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7. PRINCIPLES OF LINGUISTIC STUDY

I. THE NEED FOR SOUND METHOD

Alongside the data provided by the Ancient Near East, one must employ sound principles established by modern linguistic study when dealing with the languages of the Bible. However, in some recent so-called 'biblical theology' much stress has been laid on the supposed differences between Hebrew and Greek thought and usage, accompanied by a theory that the grammar and vocabulary of a given language (in this case, Hebrew) can be equated with the thought-patterns of its speakers, and that these supposed patterns can be read off from the alleged special characteristics of the language. These ideas seem very attractive, but unfortunately they are very questionable. They have not been based on sound linguistic procedure (which has been neglected), but have been accompanied by misuse of etymologies and by confusion of the diachronic (historical) and synchronic (contextual) aspects of biblical semantics (study of the meanings of words). Even more unfortunately, these mistaken theories and untenable methods are not merely the property of some minor party in biblical or theological study, but largely underlie even so justly famed a project as the great Kittel-Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*,¹ and characterize the quite independent study by Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (1960).²

These erroneous procedures and the urgent need for ordinary, sound linguistic method in theology and biblical study were appropriately treated with care and in some detail by J.

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Barr in a recent work³ to which the interested reader may here be referred for fuller details. It is to be hoped that students of the Old Testament and theologians will profit by Barr's thoughtful criticisms, improve their methods of working and thereby place their own work on the soundest possible foundations.

II. THE ROLE OF EMENDATION

One may state a principle echoed by leading Egyptologists long ago: 'Emendation serves only for the removal of the absolutely vicious', and '...is always to be avoided if possible'.⁴ In other words, it is to be used only when no other valid course is open to the interpreter of a text. Until recent decades, Old Testament scholars were much too partial to emendation of the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible (the notes in the *Biblia Hebraica*, edited by Kittel, exhibit this fault to a degree, as is widely recognized), but nowadays they show a much greater and commendable caution in this regard. The evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the rich harvest of linguistic gains from Ugaritic or North Canaanite have repeatedly

¹ At least in conception and intention; this massive work is of very considerable value, particularly in so far as it does not adhere consistently to the procedures here criticized.

² English translation of *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen*², 1954.

³ J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 1961, supplemented by the same writer's *Biblical Words for Time*, 1962 (=SBT, No. 33) and 'Hypostatization of Linguistic Phenomena in Modern Theological Interpretation', *JSS* 7 (1962), pp. 85-94.

⁴ The latter quotation from A. M. Blackman, *JEA* 16 (1930), p. 63.

demonstrated the essential soundness of the consonantal Hebrew text at many points where obscurity had hitherto tempted to emendation. In the Ancient Near East, moreover, there were definite ideals of accurate scribal copying of manuscripts (a point often overlooked). One example from Egypt must here suffice. A funerary papyrus of about 1400 BC bears the colophon: '[The book] is completed from its beginning to its end, having been copied, revised, compared and verified sign by sign.'⁵ There is no reason to assume that the Hebrews would be less careful with their literary products, a further reason for the exercise of due caution in emending the consonantal Hebrew text.

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One particular form of emendation is especially to be avoided, namely, emendation *metri causa*. This has often been imposed on Hebrew poetry in the past to give it a mechanical regularity of syllabic or accentual or strophic structure that it in fact never originally possessed. A lesson in this field has been administered by studies like that of Ugaritic prosody by G. D. Young⁶ who showed that mechanical regularity is quite alien to Ugaritic poets, the literary and linguistic forms of whose works are very close indeed to Hebrew. In Egypt, too, absolute regularity of structure was not always specially sought, as can be seen, for example, by examining the structure of works like the 'Kahun' hymns to Sesostriis 111,⁷ or the poems in the *Lebensmude*.⁸

III. LEXICAL CRITERIA AND THE DATING OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE

(a) *Three Essential Principles*

Sometimes a word may occur only a few times in the Old Testament or only in restricted contexts (ritual, poetry, *etc.*), and then never again in existing available sources until post-biblical writings of the Roman period, for example, the Mishna. This phenomenon is invariably interpreted by Old Testament scholars in one way only, although in fact it can be explained in any of *three* different ways:

1. The common occurrence of a word only at a very late period may imply that a few apparently 'early' occurrences should also be considered as 'late' and (if original in the text) carrying down to a similarly late date the production of the writings in which they occur. This is invariably the line of

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⁵ J. Černý, *Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt*, 1952, p. 25; H. Grapow, *Chronique d'Égypte* 14/fasc. 28 (1939), p. 225. Mesopotamia would probably yield even more evidence on this topic than does Egypt.

⁶ *JNES* 9 (1950), pp. 124-133; C. H. Gordon, *UM*, I, p. 108 and n.1 (*UT*, p. 131 and n.2). *Cf.* also M. Held, *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 272-282, on wrong emendation of verb-repetition.

⁷ Translated in A. Erman and A. M. Blackman, *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, 1927, pp. 134-137; *cf.* also H. Grapow, *MIO* 1 (1953), pp. 189-209, and G. Posener, *Littérature et Politique dans l'Égypte de la XIIIe Dynastie*, 1956, pp. 128-130.

⁸ Translations by Wilson, *ANET*, pp. 405-407, and R. O. Faulkner, *JEA* 42 (1956) pp. 21-40; but see also R. J. Williams, *JEA* 48 (1962), pp. 49-56 on this text.

reasoning followed in Old Testament studies - hence some of the arguments for, for example, an exilic or later 'P'-source in the Pentateuch, late Psalms or post-exilic dates for wisdom-literature. The other two possibilities seem almost never to be envisaged in works on the Old Testament.

2. The 'early' occurrences of such words (say, in the Pentateuch and then not until the Mishna) *may* in fact be valuable evidence of how *early* the word really was used, and its absence otherwise before late times would then be the accidental result of negative evidence.

3. A genuinely 'late' word which appears in a supposedly 'early' composition *may* be a later substitution for another term which has become obsolete, or offensive, or has changed its meaning. Such a substitute can only date itself, and not the composition in which it now appears.

Now, principles 2 and 3 are *not* simply a piece of theoretical special pleading. They are well-attested as real facts of experience from the objectively-dated literary remains of the Ancient Near East. One example for each of these principles is but a token of many more.

In accord with principle 2, it is a well-known phenomenon in Egyptology for words to occur sporadically in, say, the Pyramid Texts of about 2400 BC-and then to disappear largely or even entirely from our view until they suddenly reappear (sometimes in more frequent use) in the Ptolemaic and later temple-inscriptions of the Graeco-Roman period.⁹ Now, if the one-sided emphasis on principle 1 that occurs in Old Testament studies were to be applied identically in Egyptology, the Pyramids of the Sixth Dynasty (c. 2400 BC) would have to be dated (because of 'late words' in their texts) some twenty-one centuries later to the Greek period (c. 300-30 BC)! To compress

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2,100 years of intervening Egyptian history into two hundred years by this means is, of course, absurd. Yet by their indiscriminate use of the 'late word' argument, Old Testament scholars can hardly avoid committing absurd distortions of this kind within the history of Hebrew literature and religion.

In illustration of principle 3, one may cite the occurrence of *yam*, 'sea', 'waterflood', and the Late-Egyptian negative *bw* in the Ashmolean Ostrakon text¹⁰ of the story of Sinuhe which would, on the principle-1 reasoning of Old Testament scholarship, suggest a date of composition about 1500 BC or later, for this work and not in the twentieth century BC as required by statements made in its text. However, the existence of manuscripts¹¹ of about 1800 BC (with their readings also retained in other later MSS) reveals that *yam* and *bw* were actually substitutions in the Ashmolean text for the old word *nwy* and the Middle-Egyptian negative *n*, respectively; principle 1 would not be applicable, of course. In the Old Testament,

⁹ Examples from A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*: II, p. 274:10, *nnt*, a kind of reed; II, p. 4.89: 3, *hp m'*, 'to free from'; IV, p. 72:4-6, *swḥ*, 'to wrap, cover'; V, p. 37:7-8, *km'*, 'to mourn' and a derivative; or words like *hnwt*, 'vessel', so far known only twice in an Eighteenth-Dynasty tomb, between the Old Kingdom and the Graeco-Roman period (III, p. 106: 18-22). Full references in the *Belegstellen* volumes to the *Wörterbuch*.

¹⁰ J. W. B. Barns, *The Ashmolean Ostrakon of Sinuhe*, 1952, pp. 12 (rt. 45) and 22 (vs. 25).

¹¹ See Posener, *loc. cit.* (p. 24, note 20, above). 12 See p. 108, note 84.

it may be nothing more than the lack of *really* early and old MSS from periods long before the Dead Sea Scrolls that prevents us from finding that the same thing may sometimes be true there.

(b) The Value of Collateral Evidence

Furthermore, Old Testament scholars too often ignore collateral evidence for the early existence and use of words that they have considered to be 'late', evidence contained, for example, in Ugaritic, West-Semitic loanwords in Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) or in Egyptian, and they persist in this even after that evidence has been pointed out (*cf.* § (c), below).

Thus, it has already been noted above¹² that Hebrew '*edūth*, 'covenant (stipulations)', is not a late Aramaism but an early Canaanism, being already known as a loanword with a secondary meaning in Egyptian in the first half of the twelfth century BC. Also found as a loanword in Egyptian at this

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period is *ktm*, 'gold', (as *ktmt*) with a prehistory reaching back to Sumerian.¹³ It should not of itself, therefore, be considered as 'late'.¹⁴ The words *krz*, 'make proclamation', and *krwz*, 'herald', in biblical Aramaic have been assigned a Greek origin¹⁵ and more recently an Old Persian origin.¹⁶ But a study of Hurrian *kirenzi* (from a **kirenzi*), 'proclamation', in a Nuzi document of about 1500 BC¹⁷ indicates that forms from *krz* had begun to enter Semitic at least a millennium earlier than any of us had hitherto suspected. The word *hmr* for 'wine' in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic may well be poetic but cannot now be described as late,¹⁸ being attested in Ugaritic (thirteenth century BC at latest) and Mari Akkadian (*c.* eighteenth century BC).¹⁹ Similarly, *špr* in biblical Aramaic (and once in Hebrew, Psalm 16:6) for 'be fair', 'acceptable', 'pleasant' may possibly be rare but is certainly not 'late'.²⁰ Known in Aramaic of the eighth and fifth centuries BC (Sfiré stelae; Ahīqar papyrus), it is not restricted to Aramaic but is common West Semitic as is shown by its occurrence in personal names of that kind (*cf.* Shiprah, Ex. 1:15) in the eighteenth century BC in both Egyptian and cuneiform sources.²¹ The vast linguistic treasury of the Ancient Near East is constantly enriching our

¹² See p. 108, note 84.

¹³ See T. O. Lambdin, *JAOS* 73 (1953), pp. 151-152, following on M. Burchardt, *Die Altkananäischen Fremdwörter und Eigennamen im Ägyptischen*, II, 1911, p. 53, No. 1036, and W. F. Albright, *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography*, 1934, p. 61 (XVII: C: 11).

¹⁴ As, for example, in F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1907, p. 508b.

¹⁵ *E.g.*, *ibid.*, p. 1097b (and others).

¹⁶ *E.g.*, H. H. Schaeder, *Iranische Beiträge I*, 1930, p. 254 [56].

¹⁷ A. Shaffer, *Orientalia NS* 34 (1965), pp. 32-34.

¹⁸ As (*e.g.*) in Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 1093a.

¹⁹ *UM*, III, No. 713 (*UT*, No. 972; differently, Dahood, *Biblica* 45 (1964), 408-9); M. L. Burke, *ARMT*, XI, 1963, p. 133, §11.

²⁰ *E.g.*, Brown, Driver, Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 1117.

²¹ References in D. J. Wiseman *et al.*, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, 1965, pp. 33-34 note 18, [now on-line at: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_daniel.html] to which add the cuneiform references in H. B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts*, 1965, p. 252.

background for biblical lexicography and counsels the greatest caution over what may really be termed 'late'.

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(c) *The Question of Aramaisms*

The common dictum that Aramaisms are necessarily late is all too often erroneous.²² In the first place, a great number of so-called Aramaisms (*i.e.*, Aramaic loanwords in Hebrew) are really just early West Semitic terms found not least in poetry and are not specifically Aramaic at all (even if commoner in that language). By way of a purely random example, Eissfeldt in 1964-5 still labelled²³ *gibbel*, 'receive' (Pr. 19:20), and *nahat*, 'go down' (Pr. 17:10) - with other words - as 'Aramaisms' and therefore late, implying an exilic or later date for the relevant parts of Proverbs. Yet over twenty years earlier, Albright had pointed out²⁴ that the very same term *gibbel* occurs (in the form *tiga(b)bilu*) - and actually in a proverb - in an Amarna letter from the Canaanite king of Shechem to the pharaoh in the fourteenth century BC! It is, therefore, an early Canaanism²⁵ and *not* a late Aramaism. The same is true of *nahat*, first noted in the Ugaritic epics some thirty years ago.²⁶ Eissfeldt has never heeded these facts; and so far as these two words are concerned his statements on their date and nature are wrong and the dependent deductions for the date of those parts of Proverbs are unjustified. There is no reason to believe that the other two words he cites exemplify anything more than negative evidence and the inevitable use of principle 1.²⁷ Nor is this case unique in Old Testament studies at large.

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Secondly, it should be remembered that Aramaean penetration of Syria and Mesopotamia was well under way in the twelfth to tenth centuries BC,²⁸ and Israel was in constant contact with Aramaeans from at least the time of David, when Syrian Aram was politically subject to Israel. Hence some Aramaisms could be expected at any time from about 1000 BC onwards. It has been suggested that early Aramaic or 'proto-Aramaic' forms (like final *-ā*)²⁹ can be found

²² Demonstrated long ago by R. D. Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, 1926 (repr. 1959), pp. 112-126.

²³ In *The OT, an Introduction*, 1965, p. 474.

²⁴ *BASOR* 89 (1943) p. 31 n. 16.

²⁵ Or more strictly, an old West Semitic word shared by Canaanite, Hebrew and Aramaic, later perhaps more common in Aramaic but still used archaistically in Hebrew.

²⁶ Ugaritic *nḥt*, C. H. Gordon, *UM*, III, p. 295, No. 1231 (=UT, No. 1635); first identified by C. Viroilleaud, *Syria* 14 (1933), p. 145, and its relevance noted by E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*¹, 1949, p. 303 (³1964, p. 313). A different treatment of *nḥt* by J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache*, 1963, p. 204, No. 1771, depends on an unnecessary Arabic etymology and is less suitable in contexts; *cf.* (e.g.) M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology*, 1963, pp. 45-46.

²⁷ Thus, *r* appears in Old Aramaic as *rqq* in Sfiré stela III: 6 in the eighth century BC; *cf.* A. Dupont-Sommer, *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 13 (1956), p. 32 (meaning here 'to capture'). For *'/q*, *cf.* Kitchen in Wiseman *et al.*, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, 1965, p. 56, (iii).

²⁸ From the district of Palmyra eastward along the Middle Euphrates in the time of Tiglath-pileser I, for example (c. 1100 BC); *cf.* *ANET*, p. 275a, §b; E. Forrer in E. Ebeling and B. Meissner (eds.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, I, 1928, pp. 131-139 (*Aramu*).

²⁹ In Cappadocian and Old Babylonian texts, W. Semitic personal names from Mari, *etc.* *Cf.* with references, C. F. Jean in A. Parrot (ed.), *Studia Mariana*, 1950, p. 71 n. 33, and p. 74; M. Noth, *Geschichte and Altes Testament (FS Alt)*, 1953, pp. 135-136, 152; and M. Tsevat in A. Berger *et al.* (eds.), *Joshua Bloch Memorial Volume*, 1960, pp. 89-91. On the basis of the Mari material, any connection with the Aramaic emphatic state is doubted.

that go back to the days of the Patriarchs,³⁰ although this question requires great caution.³¹ Even measuring from about 1000 BC, there is no warrant nowadays for treating genuine Aramaisms (when they can be proved to exist) as automatically 'late'.

by H. B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts*, 1965, pp. 104 ff., 115-116. However, one would not expect to find the fully developed later usage in the early second millennium even if some classes of *-ā* were ancestral to the later Aramaic article.

³⁰ Cf. W. F. Albright, *AfO* 6 (1930/31), p. 218 n. 4; Kitchen, *NBD*, p. 56.

³¹ Cf. the 'proto-Aramaisms' suggested by M. Noth, *Die Ursprünge des alten Israel im Lichte neuer Quellen*, 1961, esp. pp. 34-40, and the critique (and virtual elimination) of these by D. O. Edzard, *ZA* 56/NF. 22 (1964), pp. 142-149. On 'early Aramaeans', cf. my *Hittite Hieroglyphs, Aramaeans and Hebrew Traditions*, ch. 2 (forthcoming).