

## Sg. \*CVCC-, pl. \*CVCaC-ū-: broken plural or regular reflex?

The Northwest Semitic languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ugaritic, are characterized by a nearly complete loss of broken plurals, i.e. pluralization through stem modification as attested in other Semitic languages like Arabic (e.g. *raǧul-* ‘man’, *riǧāl-* ‘men’) and Gəʕəz (e.g. *wald* ‘son’, *wəlūd* ‘sons’). The one place where we do find regular stem modification in the plural is in the nouns of the highly common \*CVCC- type. These insert an \*a-vowel between their second and third radical in the plural stem; see Table 1.

Table 1. *CVCC- noun types in Biblical Hebrew.				
singular	reconstruction	plural	reconstruction	meaning
<i>kéleb</i>	* <i>kalb-</i>	<i>kəlābīm</i>	* <i>kalab-ī-ma</i>	‘dog(s)’
<i>ʕēḡel</i>	* <i>ʕigl-</i>	<i>ʕāḡālīm</i>	* <i>ʕigal-ī-ma</i>	‘calf’, ‘calves’
<i>qōḏeš</i>	* <i>quds-</i>	<i>qōḏāšīm</i>	* <i>qudas-ī-ma</i>	‘sanctum’, ‘sancta’

This system, where \*CVCC- nouns have a plural that is marked both by \*a-infixation and by suffixation, while other nouns and adjectives mark the plural purely by suffixation, is generally held to be a shared innovation of the Northwest Semitic subgroup; in fact, given the small number of innovations shared by these languages, it is one of the strongest arguments for positing a Northwest Semitic subgroup in the first place.

In this talk, we will question the status of these \*CVCaC-ū- plurals as the sole remnants of the broken plural system in Northwest Semitic. Based on evidence from other branches of Semitic, we will argue that this pluralization mechanism should be reconstructed as such for Proto-Semitic. The common interpretation of the Northwest Semitic situation is that the \*CVCaC- stem reflects an old broken plural pattern to which the productive plural suffix was added in analogy to the regular, non-broken plural forms, resulting in \*CVCaC-ū-. The presence of the plural suffix at the Proto-Semitic stage argues against this scenario. Instead, we will suggest that the characteristic \*a of the plural stem is not originally a pluralizing infix, but rather an epenthetic vowel, which was inserted to resolve a consonant cluster that would have occurred in these forms at the pre-Proto-Semitic stage; cf. Table 2.

<b>Table 2. The suggested origin of the *CVCaC-ū plurals.</b>				
	<b>pre-Proto-Semitic I</b>	<b>pre-Proto-Semitic II</b>	<b>Proto-Semitic</b>	<b>Biblical Hebrew</b>
singular	<i>*kalb-u-</i>	<i>*kalb-u-</i>	<i>*kalb-u-</i>	<i>kéleb</i>
plural	<i>*kalb-w-u-</i>	<i>*kal<b>a</b>b-w-u-</i>	<i>*kal<b>a</b>b-ū-</i>	<i>kālābīm</i>

This newly suggested origin of the \*CVCaC-ū plurals eliminates most of the remaining evidence for broken plural formation in Northwest Semitic and calls for a reassessment of the history of Semitic plural formation and the status of the Northwest Semitic subgroup.