The past several decades have witnessed a burgeoning of interest in the various languages and dialects used in the area of greater Canaan during the Iron Age. This flurry of scholarly activity has been sparked by several catalysts: (a) the publication of W.R. Garr’s *Dialect Geography of Syria–Palestine* (1985),¹ which may serve as a watershed; (b) new epigraphic finds, which continue to emerge during archaeological excavations (Ekron, Tel Dan, etc.); and (c) a greater awareness of what the Bible itself contains relevant to the subject. In this essay our focus is on the last of these three factors, though naturally the first two remain ever present as we proceed in our investigations. In addition, while I have used the expression ‘other Northwest Semitic dialects’ in the title, by this designation I include Hebrew dialects beyond SBH in which the majority of the Bible is composed.²

It is my great honour to dedicate this essay to our dear friend and colleague Frank Polak, who has done so much during his distinguished career to advance our knowledge of the workings of the Hebrew language. His pioneering research into verbal vs. nominal style, the use of hypotaxis, and the employment of noun groups—to name the most important new horizons—have impacted the study of ancient Hebrew in singular fashion.³ In

2. Note the following abbreviations: SBH = Standard Biblical Hebrew; IH = Israeli Hebrew; JPA = Jewish Palestinian Aramaic; JBA = Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.
addition, Frank has always been exceedingly generous in sharing his data sets, as a glimpse at some of my own published articles, so indebted to his work, will demonstrate.4

The present article, as adumbrated above, is less dependent on Frank’s investigations into the different Hebrew writing styles, and yet it intersects with his abiding interest in the broad framework of the Hebrew language—especially through the sociolinguistic lens—as revealed in the ancient sources. By necessity, due to space limitations, the treatment will be sketchy at times (including via the use of lists, especially when I present examples discussed in earlier articles), but this outline format at least will allow the reader to realize in a single essay the full amount of data available to us.

1.0. The Shibboleth Incident (Judges 12)

The *locus classicus* for dialectal differences within ancient Hebrew itself is the well-known Shibboleth incident (Judg. 12.6):

אֶפֶרֶת וְלוֹ אָמַר לְדַבֵּר וְלֹא סִבֹּלֶת וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁבֹּלֶת לוֹ אֱמָר־נָא וַיֹּאמְרוּ

And they said to him, ‘say please šibbōlet’, and he said ‘sibbōlet’, for he could not speak thus.5

E.A. Speiser was the first to offer the correct interpretation of this passage,6 while I myself have written several articles on the subject.7 In short, Judg. 12.6 demonstrates that the phoneme /ṯ/ was preserved in Transjordanian dialects (Gilead, Ammon), but Cisjordanians could not pronounce this sound and thus realized it as [s].

2.0. Style-Switching: Genesis 24—Abraham’s Servant in Aram

The biblical authors delighted their audiences with the literary device of style-switching, by which the foreignness of various characters and geographical settings is reflected in the narrative, both in direct discourse and
in third-person narration. The first major example of this technique in the Hebrew Bible occurs in Genesis 24, as the camera follows Abraham’s servant in his journey from Canaan to Aram. The following seven items are all atypical of Hebrew, or at least SBH, but are common in Aramaic:8

2. The phrase לא־תִקַּ֤ח אֲשֶׁ֨ר ‘that you not take’ in v. 3, calquing on Aramaic דלא (instead of the expected Hebrew אם).
3. The root א-מ-ג (hiphil) ‘give drink’ in v. 17.
4. The root ה-ר-ע’pour’ in v. 20.
6. The particle אִם־לֹא ‘but rather’ in v. 38 (cf. לא—an> אלה).2
7. The noun מִגְדָּנֹת ‘choice gifts’ in v. 53.

3.0. Style-Switching: Genesis 30–31—Jacob in Aram

The narrative in the book of Genesis returns to the land of Aram in chs. 30–31, as Jacob spends twenty years in the country residing in the household of Laban. Once more the author treats his audience to a host of Aramaic-like features, embedded in both the narration and in direct discourse, as a means of creating the proper ambience for the story set in a foreign land. Examples include:9

1. The noun גָּד ‘fortune’ in 30.11 (in the naming of Gad).
2. The root ג-ב-ז ‘provide, supply’ (as both verb and noun) in 30.20 (in the naming of Zebulun).
3. והַפָּנִים שִׁימַעְתָּו לָֽמָּה ‘designate your wage for me, and I will give it’ in Gen. 30.28, with ב-ק-נ ‘mark, specify, designate’ (cf. Isa. 62.2).
4. The noun תְּיָשִׁים ‘he-goats’ in 30.35, more common in JPA and other Western Aramaic dialects than in Hebrew (see below, §15.2).
5. The noun לוּז ‘almond’ in 30.37 (in place of שקֵד).

8. For detailed treatment, see my earlier analysis of this chapter: Rendsburg, ‘Some False Leads’, pp. 24-35.
6. The verb הַצֵּר ‘peel, split’ in 30.37-38, common in JPA, JBA, Syriac, etc.  

7. 3rd person feminine plural form יָתָנה ‘and they were in heat’ in 30.38 (SBH would be יָתְנָה*) (see below, §12.1).

8. אַבְרָם תָּהְל לְךָ ‘and your father cheated me, and he changed my wages ten times’
   - The verb חֲלִף ‘exchange’ (31.7, 41) occurs only here (2x) in the Bible with reference to wages, money, etc., paralleling a usage well attested in JBA in particular.
   - The verbal form, wqatal for past tense, aligns with Aramaic syntax, not SBH.

9. The noun מֹנִים ‘times’ in 31.7, 41, occurring only here in the Bible; note also the root ה-נ-מ ‘count’, standard in Aramaic and more productive than in Hebrew.

10. The verbs מָצֵל ‘and he took away’ in 31.9 and הִצִּיל ‘he took away’ in 31.16 (otherwise ל-צ-נ hiphil means ‘save’).

11. The verb חֲלִף ‘he overtook’ in 31.23 (instead of expected Hebrew חֲלַף—though see 31.25).

12. The verbal clause נְטַשְׁתַּנִי וְלֹא ‘you did not allow me’ in 31.28 (calquing on Aramaic כָּלַפְתִּי וְלֹא).

13. The inflected participle גְנַבְתִי ‘I was robbed’ in 31.39 (2x) (even though this morpheme is attested only later in JPA).

14. The form אֶתְהֶם in Gen. 32.1 (in place of standard אתם), with the preservation of the he in this form linking it to Aramaic התו/התו (see below, §8.4).

4.0. Style-Switching: Balaam—Numbers 22–24

A slightly different kind of style-switching occurs in the Balaam story, for in this case the setting remains in greater Canaan (Moab, to be specific), but the main protagonist is a prophet brought from Aram. Balaam’s oracles, accordingly, are replete with grammatical and lexical features known from Aramaic, but which are non-standard in Hebrew. Examples include:  

10. This is a new item, not treated in the articles cited in n. 9. For the use of this lexeme in Aramaic, consult the standard dictionaries. While not directly relevant to Genesis 30, for a discussion of this verbal root with a legal nuance, see Andrew D. Gross, Continuity and Innovation in the Aramaic Legal Tradition (JSJSup, 128; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2008), pp. 167-68 (see also 162, 188-89, 198).

1. The reduplicatory plural form הַרְרֵי ‘mountains’ (construct) in 23.7 (see below, §6.2).

2. The noun הָרִים ‘mountains’ in 23.9 in the a-line of the couplet, replacing standard Hebrew גְּבָעוֹת ‘hills’ in the b-line (the only such case in the Bible); the form הָרִים evokes Aramaic טורים ‘mountains’, and no doubt reflects an attempt to include that Aramaic word in the poetry, using the Old Aramaic orthography still, in which the emphatic interdental /ʃ/ is represented by צ (before the shift to צ occurred)—in fact this orthography appears still in the Adon letter, line 8, where ‘he guarded’ appears as צצו (and not expected צצו).

3. The verb יִתְחַשָּׁב ‘be considered’ in 23.9, with the hithpael serving for passive voice, as with the T-stem in Aramaic (one expects the niphal in Hebrew).

4. The noun רֹבַע ‘dust-cloud’ in 23.10, with a cognate in Syriac, as well as in Akkadian.

5. The noun יֵנָשׁ ‘divination’ in 23.23 (with the plural form נְנָשִׁים in 24.1 in the prose narrative).

6. The verbal form נִטָּי ‘stretched out’ (or ‘standing tall’) in 24.6, with the retention of the yod in the lamed-he (IIIy) verb, as in Aramaic.

7. The noun קָלַח ‘(his) kingdom’ in 24.7, the classic Aramaic form, in place of the standard Hebrew form מַמְלָכָה.

8. The suffix -ים added to a plural noun ending in -וֹת, as in עַצְמֹתֵיהֶם ‘their bones’ in 24.8; SBH prefers the form -ם.

9. The verbal root ט-ר-ג ‘devour bones’ in the expression יְגָרֵם וְעַצְמֹתֵיהֶם ‘and their bones he devours’ in 24.8, using the denominative verb based on the Aramaic word גֶּבֶר ‘bone’ (2x elsewhere in the Bible).

In all three of these sections (§2, §3, §4), it is important to note that many of these Aramaic-like features are not attested in actual Aramaic texts until centuries, perhaps not even a millennium, later (note my nods to JPA and JBA above, for example). And yet based on their presence in these narratives from the Torah, which should be dated early rather than late—especially in light of Polak’s discovery of the greater verbal (rather than nominal) style used therein— we may assume that these elements were present in Aramaic already during the Iron Age.

5.0. Israeli Hebrew: Genesis 49—Blessings to the Tribes

As is now well recognized, ancient Hebrew was divided into two main dialects, one northern (Israelian) and one southern (Judahite). The latter is essentially SBH, since the majority of the biblical texts were composed in Judah generally or Jerusalem specifically, or by exiles from Judah/Jerusalem. The best place to find IH is in those compositions set in the north, such as the narratives concerning the northern judges and the northern kings, along with other Israeli compositions, such as the book of Proverbs. But even in texts emanating from the south one may find IH traits, as the following three sections demonstrate.

We begin with four features from the blessings to the northern tribes in Genesis 49:

1. The noun גָּרֶם ‘bone’ in v. 14 (blessing to Issachar), in place of Hebrew עֶצֶם.
2. The expression אִמְרֵי־שָׁפֶר ‘lambs of beauty’ in v. 21 (blessing to Naphtali).
3. The noun שׁוּר ‘wall’ in v. 22 (blessing to Joseph); the only other occurrence is in 2 Sam. 22.30 = Ps. 18.30, in the b-line.

6.0. Israeli Hebrew: Deuteronomy 33—Blessings to the Tribes

Similarly, the blessings to the northern tribes in Deuteronomy 33 also include IH elements:

1. The noun יְרָחִים ‘months’ in v. 14 (blessing to Joseph), as opposed to standard Hebrew חֳדָשִׁים.
2. The plural form הַרְרֵי ‘mountains’ (construct) in v. 15 (blessing to Joseph) (see above, §4.1).
3. The verb וַיֵּתֵא ‘and he came’ in v. 21 (blessing to Gad), from the root ה-ת-א, standard Aramaic equivalent of Hebrew א-ו-ב.

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4. The adjective סָפוּן ‘honored, esteemed’ in v. 21 (blessing to Gad); cf. Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic.16

5. The noun דָרוֹם ‘south’ in v. 23 (blessing to Naphtali), the Aramaic equivalent to the various Hebrew words for ‘south,’ including יָמִין, תֵּימָן and נֶגֶב—otherwise, דָרוֹם appears in Ezekiel, Qohelet and Job, as an Aramaism.

7.0. Israeli Hebrew: Wise Woman of Tekoa—2 Samuel 14

Based on the presence of two IH features in her speech, the wise woman of Tekoa, whom Joab brings to appear before David, must stem from northern Tekoa in the lower Galilee, not southern Tekoa near Bethlehem. Note the following:17

1. The particle of existence שׁאִ ‘there is, there are’ in 2 Sam. 14.19: שׁאִמ־אִ֣ם־לְהַשְׂמִ֗יל לְהֵמִ֣ין ‘there is naught (to turn) to go-right or to go-left’; cf. Ugaritic ’iṯ, Aramaic אִיִָ / לִי (negative).

2. The syntagma אחד . . . אחד to express the reciprocal in 2 Sam. 14.6: אֶת־הָאֶחָד הָאֶחָד ‘and he struck him, the one the other’, vs. SBH אֶת־אִישׁ אָחִיו ‘the man his brother’ or אֶת־רֵעֵה אִישׁ ‘the man his friend’; for further instances of this usage, see:

• Job 41.8 וּשׁיִגַ֑ב בְּאֶחָד אֶחָד ‘one touches the other’
• Samaritan Pentateuch Exod. 26.3-6 (4x)
• Targum Onqelos Exod. 26.3-6 (3x), הדא עלך הדא (1x).18

8.0. Midianite Dialect—Exodus 18 plus Two Other Relevant Passages

Both Edward Greenstein and Mordechay Mishor have pointed to a series of atypical grammatical usages in Exodus 18, within Jethro’s advice to Moses concerning the juridical process.19 The result is a text that attempts to portray the foreign speech of the Midianite priest-sheikh. The most prominent of these features are these:


18. For more on the speech of the Woman of Tekoa, see Naama Zahavi-Ely, “‘Turn Right or Left’: Literary Use of Dialect in 2 Samuel 14:19?”, Hebrew Studies 53 (2012), pp. 43-53.

1. Exod. 18.14 מִן־בֹּקֶר "from morning"; non-assimilation of nun (cf. Exod. 18.13 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר).

2. Exod. 18.18 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר "to do it"; instead of the expected מִן־הַבֹּקֶר (as in Jer. 23.20; 30.24); cf. Samaritan Pentateuch מִן־הַבֹּקֶר.

3. Exod. 18.20 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר "and you shall instruct them"—the root ר-ה-ז is non-standard; cf. 2 Kgs 6.10; Qoh. 4.13, etc.

4. Exod. 18.20 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר "and you shall instruct them"—non-standard מִן־הַבֹּקֶר (5x) in place of מִן־הַבֹּקֶר (475x) (see above, §3.14).

Another oddity occurs in Exodus 18, though in this case one must admit that the reverse of the expected occurs:

5. Exod. 18.22 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר "let them judge"
   Exod. 18.26 מִן־הַבֹּקֶר "they would judge"
   • with retention of /u/ in yaqtul(u) (see below, §17.3)

Based on the first four items listed above, which are in the mouth of Jethro, one would expect the atypical form מִן־הַבֹּקֶר to be spoken by the protagonist, with the standard form מִן־הַבֹּקֶר placed within the third-person narration. Yet just the opposite occurs. Here one must recall that in the two narrative texts characterized by style-switching presented above (§2, §3), a large number of the Aramaic-like features occur not within the mouths of the individuals either visiting or resident in Aram, but rather within the voice of the narrator. In light of this, I am inclined to explain מִן־הַבֹּקֶר, with retention of /u/ > [u:] in the yaqtul(u) prefix-conjugation verb, as yet another instance of the author’s attempt to depict the foreign setting in the land of Midian.20

If we expand the ‘Midianite’ material to include another scene in which Jethro/Reuel appears, another atypical grammatical feature stands out:

6. Exod. 2.20: feminine plural imperative קִרְאֶן "call", instead of expected קְרֶאןָ (as in Ruth 1.20).21

Now, needless to say, we know nothing about the ancient Midianite dialect or language. Yet given the conservative nature of Bedouin Arabic, one is justified to look at the speech of Bedouin in the region to the present day, if only to determine whether any of the features listed above may resonate מִן־הַבֹּקֶר (until today). Remarkably, parallels to three of the six afore-listed items are present in Sinai Bedouin Arabic, accessible now via the superb fieldwork conducted and recorded by Rudolf de Jong. The first of these is the manner of adding the pronominal suffix to the infinitive


21. Elsewhere this form of the feminine plural imperative occurs only as קְרֶאןָ in Gen. 4.23 (used by Lamech), though I am unable to explain its presence there along the current line of reasoning.
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form (§8.2 above), as in the form mimšāh ‘his going’. The second is the retention of /u/ in yaqtul(ū) verbs (§8.5 above), as witnessed in forms such as yūg ūd ‘he sits’, yūg ūdū ‘they sit’, yūḏrub ‘he hits’, yūḏrubū ‘they hit’, etc. While the third is the feminine plural imperative (§8.6 above), represented by such forms as ikīthin ‘write!’, āṣrawān ‘drink!’, āfīnān ‘open!’, etc., in contrast to the Classical Arabic form ending in -na.

This is not to imply that Jethro in particular or the Midianites in general spoke an ancient form of (Bedouin) Arabic—for to repeat, we know naught about the ancient Midianite dialect/language. If pressed, however, I think most scholars would conjecture that said language was on the fringe of Northwest Semitic, with ample isoglosses with Ancient North Arabian or even Arabic. The picture painted here certainly suggests precisely that, with the three features anticipating contemporary Bedouin Arabic from the general Sinai/Midian region.

The following feature is not directly relevant to any potential Midianite dialect, but since both the geographical setting and the literary context are close by, I take the opportunity to note an additional linguistic item here:

7. Exod. 16.15 הַיְּהִי מָן ‘what is it’ (with reference to manna); cf. Ugaritic mh, mn, Amarna manna, for example, EA 286.5 ma-an-na ep-ša-ti a-na LUGAL EN-ia ‘what have I done to the king my lord?’

Clearly, the author of Exodus 16 achieves a delightful wordplay with the use of the interrogative מָן ‘what’ in close proximity to the word מָן ‘manna’ (vv. 31, 33, 35 [twice]). Nevertheless, we learn from this usage that the form מָן ‘what’ was recognizable to an educated Israelite audience. As indicated


23. De Jong, Bedouin Dialects of the Northern Sinai Littoral, pp. 190, 299, 378, 460, 516; and Rudolf de Jong, A Grammar of the Bedouin Dialects of Central and Southern Sinai (HO, 1.101; Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 82, 164, 251-52. Note the vowel harmony inherent in these forms, with the shift of the distinctive /a/ vowel in the first syllable to /u/ in these u-type imperfects (to use de Jong’s term); this phonological feature is common in Sinai Bedouin Arabic in a wide variety of verbal forms. In addition, note that I have simplified the ending of the 3rd masc. pl. forms, which in actuality may end in u, uw, um, tūn. The reader is invited to consult the two volumes for the specific sub-dialects in which these forms are attested—though in general all of the Bedouin dialects of the Sinai reflect this feature. For an earlier statement on Negev Bedouin Arabic, see Haim Blanc, The Arabic Dialect of the Negev Bedouins (Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 4.7; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970), pp. 136-37 [pp. 25-26].

24. De Jong, Bedouin Dialects of the Northern Sinai Littoral, pp. 192, 302, 379, 462; and de Jong, Bedouin Dialects of Central and Southern Sinai, pp. 82, 166, 253. Once again, the reader is invited to consult the two volumes for the specific sub-dialects in which these forms are attested—though in general all of the Bedouin dialects of the Sinai reflect the same usage. And once more, for an earlier statement concerning Negev Bedouin Arabic, see Blanc, The Arabic Dialect of the Negev Bedouins, p. 137 [p. 26].
above, this morpheme is attested in Late Bronze Age texts from Ugarit and Jerusalem (El-Amarna 286), though the latter in turn reflects a Syrian scribal tradition.25

9.0. Phoenicianisms in the Temple Building Account (1 Kings 6–8)

The account of the building of the Temple during Solomon’s reign includes a series of Phoenician grammatical and lexical features. I conclude from this finding that not only did the Phoenicians provide the architect, the craftsmen, and the raw materials for the building of Solomon’s Temple, but that Phoenician scribes recorded the work, perhaps in conjunction with Israelite scribes. The following are the most prominent:

1. Month names: זִו ‘Ziv’ (6.1; 6.37), בּוּל ‘Bul’ (6.38), אֵתָנִים ‘Etanim’ (8.2)
2. הָשִּׁי ‘month’, as in:
   6.38 קָרָה פָּלָה אֲלֹהָיו הָשִּׁי
   8.2 קָרָה נָאָבִים נַפֵּגָה מַשְׁכֵּב
3. קֶצֶב ‘shape, form’ (6.25; 7.37)—only here in BH; cf. KAI 145.9 (Mak-tar, Tunisia) קֶצֶב ‘dressed stone, statue’
4. פַּעַם ‘tier, step, corner’ (architectural term), as in:
   7.4 עַבְקֵמִים עם יוּם עַל פַּעַם פַּעַם
   7.5 בוּאֵלָה עַל פַּעַם פַּעַם פַּעַם
   7.30 עַבְקֵמִים עַל פַּעַם פַּעַם פַּעַם

See Phoenician קֵסֶם ‘tier, platform’ (KAI 80.1, Tripolitania 41.1)26
5. /á/ > /o/ shift (see also below, §10.1), as in:27
   1 Kgs 5.24; 5.32; 7.40 חִירוֹם (~ חִירָם ‘Hirom’ (~ Hiram’) (both king and builder)
   1 Kgs 9.26 אֵלוֹת (~ אֵילָה ‘Elot’)


26. On this particular item, see M.J. Mulder, ‘pa’am as a Measure of Length in 1 Kings 7.4 and KAI 80.1’, in Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F.C. Fensham (ed. W. Claassen; JSOTSup, 48; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), pp. 177-81. As per the title of Mulder’s article, the word in question may be a measure of length, as opposed to an architectural term.

10.0. Addressee-Switching—Phoenicianisms

As first noted by Chaim Rabin, the prophets often peppered their addresses to the foreign nations with linguistic traits evocative of their fictive audiences.\(^\text{28}\) Thus, for example, we find the following Phoenicianisms in three separate prophetic books:\(^\text{29}\)

1. Ezek. 26.11
   "and the pillar of your strength to the earth will fall"
   • reflecting /á/ > /o/ (see above, §9.5)
2. Joel 4.5
   "and my precious treasures you have brought unto your palaces"
   • Ugaritic-Phoenician hkl / הַכֵּל ‘palace’\(^\text{30}\) (SBH הַכֶּל)
3. Zech. 11.3
   "and she has amassed silver like dust,
   and gold like mud in the streets"
   • Ugaritic-Phoenician hrš / חֲרוּץ ‘gold’ (SBH חֲרוּץ)\(^\text{31}\)

11.0. /á/ > /o/ in Philistine dialect

The precious little that we know about the Philistine dialect is forthcoming mainly from the Ekron inscription. What may be discerned from this epigraph, however, is quite instructive, for one notes several isoglosses with Phoenician.\(^\text{32}\) Quite astonishingly, decades before the discovery (in 1996) of the Ekron inscription, the remarkable H.L. Ginsberg, based on virtually no evidence whatsoever, had proposed that Phoenician and Philistine formed a ‘Phoenic’ sub-group within Canaanite (along with earlier Ugaritic and later Punic), which was written and spoken up and down the Levantine coast.\(^\text{33}\)

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\(^{30}\) To be technical, הַכֵּל ‘palace’ is attested in Phoenician only as an element within personal names; see Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972), pp. 302-303.

\(^{31}\) Note also the four-fold attestation of חֲרוּץ in Proverbs (3.14; 8.10, 19; 16.16) as a key piece of evidence in support of the finding that this book emanates from northern Israel, as remarked above, §5, with n. 13.


As one additional witness to this alignment, we note the presence of the /á/ > /o/ shift (see above §9.5, §10.1) in Philistine, as reflected in the divine name דָּגוֹן ‘Dagon’ (thirteen times in the Bible, eleven of which are in 1 Samuel 5, always written plene). In every other case where we gain evidence concerning the vowels of this theonym within Semitic, the name is always dagan (Eblaite, Old Akkadian, Emar Akkadian, Ras Shamra Akkadian, etc., spelled either ’da-gan or ’da-ga-an),34 with reference to the ancient grain god. Whereas Hebrew retains the word דָּגָן ‘grain’ as a common noun, by contrast the Masorah marks the second syllable of the name of the Philistine deity with /o:/ vowel, which itself accords with the information recorded by Sanchuniathon and transmitted by Philo of Byblos, to wit, Δαγών.35 The Bible, accordingly, reflects the /á/ > /o/ shift not only in Phoenician (once more, see above §9.5, §10.1), but in Philistine as well.36

12.0. Third Feminine Plural Prefix-Conjugation Form

The SBH 3rd fem. pl. prefix-conjugation form is תִּקְטֹלְנָה tiqṭolna. On four occasions, however, we encounter different forms:

1. Dialectal form: יִקְטֹלְנָה yiqṭolna (à la Aramaic and indeed proto-Semitic)
   - Gen. 30.38 (Aram)
   - 1 Sam. 6.12 (Philistia)
   - Dan. 8.22 (Aramaism in LBH)

As noted earlier (§3.7), the usage in Gen. 30.38 supports the style-shifting effect in Genesis 30–31. While our knowledge of the Philistine dialect


36. The fanciful notion that דָּגוֹן ‘Dagon’ was a fish-deity (i.e. דָּג ‘fish’ + nominal suffix -ון), as held by some ancient and medieval exegetes (Jerome, Rashi, Qimḥi, et al.)—along with some moderns!—may be rejected outright, notwithstanding the maritime origins of the Philistines. Besides, Philo of Byblos states explicitly that Dagon = Grain and that he was the discoverer of both grain and the plow; see Attridge and Oden, Philo of Byblos, p. 87 n. 87; and Albert I. Baumgarten, The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary (Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain, 89; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), pp. 190, 205.
is exceedingly limited (see above, §11)—and even if we knew more, there would be very little chance of our encountering the 3rd fem. pl. prefix-conjugation form—I would propose that the presence of \( \text{וַיִשַּׁרְנָה} \) in 1 Sam. 6.12 also serves to create the style-switching effect, though with relation to Philistia. The third passage above, occurring in the book of Daniel, constitutes a true Aramaism.

2. Dialectal form: \( \text{טִקְטְלַע} \) (Edomite?) (see below, §13.3)
   - Jer. 49.11

What I stated above about the Philistine dialect is equally true of Edomite: we know very little about either, and once more we have little chance of uncovering the 3rd fem. pl. prefix-conjugation form in this dialect. Its presence in Jer. 49.11, however, may give us a hint, with the prophet employing the Edomite form in the service of addressee-switching.37

13.0. Edomite

Given our scant knowledge of Edomite, it may be useful to exploit the biblical text for additional information. Thus, for example:

1. \( \text{אַלּוּף} \) ‘chief, leader’—Genesis 36 (43x), 1 Chron. 1.51-54 (13x), Exod. 15.15

Given the collocation of the noun \( \text{אַלּוּף} \) ‘chief, leader’ and the land of Edom in biblical texts, one will assume that the word is intrinsic to the Edomite dialect (cf., e.g., English usages such as ‘Arab sheikh’, ‘Japanese shogun’, ‘Russian czar’, etc.). Noteworthy is the three-fold use of \( \text{אַלּוּף} \) ‘chief, leader’ to refer to the leaders of Judah in the book of Zechariah (9.7; 12.5, 6). I would attribute this to the northward advance of Edomite territory during the sixth century BCE, into the domain of southern Judah—so much so, apparently, that the noun once seen as specifically Edomite came to be used for leaders of Judah during this time period.

2. No /a:/ > /o:/ shift, as per the proper nouns (all in Genesis 36):
   - דִישָן / לוֹטָן / עַלוָן / חֶמְדָן / אֶשְבָן / יִתְרָן / כְרָן / בִּלְהָן / זַעֲוָן / עֲקָן / אֲרָן
   - see also Jer. 49.8 דְדָן

3. 3rd fem.pl. prefix-conjugation form: \( \text{תִּבְטָחוּ} \) (see above, §12.2)
   - Jer. 49.11

4. Locative -ɛ (not -ă)
   - 1 Sam. 22.9 נֹבֶה / רָאִיתִי אֶת־בֶּן־יִשַּי
   - 1 Kgs 2.36 וָאָנָה / מִשָּם / לֹא־תֵצֵא

Four times in the Bible, the locative-adverbial ending appears not as הָ, but rather as הִ. In two of these instances, there is a connection to Edom, a point that I consider to be revealing as opposed to coincidental: in 1 Sam. 22.9 the form הָ to Nob’ occurs in the mouth of Do’eg the Edomite; while Ezek. 25.13 הָ to Dedan’ occurs within the prophet’s oracle addressed to Edom. The third passage, in 1 Sam. 21.2, is problematic for this approach, since the form הָ to Nob’ appears within 3rd-person narration without association with Edom; though one might wish to conjecture that contact with the same form in the next chapter led to ‘contamination’ within the Masoretic tradition here. The fourth example presumably constitutes an idiom, with the first form differentiated from the second one, hence הָ.

In addition to the four features presented here, many atypical linguistic elements in the book of Job may be relevant to the discussion as well. Clearly, many of these items also have links to Aramaic and to Arabic. But given the geographical setting of the composition, with characters hail-ing from Uz and Teman, both associated with Edom (Gen. 36.11, 15, 28, 42; though see also Gen. 22.21 regarding Uz), were we to possess greater knowledge of the Edomite dialect, we might be able to identify further Edomite features in the book of Job.

14.0. Ammonite

1. Relative pronoun יָ: Num. 21.30 יָלֶס עַדּ מֵאָי הַמֹּשְׁלִים אֲשֶׁר עַד נֹפַח וַנַּשִּׁים עַד דִּיבּוֹן חֶשְׁבּוֹן אָבַד וַנִּירָם

We know slightly more about Ammonite than we do about Edomite. One grammatical feature known, via Heshbon ostracon 4.6, is the relative pronoun יָ ‘that, which’.38 It is rather striking, accordingly, that in the difficult verse cited above—quoting from the (ancient? Transjordanian?) the balladeers’ (see v. 27)—the relative marker יָ appears with supra linear dot above the reš, one of the ten times in the Torah that such a diacritic appears. Even more remarkable is the fact that this verse appears within the account of the Israelites’ passage through Transjordan (see v. 24 for specific reference to Ammon), and indeed mentions Heshbon explicitly (see also v. 27)! We should conclude, accordingly, that the ‘original’ text read יָ, which a later Hebrew scribe changed to יָ—even as the Masoretic tradition remained aware of this alteration, hence the punctum extraordinarium.39


39. This point was noted long ago by Nahum Slouschz, Thesaurus of Phoenician Inscriptions (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1942), p. 10 (Hebrew), though with reference to the Phoenician relative pronoun יָ. Obviously, this was before the discovery of the same morpheme in Ammonite, which makes the case even stronger.
Support for this conclusion is forthcoming from the Samaritan Pentateuch, which reads אש (understood as ‘fire’ in the Samaritan tradition), and the LXX rendering πῦρ, indicative of a Hebrew Vorlage reading אש.

2. T-stem, without metathesis when sibilant is present
   Jer. 49.3 (to Ammon) הֲחַלְשֵׁנָתְנוּ, ‘roam to and fro’

In SBH the characteristic /t/ of the T-stem metathesizes with the first root letter of the verbal root when said consonant is a sibilant. In the above example, this phonological change does not occur. Two possibilities present themselves: (a) the presence of two more dentals following (viz. double /t/ in the root ת-ש) blocked the metathesis; or (b) in light of the presence of this form within Jeremiah’s oracle to Ammon, the non-metathesis constitutes an Ammonite linguistic trait. Since this same feature occurs in various Aramaic dialects, I incline toward the latter option. Special attention is drawn to the use of this feature in Nabatean Aramaic, thereby creating an isogloss in the Transjordanian region incorporating present-day central and southern Jordan. Eventually, this feature penetrated Hebrew more generally, or at least the postbiblical Hebrew dialect represented by the Judean Desert documents. The evidence is as follows:\footnote{40. For a thorough treatment, see Steven E. Fassberg, ‘t-Stem Verbs without Metathesis in Aramaic and Hebrew Documents from the Judean Desert’, in Language and Nature: Papers Presented to John Huehnergard on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday (ed. Rebecca Hasselbach and Na’ama Pat-El; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2012), pp. 27-37.}

- Sefire I A 29, ‘may the sound of the lyre not be heard’
- Nabatean Aramaic (standard) / Palmyrean Aramaic (standard)
- Yadin 53.3, יָתָשְׁנָה / Yadin 54.6, יָתָשְׁנָה (letters)
- Yadin 54.10, יָתָשְׁכָר / Yadin 54.10, יָתָשְׁכָר (letters)
- Yadin 7.16, יָתָשְׁנָה (contract) / Murabba’at 49.3, יָתָשְׁנָה (fragmentary)

15.0. Non-SBH Lexical Items

I here include two examples of ancient Hebrew lexemes which are limited to certain dialectal contexts, but which do not occur in SBH.

1. רַחַם ‘lass’
   - Ugaritic rḥm ‘woman’ (including as epithet of ‘Anat)
   - Judg. 5.30, רַחֲמָתָיו נֶפֶשׁ פָּרָהוֹ וּלְאָבְרֹמִי, ‘a lass, two lasses, for each man’
   - Mesha Stele 16-17, וְרָחֲמֶת, וַעֲבֹדֶת וְרָחָם ‘men and boys, and women and girls and lasses’
   - Amos 1.11 (Edom), וַיָּשֶׁר רַחֲמֵיהֶם ‘and he destroyed its mercies/wombs/women’
     (all three meanings may be intended)

From the evidence presented above, one will conclude that רַחַם ‘lass’ was not a lexical element of SBH. Note that the noun occurs in Ugaritic,
Israeli Hebrew, Moabite, and in a prophetic oracle to Edom used by a northern prophet—but not in any SBH text.

2. שִׁתי ‘he-goat’
   • Aramaic שִׁתי / Arabic تَيْس
   • Gen. 30.35 (set in Aram) (see above, §3.4)
   • Gen. 32.15 (set in Transjordan)
   • 2 Chron. 17.11 (tribute of Arabs to Jehoshaphat)
   • Prov. 30.31 (sayings of Agur): הַשֵּׁתִי מַחְגִּישׁ אָרָמִי，则 הַשֵּׁתִי אָרָמִי מַחְגִּישׁ
     ‘the saluki of loins, the he-goat, and the king his people with him’

From the passages listed here—which represent the totality of the evidence of this word in the Bible—one will conclude that שִׁתי ‘he-goat’ is another non-SBH lexical trait. The Aramean, Transjordanian and Arabian contexts are rather striking in light of the cognate evidence for this word in both Aramaic and Arabic.

16.0. אַלְקוּם ‘the people’—An Arabism in the Bible

The verse cited immediately above, Prov. 30.31, includes a unique Arabic term in the Bible, namely אַלְקוּם, equivalent to Arabic al-qawm ‘the people’. This verse occurs within the section of Proverbs attributed to Agur of Massa, located in the Syrian Desert.

Two grammatical points may be raised here. First, the definite article of Classical Arabic, namely ‘al, must have been present already during the Iron Age in some Arabian dialect(s), even if we have no evidence for the morpheme outside of Prov. 30.31. Second, assuming that the Masorah has

41. The meaning of זַרְזִיר remains uncertain. I have rendered the word as ‘saluki’ since an animal with outstanding loins is demanded. I have used ‘saluki’ specifically (as opposed to ‘greyhound’ or another species), since this dog is depicted in ancient Egyptian artwork and because it is treasured by the Arabs as a great hunting dog (even though dogs generally are eschewed in the Middle East). I owe this suggestion and observation to Dr. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford). On the Arabian connection, see the next section, §16. (Note that זַרְזִיר connotes a bird of some sort in Rabbinic Hebrew [e.g. t. Ḥul. 4.9]—in Modern Hebrew, specifically ‘starling’—though to my mind an ornithological identification is not suitable for Prov. 30.31, unless a strutting cock is intended, but this seems doubtful.) For more on the ornithological term זַרְזִיר, see Ephraim Nissan, ‘On a Mystery of Talmudic Zoonymy: The Parrot and the Myna? A Reassessment of the Identity of the Two andrafta Bird Species’, JAOS 131 (2011), pp. 445-52 (450-51).

42. Israel Eph'al, The Ancient Arabs (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), pp. 218-19 (and elsewhere in the book, for which see the Index, p. 252).

43. For evidence from the period of late antiquity, see Ahmad Al-Jallad, Ancient Levantine Arabic: A Reconstruction Based on the Earliest Sources and the Modern Dialects (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011), pp. 81, 84, 166, 178, 190, 199, and esp. pp. 316-21.
transmitted the pronunciation קֹם correctly, the Arabian (spoken?) dialect whence qawm was conveyed to the Israelites must have monophthongized the diphthong /aw/ to /u:/—even though the Arabic/Arabian evidence available to us suggests otherwise, with the preservation of both /aw/ and /ay/ reflected in the ancient sources. Hence, one may wish to posit an alternative approach, namely, that the recipient Canaanite dialect (perhaps Phoenician, perhaps a sub-dialect of Israelian Hebrew) may have been one in which the diphthong /aw/ was realized as /u:/.

17.0. Archaic Language in the Book of Ruth

Our final topic returns us to an inner-Hebrew issue, namely, the use of archaic language in the book of Ruth. The following features are noteworthy, for which see the convenient treatment by Robert Holmstedt. Note that the vast majority of them are in the mouths of the people of the older generation (Naomi especially), set in contrast to the younger generation (Ruth especially), who never uses such grammatical features. This linguistic distinction thereby serves a literary-stylistic purpose, to mark the older generation via their distinctive speech, which in turn is brought into sharper focus when set against the speech of the more youthful Ruth.

44. As occurs, e.g., in certain Arabic dialects of Morocco–Algeria–Tunisia, even though this represents only a formal parallel, with no direct relevance to the matter at hand. For the data, see Christophe Pereira, ‘Arabic in the North African Region’, in The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook (ed. Stefan Weninger; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2011), pp. 954-69 (958).


48. For an adumbration of the view expressed here, see Edward F. Campbell, Ruth (AB, 7; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 17, 25, 120.
1. Dual pronouns:49
   1.22 ‘and they (sc. Naomi and Ruth) came to Bethlehem’ (narrator)
   1.8 ‘may YHWH deal kindly with you’ (sc. Ruth and Orpah) (Naomi speaking)
   1.9 ‘may YHWH grant you’ (sc. Ruth and Orpah) (Naomi speaking)
   1.11 ‘are there still to me sons in my inwards, that they would be for you (sc. Ruth and Orpah) as husbands’ (Naomi speaking)
   1.13 ‘don’t, my daughters, for it is more bitter for me than for you’ (sc. Ruth and Orpah) (Naomi speaking)
   1.19 ‘and the two of them (sc. Naomi and Ruth) walked on’ (narrator)
   4.11 ‘the two of whom (sc. Rachel and Leah) built’ (towspeople at the city gate, with elders as witnesses)

2. Dual verb:
   1.8 ‘as you did (sc. Ruth and Orpah) did with the dead and with me’ (Naomi speaking)

3. yaqtul verb (see above, §8.5):
   2.8 ‘do not pass from here’ (Boaz speaking)

4. paragogic nun:50
   2.8 ‘and thus you shall cleave to my young women’ (Boaz speaking)
   2.9 ‘and you shall drink from that which the young men draw’ (Boaz speaking)
   2.21 ‘with my young men you shall cling’ (Boaz, as quoted by Ruth)
   3.4 ‘and he will tell you what to do’ (Naomi speaking)
   3.18 ‘sit, my daughter, until you know’ (Naomi speaking)


5. 2nd fem.sg. suffix-conjugation -tī

3.3 וְיָרַֽדְתְּ הַגֹּ֑רֶן

‘and you shall go down to the threshing-floor’ (Naomi speaking)

3.4 וְשָׁכַֽבְתְּ מַרְגְּלָיו וְגִלִּ֥ית וּבָ֛את

‘and you shall come, and you shall uncover his legs, and you shall lie down’ (Naomi speaking)

* * *

The biblical text abounds with linguistic nuggets ready to be mined. No doubt, future epigraphic discoveries from the region of greater Canaan, including its geographical fringes (northern Arabia, etc.), will only enhance the picture. Hopefully, this survey will serve as the basis for further study and further developments.