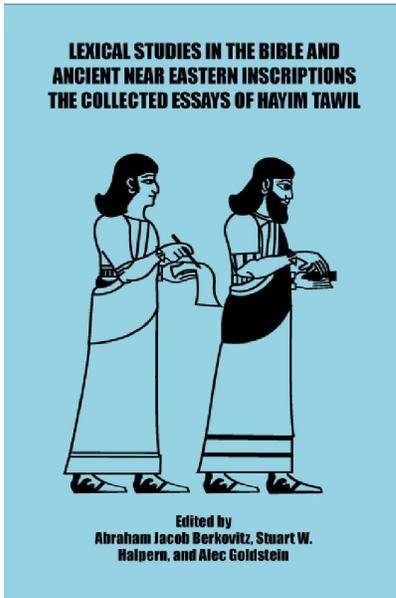


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*Lexical Studies in the Bible and Ancient Near Eastern
Inscriptions: The Collected Essays of Hayim Tawil*

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Krzysztof J. Baranowski
University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland

Philology, intended as the comprehensive study of texts and their origin, transmission, literary properties, meaning for the past generations, and relevance for the current world, is a moribund art and science. The reasons for this state of the matters are multiple and cannot be dealt with here (see Pollock 2009). The volume under review contains the fruits of a lifetime of philological research by Hayim Tawil. This book is a monument of the study of “textualized meaning” (Pollock 2009, 934) and the world(s) behind it. It is also a reminder that, in the era in which ancient texts are increasingly subjected to computerized analysis by means of digitalized databases and sophisticated search engines, nothing can substitute for intimate knowledge of ancient sources and their scrutiny by a creative mind and a profound spirit. In one sense, this book is a companion to Tawil’s *An Akkadian Lexicon Companion to Biblical Hebrew*, which provides a myriad of stimulating insights into Biblical Hebrew lexicon based on years of its study side by side with Mesopotamian sources. The present volume of collected studies contains detailed discussions of selected words, expression, and texts found in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern sources.

Before proceeding to the content of the volume, it is my pleasant duty to praise the editors and the publisher for its form. The practice of publishing the collected studies of influential scholars has recently become common, even too common. Often these volumes

contain just scanned, low-quality copies of the original publications. The studies in the present volume has been retyped, provided with the indexes of discussed words and texts, and, in the case of two contributions in Israeli Hebrew, translated into English. The book is nicely printed and hard bound. Despite of all of that, the price is reasonable. The editors and the publisher produced a handsome and affordable volume that assures easier access to Hayim Tawil's scholarship. They deserve warm thanks for their effort.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first and longest section contains eleven lexicographical notes on individual Biblical Hebrew roots and lexemes in light of the cuneiform sources. The second part gathers biblical essays dedicated mostly to a close reading of selected verses from the Hebrew Bible. The third section contains studies on Northwest Semitic inscriptions that originated from Tawil's doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Moshe Held. The final section contains the original Hebrew versions of two articles translated in the English sections of the volume. Below I present a selection of Tawil's proposals and interpretations. Their selection is subjective and does not detract from the value of other contributions.

Tawil's lexical studies follow closely the methodology practiced by his *Doktorvater*, Moshe Held (see Cohen 1989). In doing so, Tawil stresses the contextual usages of words and expressions as well as semantic, not only etymological, equivalences. Employing this procedure, in the first lexicographical note of the volume, he traces a similar semantic development from "proceed" through "advance" to "succeed" in two unrelated verbs: Hebrew **צלח/הצלח** and Akkadian *ešēru/šūšuru*. In the same contribution, while commenting on the meaning of **צלח** in Amos 5:6, Tawil makes an astute observation that is worthy of further study from a typological perspective. He observes that several roots in various Semitic languages (**צלח**, **בער**, **דלק**, *šarāḥu*, *ḥamātu*) mean "to burn, to scorch, to roast" and are used as verbs of movement referring typically to fast movement, hurrying, or pursuit.

The contribution on the late Hebrew and Aramaic root **ספר** "to cut the hair, to shear" is perhaps minor, but a phenomenon discussed there should be kept in mind by the scholars working on Biblical Hebrew lexicography. Although the late root **ספר** is homonymous with the root **ספר** "to count," the two roots do not represent a semantic development of a common Semitic root. Tawil proposes that the root **ספר** was an original Aramaic lexeme meaning "to cut the hair." Its popularity increased with time among the speakers of Aramaic, and later of Hebrew, because of language contact with Neo-Babylonian, which employed a metathesized form of this root to derive the noun *sirpu/sirapu*, meaning "shears, scissors." A broader implication of this paper lies in the fact that is precisely the phonological process of metathesis that should be taken into account when searching for cognates. The roots are not perennial and immutable entities of Proto-Semitic stock, as

students of Biblical Hebrew with limited knowledge of Semitic philology seem to be persuaded. They also change and evolve, and metathesis is one of the processes that affect them. Recent scholarship shows that metathesis is an important process in secondary developments of Semitic lexicon and supports the view of Semitic roots as independent morphological units (Prunet, Béland, and Idrissi 2000; Prunet 2006, 57–61). To a number of cases of metathesis gathered by Tawil (e.g., “honey” = Akkadian *dišpu*, Hebrew שֶׁבֶּזֶב, or “to bless” = Akkadian *karābu*, Hebrew בָּרַךְ), one should add similar couplets collected in Shvitiel 2013 and the discussion of a specific instance of metathesis in Akkadian in Testen 2003.

In another interesting note, based on the Akkadian expression *qāta napāšu*, Tawil proposes that the Hebrew equivalent of this expression occurs in Dan 12:7 and is used as a technical idiom for rejecting the covenant. Accordingly, he translates this verse as follows: “For a time, times, and a half a time, and at the time of the termination of thrusting the hand (i.e., of the covenantal rejection) of the holy people all these things will come to an end.”

Characteristic of Tawil’s method is a short paper on the root חָלַל. Against proliferation of the homonymic roots that cover the full range of meanings attested in various words derived from this root, he asserts the existence of only one root that originally had a physical-concrete meaning “to pierce through, bore” and acquired the secondary abstract sense “to profane” as the result of a development of its usage in reference to the violation of completeness in religious and moral context. He supports his argumentation by bringing a similar semantic development in the verb נָקַב “to pierce, bore” and secondarily “to profane.”

No less stimulating than lexicographical are sections dedicated to the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Inscriptions. As was the case with the lexicographical studies, Tawil’s contributions on the Hebrew Bible display his profound familiarity with Akkadian texts, as well as Jewish classic sources (Mishnah, Talmud) and Jewish medieval and traditional commentators. For example, Akkadian texts are used to explain the difficult expression “the rivers of Maṣor” in 2 Kgs 19:24 (= Isa 37:25). Tawil argues that this text alludes to Sennacherib’s canals that utilized the water springs of Mount Muṣri to irrigate Nineveh. He proposes that Mic 7:12 also mentions Mount Muṣri as an area where the exiles from Samaria were resettled. Similarly, the knowledge of Akkadian poetic diction allows Tawil to illuminate the obscure image of doves “bathing in milk” in Song 5:12. Comparison with an omen from the series *šumma ālu* indicates that milk in the biblical simile should be understood as an image for foaming waters that are white as milk, not the natural product. In the next contribution, he argues that a similar case of the use of imagery of

the lion and the birds known from Neo-Assyrian royal inscription is employed in Isa 31:4–5.

In a note on the Phoenician Aḥiram inscription, Tawil illuminates the use of the verb שִׁית in the phrase כִּשְׁתָּה by quoting its occurrences in contexts involving burial in Biblical Hebrew. His interpretation of the word בְּעֵלָם is, however, less convincing. He proposes that this word represents an abbreviation of בַּת עֵלָם, one of the Semitic circumlocutions for “tomb.” Although Tawil quotes the cases from Aramaic texts in which the final letter in בֵּית is omitted, these spellings always contain the final י and, consequently, do not provide exact parallels for the word בְּעֵלָם in the Aḥiram inscription. Also, the phrase כִּשְׁתָּה requires a preposition to follow. It may be possible to argue that the letter ב in בְּעֵלָם is a shared consonant (Watson 1969) that represents in writing both the preposition ב and the abbreviation for “house.” However, a proposal of such a highly abbreviated spelling is far-fetched, and thus Tawil’s interpretation is altogether doubtful. While the following study on opening sections of several Old Aramaic texts (the Hadad, Zākir, and Nērab II inscriptions) is very erudite and rich in detailed observations, it does not advance the broader argument beyond identification of parallel literary expressions and motifs. The section on West Semitic inscriptions ends with two constructions of difficult passages of the Sefire treaties.

When reading these studies, I admired Tawil’s familiarity with ancient sources and his ability to penetrate their lexical details and imagery. The addition of indexes at the end of the volume facilitates the reader’s way through the fruits of Tawil’s research. I hope that his insights will inspire further explorations of the language of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern inscriptions.

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