

Tawil, Hayim

AN AKKADIAN LEXICAL COMPANION
FOR BIBLICAL HEBREW
*Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents
with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic*



Hayim ben Yosef Tawil

***An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical
Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic
Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic***

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As the oldest attested Semitic language and the only well-attested member of the Eastern branch of the Semitic family tree, Akkadian is clearly important for the comparative study of the Semitic languages. Add to this the fact that Akkadian has a long and diverse literary tradition that has clearly had some influence on biblical literature, and it is evident why Akkadian is important for the study of Biblical Hebrew. The volume under review by Hayim Tawil is focused specifically on the comparison of Biblical Hebrew/Aramaic and Akkadian, using cognates and semantic/idiomatic parallels. Since the study of Akkadian has become quite widespread among biblical scholars—at the expense of Arabic, Ethiopic, and even Aramaic—there will surely be an audience for this book in the field.

Tawil's work is arranged like a Hebrew dictionary, with a supplement for biblical Aramaic. Under each Hebrew (or Aramaic) entry is an Akkadian cognate, followed by some notes (more on these below). At first glance this looks something like an etymological dictionary. Although etymological dictionaries are in short supply for the Semitic languages, the scholar of Hebrew has a decent amount of resources at his or her disposal. For Biblical Hebrew, the popular dictionaries of Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) and Koehler-Baumgartner (*HALOT*) both contain etymologies, though these are sometimes unreliable. BDB is especially weak when it comes to Akkadian, since

Assyriology was still in its early years when that lexicon was published over a hundred years ago. (Ugaritic was yet undiscovered when its authors wrote.) The comprehensive Hebrew-Hebrew dictionary of Even-Shoshan, covering all periods of Hebrew, also contains (very brief) etymological notes. The dedicated etymological dictionary of Ernest Klein (*A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English*) is generally pretty good and probably the most useful reference tool for Hebrew etymologies, though (as with Even-Shoshan's dictionary) comparative data is most often limited to Arabic, Akkadian, and Ugaritic.

For Akkadian, the only real resource for etymologies is W. von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch (AHw)*. The most comprehensive lexicon of Akkadian, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, includes no etymological information whatsoever, nor do other, smaller dictionaries of Akkadian. When searching for an Akkadian root, the Hebrew resources mentioned above can often be helpful, as can Wolf Leslau's *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, which is the closest thing there is to a comparative Semitic dictionary. The *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques*, edited by David Cohen et al., can also be useful, though to date it only covers from ' to ḥ (using the order of the Hebrew alphabet).

Tawil's book can certainly be used with profit for the cognates it provides, though it is not intended as an etymological dictionary. The lack of other Semitic cognates and any reference to Proto-Semitic make this clear. Still, finding Akkadian cognates to Hebrew words will certainly be a popular use for this volume, so I was curious to see how it compared in this capacity to some of the reference works mentioned above. I chose ten Hebrew entries at random from Tawil and checked those same Hebrew lexemes in BDB, *HALOT*, and Klein. Of the ten words that I checked (פּלֵג, נֹאֵד, חִבּוּרָה, זֶרֶק, דֶּשֶׂא, דְּרֹדֶר, צִמֵּד, שֹׁנָה, רִכָּב, תִּקֵּן), *HALOT* and Klein provided Akkadian cognates for nine out of the ten, while BDB had cognates for eight. Only the rare word דְּרֹדֶר 'thistle' was lacking a cognate in all three, while חִבּוּרָה 'wound, blow' was also lacking a cognate in BDB.

Tawil also includes an Akkadian index (with about 1,300 words), meaning that it can also be used to find Hebrew cognates to some Akkadian words. Therefore I also checked the ten corresponding Akkadian cognates in *AHw*. I found etymological information for all ten: five of the words had a note about the Semitic root (or simply an indication that the root was common Semitic), and five gave an explicit Hebrew cognate.

The real strength in Tawil's lexicon is in the citations it provides and the contextual and semantic notes that accompany each entry. These show places in which Hebrew and Akkadian cognates are used in similar contexts or share a special semantic development or idiomatic usage. For example, if we look up the root יָתַר in BDB, *HALOT*, or Klein's dictionary, we find in all three places the Akkadian cognate verb (*w*)*atāru*, with no

further comment. Both roots have the same general meaning 'be in excess'. In the Bible, we find once the expression שפת יתר (Prov 17:7), which is usually taken to mean something like 'fine speech' or 'eloquent speech'. In his entry for the noun יְתָר (152), Tawil, following a 1976 article by N. Waldman, notes that the cognate Akkadian noun (*w*)*atartu* can have the meaning 'falsehood' (though I think that 'exaggeration' is a more precise translation), providing a nice parallel, then, with the phrase שפת שקר 'lying speech' in the second half of this verse. If Waldman and Tawil are correct, then this is a semantic development common to Hebrew and Akkadian ('excess' → 'exaggeration, falsehood'), presumably one that took place already at some proto-Semitic stage. So an Akkadian cognate is not given by Tawil just for the sake of etymology, but rather to help illuminate the nuance of meaning or idiomatic usages in the Hebrew text.

Another example can be found in the entry for the root כבד 'be heavy' (153). Here we learn that both Hebrew and Akkadian use this root in conjunction with the nouns 'ear' and 'eye' to indicate, respectively, poor hearing and poor eyesight, as in עיני ישראל כבדו 'Israel's eyes were dim' (Gen 48:10). Parallel idioms could undoubtedly be found in other languages around the world, but here there is still a good chance these idioms are common Semitic. Data from other Semitic languages would certainly strengthen the case.

Sometimes a semantic parallel from Akkadian may be accepted a little too readily. For example, the Akkadian word *daddaru* is described in one Akkadian text as having a bad stench. Tawil, therefore, assumes that the Hebrew cognate דרדר must be understood as 'ill-smelling plant' in Hos 10:8. However, there is no reason to think that the context warrants this meaning in the fixed expression קוץ ודרדר, which occurs also in Gen 3:18. It also seems likely that the use of the expression in Hosea is an intentional echoing of its use in Genesis, where the meaning 'ill-smelling plant' certainly does not fit.

Among the words included in Tawil's lexicon, alongside true cognates, are loanwords from Akkadian into Hebrew, as well as loans from West Semitic into Akkadian. This is appreciated, since it could be interesting to see if a borrowing is used differently than in the source language. Tawil usually indicates that a word is a borrowing in his notes (cf. the entries for אגרת, סריס, or תלמיד) but occasionally fails to note this fact (e.g., שוק 'street'). Some borrowings (or alleged borrowings) are omitted completely (e.g., סם 'incense').

It is a bit disappointing that, for the sake of thoroughness, Tawil does not include words with Akkadian cognates or sources from postbiblical Hebrew, for example, the root זוז

‘move’ (cognate with Akkadian *izuzzum*)¹ or the noun אַדְרִיכַל/אַרְדִּיכַל ‘architect, artisan’ (< Akkadian *ar[a]d ekall-*). However, such words are few, and Tawil’s aims are explicitly toward biblical studies, not the history of the Hebrew language.

Following the entries and notes, Tawil sometimes points out relevant work in the secondary literature, which is a very helpful feature. These references are usually quite clear, though occasionally a note is ambiguous. For example, at the end of the entry for סַפַּד (265), there is a reference to “Gruber, 449–55,” but there are two possible matches in the bibliography.

At the end of the lexicon, before the index, Tawil provides a very brief (six-page) overview of the history and structure of Akkadian. His overview of Akkadian dialects is quite useful, and I was pleased to see in his chart of consonant correspondences (468) that Tawil has followed the latest scholarship, for example, reconstructing Proto-Semitic *s in place of more traditional *š. I disagree, however, with Tawil’s equation of the Akkadian relative *ša* and Hebrew relative -שׁ (470), which despite their similar appearance are almost certainly unrelated. Akkadian *ša* is cognate with the rare biblical Hebrew relative הַזֶּה/זֶה, while -שׁ is a reduced form of אֲשֶׁר.² I know that many will side with Tawil on this contentious issue.

Unfortunately, parts of the book are riddled with minor typographical errors. I happened to look at the bibliography first and within five minutes had found almost twenty errors (misspelled and wrong names, missing diacritics, wrong years, and the like). I mention this not to find fault with this work, which has great value. I only mean to point out that after seeing the errors in the bibliography, I was a bit wary of trusting the Akkadian and Hebrew forms in the lexicon, where a missing macron or dot beneath a letter can make a difference. Of course, it is easy to double-check these forms in other dictionaries, but one does want to have confidence in the lexicographer’s eye for detail.

In sum, Tawil’s lexicon is a very useful tool for finding Akkadian cognates to biblical Hebrew words, as well as the reverse, and is a bit more thorough and up-to-date in scholarship than existing biblical Hebrew dictionaries. The semantic parallels listed provide an excellent resource for illuminating the nuances of the biblical text. The book can also be easily used by those with little or no knowledge of Akkadian.

1. See John Huehnergard, “*izuzzum* and *itūlum*,” in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen* (ed. Tzvi Abusch; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 161–85.

2. See John Huehnergard, “On the Etymology of the Hebrew Relative *šē-*,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 103–25.