

Samuel Loewenstamm

REMARKS UPON THE INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE
IN UGARITIC AND PHOENICIAN(Samuel Loewenstamm is Associate Professor of
Bible at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

In his stimulating paper "Studies in Ugaritic Grammar I" (ANES, Vol. I, No. 2 [1969], pp. 55ff.) D. Marcus inter alia rejects my view that tCr in ttCr ksat lmhr[m] tCr tllnt lšbim is necessarily an infinitive absolute and parses this form as a perfect. In contrast to U. Cassuto, M. Held and G. R. Driver the author interpretes tCr as a stative verb, and argues that an agreement between such a verb and its noun subject is not required.

This rule, however, is not borne out by the examples in Marcus' paper. In a sentence like šmh btl Cnt (instead of šmht, etc.), šmh lends itself to the explanation as the third masculine singular for the sole reason that the predicate precedes the subject, not because šmh is a stative verb. The same applies to all sentences adduced by Marcus in order to illustrate the alleged special use of the stative verbs šmh, šhq, ark. None of them verifies the possibility of a lack of congruence between a stative and its preceding subject.

The explanation of tCr as infinitive absolute admits of some corroboration from Phoenician forms like ירום און "I brought them down," parsed by Marcus as perfects incongruent with their subsequent subjects. But this explanation is highly improbable in view of Hebrew in which the person of the verb invariably does correspond to its subject. ירום אונ instead of אורום אונ is obviously incompatible with Hebrew usage, as the possible lack of congruence is strictly limited to gender and number. An explanation of these forms as participles encounters no less serious difficulties, correctly expounded by Marcus himself. Therefore, the most plausible solution is to regard these forms as infinitives. The consequences for the parsing of Ugaritic ngš ank and Hebrew שנה אני are self-evident.

I thank Prof. Loewenstamm for the courtesy and honor he extended to me by replying to my paper. It must be pointed out, however, that I was dealing in my article only with those cases of apparent incongruence between the verb and its following noun, not vice versa. Thus, I was not positing incongruence as the rule for stative verbs, but only when they precede the subject. It is quite true, as Prof. Loewenstamm writes, that this incongruity can be explained by the fact that the verb precedes the noun, but the curious fact still remains that all the verbs under discussion are statives! As regards ngš in ngš ank and the Phoenician ירום being infinitive absolutes, I refer the reader to my original article where there is a full discussion of this point together with appropriate bibliography. In my opinion, the strong objections to this point have yet to be answered.

--David Marcus