 2003: §154d). Hebrew lost case markings entirely in the singular, but the bound and suffixal forms of father and brother preserve the original \bar{i} of the genitive

3 The bound form of a noun marks it as the head noun in a nominal chain; the unbound form marks it as independent.

4 The genitive *-i* still survives in Old Akkadian in the construct on masculine and feminine singular nouns and feminine plural nouns (von Soden 1995: §64a; Hasselbach 2005: 183).

Table 2. The lengthened feminine singular suffix in the Semitic words for ‘sister’ and ‘mother-in-law’

‘Sister’		‘Mother-in-law’	
Language	Form	Language	Form
Akkadian	<i>aḥātum</i>	Akkadian	<i>emētum</i>
Ugaritic	<i>ʾaḥātu⁵</i>	Ge‘ez	<i>ḥamāt</i>
Syriac	<i>ḥātā < *ʾaḥātaʾ</i>	Classical Arabic	<i>ḥamāt</i>
Biblical Hebrew	<i>ʾāḥōt < *ʾaḥāt</i>	Syriac	<i>ḥmātā < *ḥamātaʾ</i>
Proto-Semitic	<i>*aḥātum</i>	Biblical Hebrew	<i>ḥāmōt < *ḥamāt</i>
		Proto-Semitic	<i>*ḥamātum</i>

(Gesenius et al. 1987: §96). The similarity of the Akkadian and Classical Arabic patterns, coupled with supporting evidence from other West Semitic languages, suggests that this pattern goes back to Proto-Semitic. The words for sister and mother-in-law, which are derived from **ʾaḥ-* and **ḥam-* by suffixation, exhibit a similar phenomenon. In several Semitic languages, the common feminine suffix *-at* appears as *-āt* in a historically open syllable (Table 2).

Several explanations have been advanced to account for this pattern of vowels. Carl Brockelmann (1908: 331) saw them as an early adaptation to the predominantly tri-consonantal pattern of Semitic. Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander (1962: 524; Bauer 1915: 561), on the other hand, derived them by analogy from the proposed vocative ending **-ā*, while Aharon Dolgopolsky (1978: 1) posited stress-based lengthening of the case vowels. None of these suggestions is particularly convincing. Brockelmann does not explain why the kinship terms **ʾab-*, **ʾaḥ-*, and **ḥam-* received special treatment compared to other originally bi-consonantal nouns such as **yad-* ‘hand’ and **iṭʾ-* ‘tree’. Bauer and Leander’s vocative **-ā* lacks adequate supporting data⁶ and Dolgopolsky’s stress-based approach falters for lack of evidence for phonemic stress in Proto-Semitic.⁷ Barth (1887: 610), Nöldeke (1910: 112), and Voigt

5 For the vocalization of this form see Huehnergard 2008b: 105.

6 Bauer (1915: 561) claims that the vocative *-ā* occurs frequently in Arabic, in Ethiopic *abā*, and in Babylonian *belāma*. But his Akkadian example actually contains the Neo-Babylonian form of the 1cs possessive morpheme *-ā* (von Soden 1995: §42 j/k) and thus cannot constitute East Semitic evidence for this proposed morpheme. Without East Semitic data, we cannot reliably reconstruct a vocative morpheme *-ā* to Proto-Semitic (Huehnergard 2006: 2–3; Wilson-Wright 2014: 2) where it supposedly contracted with the case vowels.

7 Dolgopolsky (1978: 1–2) cites the plurals of segolate nouns in Hebrew and the allomorphy of the feminine singular morpheme as evidence for phonemic stress in Semitic, but these phenomena do not necessitate the reconstruction of stress. The Hebrew segolate plurals represent an inherited Northwest Semitic trait – the double pluralization of *qvtl* nouns (Huehnergard 1991: 284–5) – and the short form of the feminine singular morpheme could be the result of syncope (Steiner 2012: 373–5). If Proto-Semitic had phonemic stress, it would probably exhibit more apparent homophones that differed only in their stress patterns. Some Semitic languages do display phonemic stress (e.g. Hebrew *ʾqāmā* ‘she stood’ vs *qāʾmā* ‘standing’; Ethiopic *raʾkabā* ‘they (fem.) found’ vs. *rakaʾbā* ‘he found her’), as the result of secondary developments particular to each language; but

(2001: 206–13) come closer to the reconstruction advocated here when they reconstruct **ʔab-*, **ʔah-*, and **ham-* with a final, consonantal *w* that contracted with the case vowels. Yet they do not relate these contractions to general sound changes, but instead give examples of ad hoc vowel shortening in particular forms. As I will show, however, the alternating quantity of the case vowels in **ʔab-*, **ʔah-*, **ham-* is the result of a general Proto-Semitic sound change.

An identical pattern of long and short vowels can be reconstructed to Proto-Semitic for the preterite of II-glide verbs as the result of the glide contracting with the following vowel (Table 3). Third masculine singular *yaqum*, for example, alternates with third masculine plural *yaqūmū*. Contractions also took place in nominal forms derived from II-glide roots such as Akkadian **malwuṭum* ‘bridle’ > *malūṭum* and Arabic **maqwamum* ‘place’ > *maqāmun* (Table 4). On the basis of these forms, John Huehnergard (2006: 10; 2008a: 230; 2010: 125–6) has proposed a Proto-Semitic sound change: **Cwv*, **Cv* > *Cv* in closed syllables but *Cv̄* in open syllables, which can account for the behaviour of both middle weak roots and the nouns derived from them.⁸ The same rule can also account for the case vowels of **ʔab-*, **ʔah-*, and **ham-* and the long feminine suffixes of **ʔahāt-* ‘sister’ and **hamāt-* ‘mother-in-law’. In the unbound forms, Pre-Proto-Semitic nominal **ʔabwum* contracted to *ʔabum*, while in the bound and suffixal forms, **ʔabwu-* contracted to *ʔabū*. In the case of sister and mother-in-law, **ʔahwatum* contracted to **ʔahātum*.⁹

It remains to specify which glide triggered these contractions (see Table 5). In the case of brother, at least one Proto-Semitic derivative contains a final *w*: the denominal verb **taʔahwa* ‘to be brothers’, which is attested in Akkadian (*athū* ‘to fraternize’), Geʿez (*taʔahawa/taʔāhawa* ‘to be brothers, contract an alliance’), Sabaic (*tʔhw* ‘to ally oneself with’), and Classical Arabic (*ʔāhawa* ‘to associate with someone as a brother’) typically in the Gt stem. **ʔab-* and **ham-*, on the other hand, do not have any Proto-Semitic derivatives that contain *w*. But they probably ended in a *w* as well, because other forms of **ʔab-*, **ʔah-*, and **ham-* also contain a glide, even though they cannot be formally reconstructed to Proto-Semitic. The Geʿez, Tigrē, and Mehri plurals of father and

these stress patterns occur in different subsystems of the language and cannot be reconstructed to Proto-Semitic.

- 8 Other III-*w* nouns like Geʿez *badw* ‘desert’, Classical Arabic *daʔwatun* ‘acclaim’, and Biblical Hebrew *šalwā* ‘rest, ease’ appear to violate this sound change. But since they are derived from verbal roots, the *w* was probably retained due to paradigm pressure. Furthermore, many of them do not go back to Pre-Proto-Semitic when this sound change was operative. In his extensive study of isolated nouns in Proto-Semitic, Fox (2003: 77) only mentions a single isolated *qatw-* noun, **qaww-* ‘thread, line’, which probably resisted contraction due to the gemination of the glide. He does note, however, six isolated *qvtv-* nouns that do not undergo contraction: **ʔary-* ‘wild animal’, **gady-* ‘kid’, **lahy-* ‘jaw’, **θʔaby-* ‘gazelle’, **kvlv-at-* ‘kidney’, and **ʔury-* ‘manger’. These nouns pose a problem for half of Huehnergard’s proposed sound change, but do not affect my argument.
- 9 The Biblical Hebrew form **ʔahwatum* > *ʔahāwā* ‘brotherhood’ (Zech 11: 14) appears to have survived this sound change. It should have contracted to **ʔahātum* like its homophone **ʔahwatum* ‘sister’, but retained the original glide.

Table 3. Proto-semitic vowel contractions in the preterite of \sqrt{qwm} 'to stand'

	Singular	Plural
3 m	* <i>yaqwum</i> > <i>yaqum</i>	* <i>yaqwumū</i> > <i>yaqūmū</i>
3f	* <i>taqwum</i> > <i>taqum</i>	* <i>yaqwumna</i> > <i>yaqūmna</i>
2 m	* <i>taqwum</i> > <i>taqum</i>	* <i>taqwumū</i> > <i>taqūmū</i>
2f	* <i>taqwumī</i> > <i>taqūmī</i>	* <i>taqwumna</i> > <i>taqumna</i>
1c	* <i>ʔaqwum</i> > <i>ʔaqum</i>	* <i>naqwum</i> > <i>naqum</i>

Table 4. Proto-Semitic vowel contractions in nouns derived from II-glide roots

Language	Noun
Akkadian	* <i>malwuṭum</i> > <i>malūṭum</i> 'bridle'
Akkadian	* <i>makwaṣum</i> > <i>makāṣum</i> 'slaughter bench'
Ge'ez	* <i>makwanum</i> > <i>makān</i> 'place'
Classical Arabic	* <i>maqwamum</i> > <i>maqāmun</i> 'place'
Biblical Hebrew	* <i>manwuʿsatum</i> > <i>mənūsā</i> 'flight'
Biblical Hebrew	* <i>maqwamum</i> > <i>māqôm</i> 'place'

Table 5. Plural forms of 'father' and 'brother' preserving a final *w*

Language	Form	Meaning
Ge'ez	<i>ʔabaw</i>	'fathers'
Tigrē	<i>abaw</i>	'forefathers' ¹⁰
Mehri ¹¹	<i>ḡayw</i> < * <i>ʔahaw</i>	'brothers'
Ge'ez	<i>ʔahaw</i> < * <i>ʔahaw</i>	'brothers'
Tigrē	<i>ḥaw</i> < * <i>ʔahaw</i>	'brothers'

brother, for example, take the form *CaCaw*, while other, derived, forms contain a *w* as well.

Rebecca Hasselbach (2007: 126) and Frank Moore Cross (2003: 355) treat the *-aw* of *ʔabaw* and *ʔahaw* as an independent plural morpheme, sporadically attested in other Semitic languages (e.g. Ge'ez *ʔafaw* 'mouths'). Yet there is little evidence for reconstructing *-aw* as an Afro-Asiatic or even Proto-Semitic plural marker. The form *-aw* only appears as a plural morpheme in West Semitic languages like Ge'ez, Syriac, and Arabic and therefore cannot be reconstructed to Proto-Semitic on the basis of internal evidence. Furthermore, the Afro-Asiatic parallels for this morpheme are weak. In Egyptian the masculine plural is marked by a final *-w*, which survives into Coptic under a bewildering variety of forms, including *-ew*, *-ēw*, *-ēwə*, *-ōw*, and *-ow* (Layton 2004: 87). Of these, only *-ow* reflects original *-aw*.¹² This suggests that *-aw* was either one of

10 The Tigrē form *abaw* is a morphological relic relegated to secondary semantic use. The normal plural of *ab(u)* is *abač* or *abayt* (Palmer 1962: 75; Raz 1983: 18).

11 I would like to thank Aaron Rubin for providing information about the Modern South Arabian forms used in this paper.

12 See Allen (2013: 26), for the reconstruction of Egyptian vowels on the basis of Coptic.

many different masculine plural markers in Egyptian or, more likely, that the Egyptian masculine plural morpheme had the form $-w(v)$ and “trapped” the preceding vowel (e.g. $*sa'nu-w(v)$ ‘brothers’ > $snēw$, but $*i'ha-w(v)$ ‘oxen’ > $ehow$). With regard to Chadic, Paul Newman (1990: 36) remarks that “the evidence here is too weak to justify reconstructing $-au$ or $-aw$ as a PC [Proto-Chadic] ending. Although plural forms with final $-au$ or $-o$ do occur on the surface in a number of scatter languages, it is unlikely that most of them are cognate”. Andrzej Zaborski (1986: 295) does not find any examples of $-aw$ in the Cushitic languages in his comparative study of plural morphology. And, in the Berber language Touareg, the plural morpheme $-aw$ only occurs on two nouns (Ratcliffe 1998: 103), which does not provide enough evidence for reconstructing $-aw$ to Proto-Berber.

I would like to suggest, therefore, that ${}^{\prime}abaw$ and ${}^{\prime}ahaw$ are broken plurals (i.e. plurals formed by a change in vocalic pattern) and that $-aw$ was only later reinterpreted as a separate plural morpheme by analogy with the singular. The reason for this is simple. As $qatl$ nouns, Pre-Proto-Semitic $*{}^{\prime}abw-$, and $*{}^{\prime}ahw-$ most likely formed their plurals by a-ininsertion – the inter-digitation of an a-vowel between the second and third radicals. This morphological process, as Joseph Greenberg (1955: 198–204) has shown, is a common way of forming the plural of $qvtl$ nouns in Afro-Asiatic. Furthermore, these plurals must predate Proto-Semitic, because the elision of the glide in the singular in Proto-Semitic left speakers with no evidence for restoring the original glide in the plural. Once the w elided in the singular, the final $-aw$ of the plural appeared unmotivated and was ripe for reinterpretation in accordance with Kuryłowicz’s fourth law of analogy (Kuryłowicz 1945–49: 30). Speakers of different West Semitic languages extracted a new plural marker from $*{}^{\prime}abaw$ and $*{}^{\prime}ahaw$ by analogy with the external plurals:

${}^{\prime}ilum : {}^{\prime}il-ūna :: {}^{\prime}abum : {}^{\prime}ab-aw$

They then transferred the newly minted plural morpheme to other nouns by means of a second analogy:

$Ge'ez {}^{\prime}ab : {}^{\prime}ab-aw :: {}^{\prime}af : {}^{\prime}af-aw$ ¹³

In other cases, the old plural gave way to new forms. Already in Proto-Semitic, a new plural was formed by geminating the second consonant and adding an external plural marker, a common pluralization strategy in Semitic: $*{}^{\prime}abum \sim *{}^{\prime}abb-ū-na$.¹⁴ The new plural of $*{}^{\prime}ahw-$ was especially pervasive; it appears in

13 In several Aramaic dialects, speakers no longer understood $-aw$ as a plural marker and added the general plural morpheme $-āt$ to these forms to supplement the weakening numeric associations of $-aw$ (compare Ge'ez ${}^{\prime}afawāt$ ‘mouths’ and Arabic $sanawāt-un$ ‘years’). This process gave rise to several plurals in $-awāt$ such as Syriac ${}^{\prime}atrāwātā$ ‘places’ from ${}^{\prime}atrā$ and Targumic Aramaic ${}^{\prime}ātwāt$ ‘signs’ from ${}^{\prime}ā$, which do not have w as a final root consonant. See Nöldeke 1875: 167; Bauer and Leander 1962: §53j; Fassberg 1990: 136 for more examples of this plural ending. Most of the nouns they cite, however, originally had w as a third consonant.

14 Compare Akkadian $arku$ ‘long (sg.)’ ~ $arrakū$ ‘long (pl.)’ (CAD A2 303) and Hebrew $qēšet$ ‘bow’ ~ $qaššētôt$ (cnst.) ‘bows’ (Isa. 5: 28; Jer. 51: 56; Ps. 37: 15; Neh. 4: 7).

Table 6. Retention of *ʔahaw in the plural of ‘sister’¹⁶

Language	Plural
Tigrinya	<i>hawāt</i>
Arabic	^ʔ <i>aḥawāt-</i>
Syriac	^ʔ <i>aḥwātā</i> < *ʔ <i>aḥaw-āt-aʔ</i>
Mehri	<i>gawtən</i> < *ʔ <i>aḥaw-tinʔ</i>
Harsusi	<i>gawtən</i> < *ʔ <i>aḥaw-tinʔ</i>

Akkadian (*aḥū*), Aramaic (^ʔ*aḥīn* < *ʔ*aḥḥīn*), and Hebrew (^ʔ*aḥīm* < *ʔ*aḥḥīm*) and is therefore reconstructable to Proto-Semitic alongside the original plural *ʔ*aḥaw*.

The original *-w* of *ʔ*abw-*, *ʔ*aḥw-*, and *ʔ*ḥamw-* survives in other patterns as well, such as the Sabaic plurals ^ʔ*bw* ‘fathers’ (C 322/7), ^ʔ*bwt* ‘elders’ (C 609/2), and ^ʔ*ḥwt* ‘brothers’ (C 541/18). A.F.L. Beeston (1962: 35) treats ^ʔ*bw* as an ^ʔ*afʕal-ū* plural – that is a plural with a suffixed *w* – but the most common internal plural in Sabaic is ^ʔ*afʕāl*, which accounts for more than half of such plurals (Beeston 1984: 26). Thus, ^ʔ*bw* most likely preserves the original *w* of *ʔ*abw-*. The Geʿez plural ^ʔ*aḥmāw* ‘fathers-in-law’ reflects the same pattern. Similarly, the Classical Arabic dual forms ^ʔ*aḥaw-āni* ‘brothers (du.)’, ^ʔ*abaw-āni* ‘fathers (du.)’ appear to be built on a singular *qatal* base that also preserves this final *w*. In several languages, the plural of sister derives from the original plural of brother. Tigrinya *ḥawat*, Classical Arabic ^ʔ*aḥawāt-*, Syriac ^ʔ*aḥwātā*, and perhaps Mehri and Harsusi *gawten* all reflect *ʔ*aḥaw* with the addition of the feminine plural morpheme *-āt* (Table 6).¹⁵ The Classical Arabic plural of mother-in-law takes the same pattern: *ḥamawāt-*. The concatenation of these Proto-Semitic suffixes with *ʔ*aḥaw* and *ʔ*abaw* suggest that these plurals are also very old.

Given the wide distribution of these patterns, it is unlikely that the *w* of father, brother, and father-in-law is a root extension. First, root extensions can only be detected when the bare stem alternates with an augmented stem. But, at the Pre-Proto-Semitic level, all forms of *ʔ*abw-*, *ʔ*aḥw-*, and *ʔ*ḥamw-* contain a final *w*. They do not alternate with anything (as recognized by Voigt 2001: 207). Second, *ʔ*abw-*, *ʔ*aḥw-*, and *ʔ*ḥamw-* lack clear Afro-Asiatic cognates which could settle the issue. In their Afro-Asiatic dictionary, Vladimir Orel and Olga Stolbova (1995: 1) equate *ʔ*abw-* with certain Berber and Cushitic

Lipiński (2001: 252–3) cites more examples and suggests that the underlying plural pattern is C₁V C₂ C₂ a (C₃), which would yield *ʔ*abba-ū* > ^ʔ*abbū*. See further Erika Reiner (1966: 64–5) for the Akkadian data.

15 In the Modern South Arabian forms, *-awten* could also be a reflex of the feminine plural marker *-ūten*. In the Mahriyōt dialect of Mehri, /ū/ and sometimes /ō/ become /aw/ immediately following a guttural; these allophones of /ū/ and /ī/ are even more common in the Mehreyet dialect (Watson 2012: 28–9).

16 The Biblical Hebrew form ^ʔ*aḥwōtay* in the Leningrad Codex of Joshua 2:13 may preserve a similar plural, but it is most likely a scribal error for ^ʔ*aḥyōtay*, which is attested in several other Masoretic manuscripts.

forms which lack a final *w*, including Tawlemmet *abba*, Izyazan *ibba*, Bilin *abba*, Saho *abba*, Somali *aba*, Sidamo *aabbo*, and Asa *aba*.¹⁷ It is unclear, however, whether these words are actually cognate with **ʔabw-*. At most, they share the CV segment *-ab-* with **ʔabw-*, which could be the result of chance, especially since the word for ‘father’ is often a *Lallwort* (Ringe 1999: 218–9). Furthermore, the geminated *b* in many of these forms lacks a parallel in Semitic. Theoretically, it could result from the assimilation of a final *w* to the preceding voiced bilabial stop, but we lack historical data from these languages to verify this.

III. Conclusion

I have reconstructed the Pre-Proto-Semitic words for ‘father’, ‘brother’, and ‘father-in-law’ as **ʔabw-*, **ʔahw-*, and **ḥamw-*. In Proto-Semitic, the final *w* contracted with the case vowels in the singular as the result of a regular sound change, giving rise to a characteristic pattern of long and short case vowels in the bound, unbound, and suffixal forms. This *w* survived in other patterns, however, such as the denominal verb **taʔahwa* ‘to be brothers’ and the plurals **ʔabaw* and **ʔahaw*. Later speakers of different languages reinterpreted the *aw* of **ʔabaw* and **ʔahaw* as a new plural morpheme on the basis of other nouns. But at the earliest level the final *w* in these forms was not a root extension; it was a root consonant. The Semitic words for father, brother and father-in-law were originally tri-consonantal and this affects how we conceptualize the pre-history of Semitic. With two fewer bi-consonantal nouns to work with, the possibility of an earlier bi-consonantal stratum in Semitic becomes even more remote.

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17 They also equate Semitic **ʔahw-* with the Cushitic forms Kulere *ahy* ‘uncle’, Warjiri *yahā-* ‘brother’, and Musgum *ahī* ‘brother’ (Orel and Stolbova 1995: 6). Of these, only *ahī* comes remotely close to matching both the phonology and semantics of Semitic **ʔahw-*. It is probably safe to say that similarities are coincidental and Semitic **ʔahw-* does not have any Afro-Asiatic cognates. They do not list any Afro-Asiatic cognates for **ḥamw-*.

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