

## A Proper View of Arabic, Semitic, and More

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The recent contribution by George Mendenhall in the pages of this journal<sup>1</sup> is so riddled with errors and idiosyncratic views, it demands a response. The author's main contention is that the roots of Arabic are to be found in the language(s) of the Late Bronze Age Levant (Ugaritic especially). In his own words: "It is here suggested, accordingly, that the origins of the linguistic phenomena characteristic of Arabic are to be located in the population of Syro-Palestinian groups who, in response to the increasing turmoil and violence of the Late Bronze Age, migrated south to the relatively remote and untouched regions of Arabia. Thus, instead of viewing Arabia as the early homeland *from which* the later Semitic language groups departed, we should view it as a late refuge *to which* population groups from Syria and Palestine migrated. They took with them, of course, their material culture, and above all their Bronze Age linguistic repertoire" (p. 18).

Now, to be fair, there is nothing impossible in the scenario that Mendenhall presents—except for a) the lack of any archaeological data to support this view, and b) the specious and spurious nature of the linguistic arguments that he musters. Let us examine it in detail.

1. Mendenhall relies heavily on his reading of the Byblos Syllabic texts,<sup>2</sup> but he has convinced few scholars of his "decipherment." In the words of one critical review, "Mendenhall's imagination is vast enough to enchant us with etymological possibilities. Unfortunately, this is not enough to convince us as to the validity and success of his decipherment. Far-fetched etymologies, forcing of known and accepted linguistic rules of other well known languages, together with much too much unreliable data, play a major role in this scholarly work. This makes Mendenhall's decipherment of the enigmatic inscriptions from Byblos no less enigmatic than the inscriptions themselves. I am afraid that until a bilingual or another 'tripod' appears on stage, there can be no proof for this (or any other) deciphering attempt for these inscriptions."<sup>3</sup>

2. Mendenhall claims that diglossia "is attested not only at Late Bronze Ugarit, but has also become increasingly in evidence from pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions" (p. 18). It is hard to imagine what evidence he would muster to defend this statement. Both corpora, especially the latter, are extremely limited. Now, many linguists would argue that every language in the world with a written tradition is characterized by diglossia, since people always write and speak differently. So it is very likely that diglossia existed in ancient Ugarit and in pre-Islamic Arabic,<sup>4</sup> but the data are lacking to demonstrate the point and to highlight the lexical and

1. G. E. Mendenhall, "Arabic in Semitic Linguistic Theory," *JAOS* 126 (2006): 17–26. All internal references are to this article.

2. G. E. Mendenhall, *The Syllabic Inscriptions from Byblos* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985).

3. S. Izre'el, *JAOS* 108 (1988): 519–21, in particular 520. For other critical reviews, see G. J. Hamilton, *JBL* 106 (1987): 693–95; and W. L. Moran, *CBQ* 50 (1988): 508–10.

4. One recalls the view of K. Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien* (Strassburg: K. J. Trubner, 1906), that Arabic diglossia extends back to pre-Islamic times. See also C. A. Ferguson, "The Arabic Koine," *Language* 35 (1959): 616–30. For an alternative view, arguing for the beginning of Arabic diglossia in the first Islamic century, see J. Blau, "The Beginnings of Arabic Diglossia: A Study of the Origins of Neoarabic," *AAL* 4:4 (1977): 1–28.

grammatical differentiations that presumably existed between the literary and colloquial registers in these two instances. Contrast the effort (by one of the present authors) to demonstrate diglossia in ancient Hebrew, with a much larger corpus and with sufficient data to (hopefully) have proven the point.<sup>5</sup>

3. A statement such as “Ostrakon 2 from Kamid el-Loz is Arabic” (p. 20) is without justification. The ten inscribed sherds found at Kamid el-Loz are written in an alphabet (“altkanaanäischer Schrift” according to Günter Mansfeld, who first published the texts) with some signs that resemble their ancient South Arabian equivalents,<sup>6</sup> but that does not mean that the language of this inscription is Arabic—unless, of course, one accedes to Mendenhall’s view that anything Arabian is by definition Arabic. More importantly, Ostrakon 2 has only five signs, and of these only three appear to be actual letters. Mansfeld read a single word here, as either *bṯm* or *rṯm* or *dṯm*, with the following comment, “wenn auch keiner dieser Stämme in den altsemitischen Sprachen bisher bekannt ist.”<sup>7</sup> True, Mendenhall reads the inscription in the opposite direction, with the five symbols yielding *lmṯry* (p. 20), but in no way can this term be deemed to be Arabic. And even if it were, no linguist would weave such a major hypothesis (of Arabic origins) from a single thread (an ostrakon consisting of three to five graphemes).<sup>8</sup>

4. Mendenhall denies that *ḡayin* is a proto-Semitic consonant. He states, “As a matter of fact, there is no epigraphic evidence whatever for *ghayn* in Semitic until the LB texts of Ugarit, and it exists nowhere but in Ugaritic and the proto-Arabic language complex” (p. 21). This statement is patently wrong. But before addressing the issue itself, we first note that Mendenhall seems totally unaware of the history of research on this matter.<sup>9</sup> As is well known among Semitists, already more than half a century ago, Rudolf Růžička proposed that /ḡ/ is not a proto-Semitic consonant, but rather was an Arabic innovation.<sup>10</sup> Růžička’s position, in turn, gained further support from Karl Petráček.<sup>11</sup> The response to this view

5. G. A. Rendsburg, *Diglossia in Ancient Hebrew* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1990).

6. See G. Mansfeld, “Scherben mit altkanaanäischer Schrift vom Tell Kāmid el-Lōz,” in D. O. Edzard et al., *Kamid el-Loz-Kumidi: Schriftdokumente aus Kamid el-Loz* (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1970), 29–41; and G. Mansfeld and W. Röllig, “Zwei Ostraka von Tell Kāmid el-Lōz und ein neuer Aspekt für die Entstehung des kanaanäischen Alphabets,” *Die Welt des Orients* 5 (1970): 265–70.

7. Mansfeld, “Scherben mit altkanaanäischer Schrift vom Tell Kāmid el-Lōz,” 31.

8. Additional epigraphic evidence that Mendenhall could have cited in support of his theory, but which he elected not to, is forthcoming from the discovery of two Ugaritic abecedaries (one found at Beth Shemesh in 1933 [*KTU* 5.24] and one found at Ugarit in 1988) arranged in the order of the Old South Arabian alphabet. For details, see J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 13–15 (and the references cited there). For some historical considerations of the more recent find, see the summary (and the references cited) in I. Singer, “A Political History of Ugarit,” in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 614. In any case, even if Mendenhall had utilized these finds for his theory, they would demonstrate very little, given their very limited scope.

9. Even though a fine summary of the scholarly literature is found in a widely used standard reference work (still useful, notwithstanding the passage of decades): S. Moscati, ed., *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964), 38–39.

10. R. Růžička, “La question de l’existence du ḡ, dans les langues sémitiques en général et dans la langue ugaritienne en particulier,” *ArOr* 22 (1954): 176–237.

11. K. Petráček, “Der doppelte phonologische Charakter des Ghain im klassischen Arabisch,” *ArOr* 21 (1953): 240–62; and “Die Struktur der semitischen Wurzelmorpheme und der Übergang ‘ain > ḡain und ‘ain > r im Arabischen,” *ArOr* 23 (1955): 475–78.

came from Otto Rössler, who, in two classic articles, demonstrated that /ǧ/ is indeed a proto-Semitic consonant.<sup>12</sup> Astoundingly, nowhere does Mendenhall refer to these earlier studies.<sup>13</sup>

And now to the issue itself. Recent research (building on Rössler's earlier studies) has established beyond a reasonable doubt that /ǧ/ was a separate phoneme in early Akkadian, distinct from both /ʕ/ and /ħ/. In Old Akkadian the recently borrowed writing system was not equipped to represent /ǧ/ consistently, but clear examples are written with the 𒀠/𒀡/𒀢 series of signs, e.g., *za-ḫa-ar-tim* /ṣaḡartim/ 'small' (feminine singular adjective), *za-aḫ-ra* /ṣaḡrā/ 'they (dual) are small,' both from the root ṣḡr.<sup>14</sup> In Old Babylonian, writings of the reflex of Proto-Semitic /ǧ/ vacillate between the 𒀠- signs and 𒀣; for an example of the former, see Akkadian *ḫalāpu* /ǧalāpu/ 'cover, close,' cognate with Arabic *ǧallafa* 'wrap, cover,' Ugaritic *ǧlp* 'husk' (cf. Hebrew עָלַף 'cover, wrap').<sup>15</sup> As this illustration demonstrates (unlike with the reflex of /ʕ/), no vowel raising occurs in the vicinity of /ǧ/, thus providing further evidence that the two consonants were originally distinct.

Also relevant are the data from Amorite, with the following personal names attested: *ḫa-za-la* and *a-za-lu-um* = /ǧazāl-/ 'gazelle'; *ḫu-za-lum* and *ú-za-lum* = /ǧuzālum/ 'little gazelle'; and *pu-ur-ḫu-ša-nu* = /purǧušānu/ 'flea'—yielding the conclusion that "/ǧ/ [dürfte] im Amurritischen als selbständiges Phonem erhalten sein."<sup>16</sup>

When we turn to the world of greater Canaan, we note that Egyptian transcriptions of Semitic words demonstrate beyond doubt that "/ǧ/ is a phoneme distinct from *ayin*, as it is consistently transcribed by Egyptian *q* and *g* in roots containing Proto-Semitic \*/ǧ/. . . . The evidence clearly indicates that /ʕ/ and /ǧ/ were phonemically opposed in most [Canaanite] dialects."<sup>17</sup> Further evidence for this distinction derives from Greek transcriptions of Hebrew words in the Septuagint. In the words of Joshua Blau, who thoroughly researched the topic, "G [= the Greek transcription] reflects a language in which Proto-Semitic ʕ and ǧ were still separate phonemes."<sup>18</sup> That is to say, as late as the third century B.C.E. (the date of the Septuagint), Hebrew continued to distinguish the two phonemes, even though only a single grapheme ʕ existed to express the two consonants in writing. Apparently, Mendenhall is

12. O. Rössler, "Zur Frage der Vertretung der gemeinsemitischen Laryngale im Akkadischen (ʕ<sub>5</sub> = ǧ)," in *Akten des XXIV. Internationalen Orientalisten-Kongresses München*, ed. H. Franke (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959), 129–32; and "Ghain im Ugaritischen," *ZA* 54 (1961): 158–72. These two articles are reprinted in O. Rössler, *Gesammelte Schriften zur Semitohamistik* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 419–22, 438–52. More recent studies relevant to this topic by current scholars are cited in the next paragraph (see nn. 14–16).

13. Admittedly, Mendenhall introduces a new twist to the old hypothesis, namely, that /ǧ/ was brought by Levantines to Arabia during the Late Bronze Age (see further below), but nonetheless one would expect some mention of the classic studies by Růžička and Petráček, along with a response to Rössler.

14. R. Hasselbach, *Sargonic Akkadian: A Historical and Comparative Study of the Syllabic Texts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 85, 130–31, 133.

15. L. Kogan, "ǧ in Akkadian," *UF* 33 (2001): 263–97; and "Additions and Corrections to 'ǧ in Akkadian,' (*UF* 33)," *UF* 34 (2002): 315–18.

16. M. P. Streck, *Das amurritische Onomastikon der altbabylonischen Zeit, Band 1: Die Amurriter, Die onomastische Forschung, Orthographie und Phonologie, Nominalmorphologie* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 231.

17. J. E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 412–13. See also D. Sivan and Z. Cochavi-Rainey, *West Semitic Vocabulary in Egyptian Script of the 14th to the 10th Centuries BCE* (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion Univ. of the Negev Press, 1992), 13.

18. J. Blau, *On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 9.

totally unaware of this evidence, given his statement (cited above) that /ǧ/ “exists nowhere but in Ugaritic and the proto-Arabic language complex.”<sup>19</sup>

Next there is the evidence of Old South Arabian, whose alphabet includes a separate grapheme for *ǧayin*, though apparently Mendenhall includes this language in his “proto-Arabic language complex.” Given the many important grammatical differences between Old South Arabian and Arabic, however, one cannot simply assume a close genetic relationship between these two distinct languages used in the Arabian peninsula.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the Modern South Arabian languages also attest to the phoneme /ǧ/<sup>21</sup>—and once more we emphasize that this language bundle is not to be identified with Arabic in any way, shape, or form.<sup>22</sup> Examples of common words (selected from Mehri) that begin with /ǧ/ include *ǧayg* ‘man,’ *ǧbr* ‘meet,’ and *ǧlk* ‘look’—all of which, we hasten to add, have no cognates in Arabic.

All of this suggests, of course, that /ǧ/ is a distinct phoneme in proto-Semitic. Mendenhall’s proposal, by contrast, is as follows: “I would suggest as a working hypothesis that the large number of Anatolian (Luwian and Hurrian) words and names that are spelled with a *ghayn* in Ugaritic, and the large percentage of Anatolians within the population of Ugarit and northern Syria in the Late Bronze Age might go far in accounting for the comparatively late introduction of this consonant into a very restricted segment of Late Bronze Age Semitic. When elements of this population migrated into the Arabian desert to found fortified cities, they carried this phoneme along with their language and other cultural traditions” (p. 21). Let us accept as a given that Luwian and Hurrian, as well as Hittite (which Mendenhall does not mention in this regard), included the voiced velar fricative /ǧ/ in their phonetic inventory.<sup>23</sup>

19. One cannot know how Mendenhall would respond to our having brought these data to the fore, though presumably he would counter that the Hebrew (and other) evidence is irrelevant. That is to say, he might understand Canaanite/Hebrew /ǧ/ as a continuation of Ugaritic /ǧ/—after all, if Arabic /ǧ/ is a continuation thereof, then *qal wa-ḥomer* the Canaanite/Hebrew phoneme would be as well.

20. Naturally, there is no *communis opinio* concerning the genetic classification of the Semitic languages. For well reasoned schemes, see R. Hetzron, “La division des langues sémitiques,” in *Actes du premier Congrès international de linguistique sémitique et chamito-sémitique, Paris 16–19 juillet 1969*, ed. A. Caquot and D. Cohen (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1974), 181–94 (with Arabic in “Central Semitic” and Old South Arabian in “South Semitic”); J. Huehnergard, “Features of Central Semitic,” in *Biblical and Oriental Essays in Memory of William L. Moran*, ed. A. Gianto (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 155–203 (with both languages in “Central Semitic,” though with certain features not shared by Arabic and Old South Arabian); and J. Blau, “Hebrew and North West Semitic: Reflections on the Classification of the Semitic Languages,” *HAR* 2 (1978): 21–44 (reprinted in: J. Blau, *Topics in Hebrew and Semitic Linguistics* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998], 308–32, with Arabic and Old South Arabian together in “South Semitic”). Mendenhall, it appears, is completely unaware of these and other studies. Most importantly, however, and to repeat, regardless of which approach one follows, all scholars agree that Arabic and Old South Arabian are two distinct languages.

21. A. Lonnet and M.-C. Simeone-Senelle, “La phonologie des langues sudarabiques modernes,” in *Phonologies of Asia and Africa*, ed. A. S. Kaye (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 1.346, 1.366.

22. Indeed, regardless of how one classifies Old South Arabian (see above n. 20, with Huehnergard’s proposal that this language join Arabic in the “Central Semitic” group), Modern South Arabian is not part of Central Semitic.

23. We say “accept as a given,” for while there is some debate on the matter, we favor the view of H. C. Melchert that a contrast existed in Hittite and Luwian between the sound represented in cuneiform script as *-ḫ-* (intervocally) and that represented by *-ḫ-* (again, intervocally), with the latter realized as a voiced fricative (either velar or pharyngeal). For discussion, see H. C. Melchert, *Anatolian Historical Phonology* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 21–22; “Luvian,” in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World’s Ancient Languages*, ed. R. D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 579; and H. A. Hoffner and H. C. Melchert, *A Grammar of*

And yes, this sound was represented in the Ugaritic alphabet with the letter ḡ; a famous and convenient example is the Hittite royal name <sup>m</sup>*tu-ud-ḡa-li-ya* ‘Tudḡaliya’ = *tdḡl*.

The problem with Mendenhall’s proposal, however, is that a language does not borrow a phoneme from another language without borrowing a substantial number of words containing the phoneme. For Mendenhall’s scheme to have even a modicum of likelihood, one would need to identify a sizable list of Hurrian and Hittite (and Luwian) words containing the phoneme /ḡ/ that were borrowed into Ugaritic. Such is not the case, however. Certain (or relatively certain) cases include *dḡt* ‘offering’ (< Hittite *duḡḡiṣ*), *ḡr* ‘sum, total’ (< Hurrian *ḡeyari*), *pḡ(n)dr* ‘cloak, blanket’ (< Hurrian *paḡandarri*), and *tzḡ* ‘offering’ (< Hurrian *taṣuḡḡe*).<sup>24</sup> Other words appear to have Hurrian elements in them (e.g., *mḡrḡl* ‘guard, watchman,’ *mndḡ* ‘fine flour’<sup>25</sup>), but the actual etyma are not attested in the known Hurrian lexis and thus caution is advised. In contrast to this relatively sparse list, the vast majority of Ugaritic words containing the letter ḡ have cognates in the other Semitic languages, with the corresponding *ḡayin* in Arabic and South Arabian (or *‘ayin* in Hebrew and other languages), including, for example, *ḡzl* ‘spin,’ *ḡzw* ‘raid,’ *ḡlm* ‘lad,’ *ḡlp* ‘husk’ (see above), to name but a few.

In short, only through several long leaps (including the carrying of this “borrowed phoneme” into the Arabian desert), and by ignoring the intra-Semitic evidence, can one accede to Mendenhall’s claim that Anatolians are responsible for the “introduction of this consonant into a very restricted segment of Late Bronze Age Semitic.” The standard view concerning the voiced velar fricative should be sustained.<sup>26</sup>

5. Next comes the following declaration: “That this proto-Arabic population was also in close contact with the Anatolian populations is proven by the fact that this group, which can be identified with the Midianites, consisted of five members of a confederation (Num. 31:8—five kings). One group was the *kashi* well known from Hittite inscriptions as border guards at the Mitanni boundary. They are also well known from the Amarna letters from Byblos and Jerusalem. In the latter city they were accused of attempting to kill their Hurrian (i.e., Mitannian) king” (pp. 21–22). Once more, one hardly knows where to begin.

We are at a loss to identify the *kashi* of the Hittite inscriptions cited by Mendenhall.<sup>27</sup> He provides no references, though apparently he intends the troops of Kaššiya/Kiššiya, who were

*the Hittite Language*, Part 1: Reference Grammar (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 39. For Hurrian, in which voicing is not phonemic and thus /ḡ/ most likely occurs as an allophone of /ḡ/, see G. Wilhelm, “Hurrian,” in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World’s Ancient Languages*, 98–99. We take this opportunity to thank Craig Melchert for his advice on this section (via email communication, November 2008).

24. See the entries in G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1.268, 1.325, 2.666, 2.884, respectively. For *dḡt*, see the classic study of H. A. Hoffner, “An Anatolian Cult Term in Ugaritic,” *JNES* 23 (1964): 66–68. For *pḡ(n)dr*, see also J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 169.

25. Again, see the entries in del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 2.529, 2.561, respectively.

26. As an indication of scholarly consensus on the matter, note that E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), did not even note the view of Růžička and Petráček (and the aforementioned articles are not included in his extensive bibliography either). See also the following comment by P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 28 n. 2 (from the pen of the latter co-author, naturally): “In spite of a long series of writings by R. Růžička the existence of Ghain in Proto-Semitic as a genuine Semitic phoneme is *universally* accepted” (emphasis added).

27. For what follows we are grateful for the assistance of our colleague Itamar Singer (Tel-Aviv University), via email communication, October 2008.

employed by the Hittite army on the periphery of the empire.<sup>28</sup> But in no way can this group be the same as the *kaši* of the Amarna letters, who most likely are the Egyptian *kꜣš* ‘Cush’ (Nubia).<sup>29</sup>

Mendenhall continues in this paragraph with reference to Moses’s Cushite wife (Numbers 12:1), though elsewhere Zipporah is referred to as a Midianite (see Exodus 2: 15–22). In addition, while he does not state so explicitly, he also must have in mind Habakkuk 3:7, which presents Midian and Cushan as parallel terms. All biblical scholars would agree that Cush(an) must be a tribe or a group within the greater entity of Midian. But it is a big step from this basic finding to Mendenhall’s position that these Cushites/Midianites originate as the *kashi* of the Hittite inscriptions (whoever Mendenhall may have in mind) and the *kaši* of the Amarna letters (see above). In short, there is no historical justification for Mendenhall’s reconstruction.

6. Mendenhall states, “Recently it has been suggested by several linguists that in the real world of spoken languages—as opposed to the somewhat artificial world of formal written documents and learned scribal conventions—it is vocabulary, not phonetics or morphology, that constitutes the most reliable index of dialect” (p. 22). He then uses this approach as the basis for showing how Arabic shares many lexical features with Ugaritic, Byblos Syllabic, early Hebrew poetry, and so on. Now, the statements of many important linguists could be marshaled against this position, but for the nonce let us accept Mendenhall’s contention that lexicon is “the most reliable index of dialect.” One even could grant Mendenhall his due here regarding Arabic, on the one hand, and Ugaritic and Hebrew, on the other (though see below). Nonetheless, the lexical relationships would not prove much at all. First, since the classical Semitic languages as a whole do not differ one from the other more than a single sub-group within Indo-European, let’s say, Slavic or Romance or Germanic,<sup>30</sup> it is only to be expected to find a strong lexical correspondence between any two Semitic languages. Secondly, since Arabic is the Semitic language with the largest attested lexical inventory, it is not surprising that one finds cognates for Ugaritic words only in Arabic. Thirdly, the vocabulary common to Arabic and Ugaritic is due to shared retention, which does nothing to show genetic relationship. And finally, on a similar note, archaic Hebrew words attested mainly or only in early poetry are also to be seen as retentions from Proto-Semitic, and thus they too should not be used to demonstrate genetic relationship.

In addition, Mendenhall seems totally unaware of the lexico-statistical study (using the 100-word list created by Morris Swadesh) conducted by Chaim Rabin, with the result (among others, but the one most relevant for the present study) that the Hebrew lexicon shares more with the Akkadian lexis than it does with the Arabic.<sup>31</sup> In fact, one of Rabin’s discoveries

28. See, e.g., R. H. Beal, *The Organisation of the Hittite Military* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1992), 75–78, 494–95.

29. W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 390. Admittedly, Moran held out the possibility that the *kaši* of EA 287 (from Jerusalem) referred to another group, but again identification with the Kaššiya group is impossible. In passing, we also question Mendenhall’s identification of the Abdi-ḥepa (more properly *ir-ḥe-ba*), king of Jerusalem (EA 280, 285–90, 366) as a “Hurrian (i.e., Mitannian) king.” Clearly, the theophoric element in his name is Hurrian (namely, the goddess Ḥebat), but this does not necessarily make the ruler himself Hurrian. For further details on this anthroponym, see R. S. Hess, *Amarna Personal Names* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 176.

30. See Blau, “Hebrew and North West Semitic: Reflections on the Classification of the Semitic Languages,” 22 (reprinted in: Blau, *Topics in Hebrew and Semitic Linguistics*, 309).

31. C. Rabin, “Lexicostatistics and the Internal Divisions of Semitic,” in *Hamito-Semitic: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held by the Historical Section of the Linguistics Association (Great Britain) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on the 18th, 19th and 20th of March 1970*, ed. J. and T. Bynon (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 85–99 (with discussion by others following on pp. 99–102).

is that “Arabic has 53 words not found (at all or in this meaning) in any of the other languages,” which is by far the largest number for any single language (others, for example: Ethiopic, 40; Akkadian, 33; Hebrew, 9).<sup>32</sup> Examples include *ʔaswad* ‘black,’ *šadr* ‘breast,’ *ḥaraqa* ‘burn,’ *gamamah* ‘cloud,’ *bārid* ‘cold,’ *turāb* ‘earth,’ *rišah* ‘feather,’ *ṭāra* ‘fly,’ etc. If Arabic were indeed derived from the language(s) of Bronze Age Canaan (Ugaritic, proto-Hebrew, etc.), one would expect greater lexical coherence between these two entities.

Finally, there is the recent comprehensive study by Martin Zammit, which compares the entire lexicon (1717 entries) of the Qurʾān with the lexica of the classical Semitic languages (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Syriac, Old South Arabian, Geʿez).<sup>33</sup> True, Qurʾānic Arabic shares the most cognates with Hebrew, but this figure amounts to 741 items, or 43.2%.<sup>34</sup> In line with what we stated above, if Arabic derived from the patois of the ancient Levant, one would expect this figure to be much, much higher. The next highest figures obtained are for Aramaic and Syriac, with which Arabic shares 685 cognates, or 39.9%, and 657 cognates, or 38.3%, respectively. (For the record, the number of cognates shared with Ugaritic is 394, or 23.0%, and the number shared with Phoenician is 229, or 13.3%—though naturally the “quantitatively limited lexica” of these two languages skew the data considerably.<sup>35</sup>) What is truly striking, however, is that “in the case of 535 Arabic lexical items (i.e., 31.1% of the corpus), no cognate forms were found in the other Semitic languages”<sup>36</sup> a datum that coheres well with Rabin’s finding and therefore raises the same considerations noted above.<sup>37</sup>

7. Mendenhall next turns his attention to personal names. His statement that “One of the commonest roots in the pre-Islamic Arabic onomasticon is *wṭʿ*, ‘to save, deliver’” (p. 23) is totally misleading. The root is attested in North Arabian (Safaitic, Thamudic, etc.) personal names, not in Arabic *per se*. Mendenhall attempts a sleight-of-hand here, by lumping together all languages in the Arabian peninsula without distinction, though the astute student of Semitic knows better. Mendenhall’s inability to handle even the most basic elements in Semitic is seen further by his relating the Hebrew personal name *יהושע* to this root. Hebraists are in agreement, however, that this anthroponym is comprised of the divine name Yahu (shortened form of Yahweh) and the verbal root *שׁוּע* ‘noble’ (not *יִשׁע* ‘save, deliver’), as per the analysis first put forth by Jonas Greenfield, based on a) the Ugaritic cognate *ṭʿ* ‘leader, chief,’ and b) the parallel word pairs in Isa. 32:5, and Job 34:18–19.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, one must recall that in general the testimony of personal names should not serve as firm evidence for any linguistic argument.<sup>39</sup>

32. Rabin, “Lexicostatistics and the Internal Divisions of Semitic,” 98–99.

33. M. R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qurʾānic Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

34. *A Comparative Lexical Study*, 561–62, for the data presented in this paragraph.

35. *A Comparative Lexical Study*, 563.

36. *A Comparative Lexical Study*, 561. See also the final statement of the entire book, which follows upon further mention of the 31.1% figure: “This most important quantitative element emerging from the present study is a reminder of the lexical exclusivity characterizing Arabic among the rest of the Semitic language” (p. 590).

37. We hasten to add that we share all the usual caveats and criticisms concerning lexico-statistics (and its derivative approach glottochronology), which is to say, we would not extrapolate from such studies to establish family-tree relationships and the like. For our present purposes, however, we find the data compiled by Rabin and Zammit to be useful and beneficial.

38. J. C. Greenfield, “Some Glosses on the Keret Epic,” *Eretz-Israel* 9 (1969): 60–61. For discussion of the root, including the Ugaritic evidence, see *HALOT*, 1444.

39. See, for example, M. C. A. Macdonald, “Some Reflections on Epigraphy and Ethnicity in the Roman Near East,” *Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1999): 177–90, with specific reference to the inscriptions of the Arabian peninsula, in fact.

8. Mendenhall refers to three M.A. theses produced in recent years by students at Yarmouk University. Unfortunately these works are not readily available (if at all) in North America and thus it is hard for others to evaluate independently their conclusions (linguistic, statistical, etc.). One would hope that the individuals involved would exert the effort to make their findings more available to the general scholarly community, but given the dates of 1989 and 1992 (two) for the original works, we suspect that there is little hope at this point of such occurring.

9. The notion that Arabic *could be* the language of Bronze Age Syria, transported by émigrés to the Arabian peninsula is by itself not an impossibility. Parallels to this proposal are attested within historical times. The most famous and convenient illustration is the case of Icelandic, essentially Old Norse, transported from continental Scandinavia to a remote island in the North Atlantic Ocean, where it remains the most conservative of the Germanic languages. Other cases are the migration of the Huns (with their language) from western Siberia (the Uralic region) to present-day Hungary and the migration of the Turks (with their language) from central Asia to Anatolia. But all of these movements are well attested historically, and there is a firm consensus concerning the linguistic picture by all who have studied the matter. Curiously, Mendenhall does not refer to these or any other parallels in his reconstruction of the history of the Arabs and the Arabic language.

10. Next we turn to the archaeological evidence that Mendenhall musters in support of his historical reconstruction.<sup>40</sup> Time and again he refers to newly founded cities in northwest Arabia dated to the Late Bronze Age, and on one occasion he even refers to their “characteristic pottery [consisting] of locally made copies of the typical Mycenaean pottery of the LB period” (p. 22). We are simply at a loss to understand this statement, and the fact that he offers no citations for the archaeological data makes his claim all the more suspect. Stranger still is the fact that Mendenhall makes no mention of the so-called Midianite pottery that does appear in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, at Qurayya, and as far northeast as southern Jordan.<sup>41</sup> This pottery is traditionally dated to the beginning of the Iron Age I period, so Mendenhall may find it less relevant for his argument. Nonetheless, this pottery remains one of the more significant data for the archaeology of Arabia during the general period under discussion—and in any case very little time separates Mendenhall’s posited migration of Levantines to Arabia at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the dating of the so-called Midianite pottery at the beginning of the Iron Age I period.

As another indication of Mendenhall’s lack of awareness of recent scholarly trends, we note his failure to refer to the work of Israel Finkelstein. A series of surveys conducted mainly by Israeli archaeologists in the 1970s and 1980s (Finkelstein included) determined that the number of settlements in the central hill country of Israel during the Late Bronze Age decreased drastically, especially in comparison to the previous Middle Bronze Age.<sup>42</sup>

40. For what follows we gratefully acknowledge the assistance of J. P. Dessel and Jodi Magness, via email communications, August 2008.

41. P. J. Parr, “Pottery of the Late Second Millennium B.C. From North West Arabia and its Historical Implications,” in *Araby the Blest: Studies in Arabian Archaeology*, ed. D. T. Potts (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1988), 73–89, esp. 74, prefers to call this pottery by the term “Qurayya painted ware.” For a recent survey, albeit with a focus on southern Jordan, see P. Bienkowski, “Iron Age Settlement in Edom: A Revised Framework,” in *The World of the Arameans II: Studies in History and Archaeology in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, J. W. Wevers, and M. Weigl (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 257–69.

42. Among the many publications that could be cited in this regard, see I. Finkelstein, “The Rise of Early Israel: Archaeology and Long-Term History,” in *The Origin of Early Israel: Current Debate, Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. S. Ahituv and E. D. Oren (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion Univ. of the Negev Press, 1998), 7–39.

This finding led Finkelstein, in particular, to theorize that these previously sedentary people mobilized themselves and headed eastward and southward to assume a pastoral lifestyle.<sup>43</sup> While we do not necessarily accede to Finkelstein's theory—for other explanations are equally possible—we find it striking that Mendenhall does not refer to current archaeological research, even when it would assist his argument. It would be only a small step from Finkelstein's reconstruction of eastward and southward migrations into the desert fringe of the Sinai, Negev, and Transjordan to Mendenhall's postulated migration to northern Arabia.

In addition, one notes Mendenhall's reference to "the massive Amorite immigration from northeastern Syria [into the Levant] that took place at the transition between Middle Bronze I and Middle Bronze II eras" (p. 24). One hardly needs to observe that the concept of an Amorite invasion (or simply migration) harks back to mid-twentieth-century scholarship; scarcely anyone today would countenance such an event or process.

Finally, we find it strange that there is no mention of the earliest textual references to Arabs found in Neo-Assyrian texts. The material has been collected in fine and convenient fashion by Israel Eph'al,<sup>44</sup> and yet a citation of this book is wanting. Again, Mendenhall might consider these references to be irrelevant, since they come from centuries after his hypothetical migration—and yet one still expects mention of the material.

11. Mendenhall concludes his article with several summary statements, adumbrated above: "To sum up: the remote ancestor of Arabic reflected in the Syllabic Inscriptions from Byblos is also the ancestor of Northwest Semitic" (p. 24); "In the course of the Late Bronze Age, massive immigration of peoples from Anatolia . . . resulted in the breakdown of the old linguistic system" (p. 25); and "Toward the end of the Late Bronze Age, populations of the region, whose language had escaped the second, Anatolian, wave of linguistic influence migrated *into* the Hejaz of the Arabian desert" (p. 25). As we hope to have demonstrated, these and similar statements are totally at variance with the linguistic, historical, and archaeological data emerging from the study of the ancient Near East.

43. I. Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe: The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in Bronze and Iron Ages* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

44. I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent, 9th–5th Centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984).