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Short Title: History of Biblical Hebrew Lexicography

Brief summary of paper to be presented:

Proposal for a research project: The History of Biblical Hebrew Lexicography

In the research I propose here, I would investigate the historical background of some of the questions that arose while completing my thesis. These questions relate to the development of the biblical Hebrew lexicographical tradition and the respective influences of Jewish and Christian tradition, intellectual climate, cognate scholarship, and translator choices.

In my thesis I explored these questions in relation to one *hapax legomena,* סכת. I investigated the origin of its perceived change in meaning from 'listen' to 'be silent' by tracing dictionary entries from the medieval period to today. In the process of doing so, I discovered that it was the introduction of cognate languages into dictionaries in the 17th century that most seemed to influence the shift in accepted meaning. I noticed another shift in perceived word meaning with the root דמם, again as a result of cognate information, but this time in the 20th century and from Akkadian.

These clear shifts in perceived meaning, along with some other dictionary entries that do not fit the textual evidence, have encouraged me to devote more attention to the formation of the biblical Hebrew lexica currently in use in order to understand the social and academic influences that have shaped them over time. An improved understanding of this process would help us to discern the reliability of different approaches, alert us to a potential overuse of cognate material, and encourage more discernment in the use of these dictionaries.

Summary / Abstract of my doctoral project

(completed March 2018; Oriental Studies, University of Oxford)

Title: The Semantics of Silence in Biblical Hebrew

My thesis examines how silence was understood by speakers of biblical Hebrew. Using the biblical books, Ben Sira, Dead Sea Scrolls, and inscriptions, it evaluates how seven lexemes referring to silence were used. Each reference was examined for clues to meaning, using syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, parallels, glosses, antonyms, and causal relations. The early versions (Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Syriac) were consulted to see if they might shed further light on ancient understandings of these words. Semitic languages were also surveyed for potential cognates that might reveal diachronic semantic development.

The chosen lexemes divided into two related domains: restraint (of sound, of action) and cessation (of sound, of motion, of life). Part 1 covers words indicating restraint: 1) חרשׁ refers to not speaking and not hearing (deafness), as well as not acting when expected to. Its counterpart is 2) אלם, referring to muteness or being restrained from speech, while 3) חשׁה can also refer to restraint of both speech and action.

Part 2 covers words indicating cessation: 4a) דמם refers to cessation of motion; 4b) דמה to cessation of life. From these roots arise many derived forms of uncertain meaning (4c): i) דּוּמָה and ii) דֶּמָה, likely referring to the place of the dead; iii) דֶּמִיה/דּוּמִיָּה, possibly referring to rest; iv) דּוּמָם, ‘silent’ or ‘immobile’; v) דֳּמִי, perhaps rest or cessation; and vi) דְּמָמָה, probably ‘cessation’, but often translated ‘whisper’. Other roots related to cessation are: 5) הס, an interjection meaning ‘hush!’; 6) שׁתק, referring to cessation of commotion; and 7) סכת, a *hapax legomenon* meaning either ‘be silent’ or ‘listen’.

Part 3 briefly introduces peripheral words, primarily the closely related root שׁקט (8), referring to rest and peace. The periphery of the semantic field is briefly considered (9), along with צמת, which means ‘be silent’ in cognate languages.

The conclusion offers some observations about the field as a whole, describing how the lexemes overlap and differ. Tables and diagrams are offered to represent the richness and versatility of this field graphically.