THE ETYMOLOGIES OF HEBREW ʾăšer AND šeC-*

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE etymologies of the Hebrew relative words were the object of considerable study in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, as were the Akkadian *ša* and Phoenician *ʾš*.[1] With the publication of Bergsträsser's "Das hebräische Präfix שׁ" in 1909, however, the Hebrew part of the discussion quieted considerably.[2] That a few issues linger is illustrated by the recent appearance of two articles addressing the etymology of Hebrew *ʾăšer* and *šeC-*.[3] Specifically, questions remain about the apparent linguistic novelty of *ʾăšer*: why were Hebrew and a few Canaanite sister-dialects (Moabite and Edomite) innovative

[1] I will cite the relevant literature on Hebrew at a later point. For the other Semitic relatives, see in particular S. Langdon, "The Etymology of the Babylonian Relative Pronoun," *AJSL* 31 (1915): 271–81; O. E. Ravn, *The So-Called Relative Clauses in Accadian or the Accadian Particle ša* (Copenhagen, 1941); S. Gevirtz, "On the Etymology of the Phoenician Particle אשׁ," *JNES* 16 (1957): 124–27; H.-S. Schuster, "Der Relativsatz im Phönizischen und Punischen," in H. G. Güterbock and T. Jacobsen, eds., *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 431–48; F. A. Pennacchietti, *Studi sui pronomi determinativi semitici* (Naples, 1968); K. Aartun, *Die Partikeln des Ugaritischen, 1. Teil: Adverbien, Verneinungspartikeln, Bekräftigungspartikeln, Hervorhebungspartikeln*, AOAT 21/1 (Kevelaer, 1974) and *Die Partikeln des Ugaritischen, 2. Teil: Präpositionen, Konjunktionen*, AOAT 21/2 (Kevelaer,

1978); M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, "Ugaritisch ʾTR, AṮR, AṮRYT und AṮRT," *UF* 16 (1984): 57–62; G. Garbini, "Il relativo š in Fenicio e in Ebraico," in C. Robin, ed., *Mélanges linguistiques offerts à Maxime Rodinson* (Paris 1985), pp. 185–99; G. Deutscher, "The Rise and Fall of a Rogue Relative Construction," *Studies in Language* 25 (2001): 405–22 and "The Akkadian Relative Clauses in Cross-Linguistic Perspective," *ZA* 92 (2002): 86–105; A. Gai, "The Relationship between the Relative Clauses of Akkadian and Old Akkadian," *RA* 96 (2002): 103–8.

[2] G. Bergsträsser, "Das hebräische Präfix שׁ," *ZAW* 29 (1909): 40–56. After Bergsträsser's article we find few studies of *ʾăšer* or *šeC-*: P. Joüon, "Études de philologie sémitique (suite)," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 6 (1913): 121–46; C. Gaenssle, *The Hebrew Particle אשׁר* (Chicago, 1915); I. Eitan, "Hebrew and Semitic Particles: Comparative Studies in Semitic Philology," *AJSL* 44 (1928): 177–205; H. Niehr, "Zur Etymologie und Bedeutung von ʾšr I," *UF* 17 (1986): 231–35. I am grateful to John Huehnergard for bringing the 1913 Joüon reference to my attention.

[3] F. Israel, "Il pronome relativo nell'area Cananaica," in J. Lentin and A. Lonnet, eds., *Mélanges David Cohen: études sur le langage, les langues, les dialectes, les littératures, offertes par ses élèves, ses collègues, ses amis, présentées à l'occasion de son quatre-vingtième anniversaire* (Paris, 2003), pp. 31–46; J. Huehnergard, "On the Etymology of the Hebrew Relative šɛ-," in S. E. Fassberg and A. Hurvitz, eds., *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (Jerusalem and Winona Lake, Indiana, 2006), pp. 103–25. The *C* in *šeC-* indicates that with all nonguttural consonants, the consonant immediately following the relative word is geminated.

in using *ʾăšer* as a relative word and not retaining any hint of nominal semantics?[4] Also, is it plausible that Hebrew has *three* relative words, *ʾăšer*, *šeC-*, and *ze/zû/zô*, particularly when the typical derivation of the last two is from the same Proto-Semitic determinative-relative *$\underline{d}\bar{u}/\underline{t}\bar{u}$? In this article I will briefly review the data and history of the scholarship on the Hebrew relative words and then evaluate the proposals.

II. Cognate Evidence for Hebrew *ʾăšer*

Starting with the Hebrew data that provide the most linguistic information (in this case, the Tiberian Masoretic tradition provides the most phonological information, since the earlier nonbiblical texts lack vocalization), it is important to note that the word *ʾăšer* never appears in free form in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the medieval vocalization of the word suggests that it was a phonological clitic.[5] Based on comparison with other forms, this vocalization suggests that if Hebrew *ʾăšer* had had a free form, it would have been either **ʾašir* or **ʾašar*, with the former much more common in Hebrew, while the latter is favored by the comparative Semitic evidence. The CaCaC underlying word pattern is typical as the base for nouns, although no such noun exists with the discontinuous root [ʾ-š-r]. Two Hebrew nouns of this root based on different nominal patterns are attested, though, **ʾāšur* (CaCuC) and **ʾaššur* (CaCCuC),[6] both meaning 'step, footstep,' as are verbs with the meaning 'to stride'. The connection between the function word *ʾăšer* and the nominal and verbal derivations from the root [ʾ-š-r] might be coincidental (many examples of such differing root-based homophony exist in Hebrew), but it is also quite plausible given the likely etymology of *ʾăšer*.

The Semitic cognates are well attested.[7] In East Semitic, Akkadian provides us with a noun *ašru(m)* (clitic form: *ašar*) 'place, site, region'.[8] In West Semitic there are a number

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[4] The oft-repeated suggestion (see, among many others, B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990], p. 332, n. 4) that Judg. 5:27 might reflect the original nominal status of *ʾăšer* is unwarranted; there is nothing in *baʾăšer kāraʿ šām nāpal šādûd* that would necessitate a nominal analysis for *ʾăšer*. Rather, this phrase presents a straightforward example of a null-headed relative, 'in (the place) that he went down, there he fell, destroyed'.

[5] By all six criteria listed in A. M. Zwicky and G. K. Pullum ("Cliticization vs. Inflection: English *nʾt*," *Language* 59 [1983]: 502–13) for distinguishing clitics from affixes, the Hebrew word *ʾăšer* is clearly a clitic, phonologically and prosodically, as are many other Hebrew function words, such as the article *haC-*; the basic conjunction *wə-* 'and'; prepositions such as *bə-* 'in', *kə-* 'as', *lə-* 'to'; and the nominalizer *šeC-*.

[6] Neither noun is attested in free form, hence the *-marking.

[7] For general discussions, see E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford, 1910), p. 444, n. 1; Gaenssle, *Hebrew Particle*, pp. 25–29; H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* (Hil-

desheim, 1922), p. 264; D. Cohen, *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques ou attestées dans les langues sémitiques*, vol. 2, *ʾTN - GLGL* (Paris, 1976), p. 37; S. Moscati et al., *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology* (Wiesbaden, 1980), p. 113; A. Murtonen, *Hebrew in Its West Semitic Setting: A Comparative Survey of Non-Masoretic Hebrew Dialects and Traditions* (Leiden, 1989), p. 103; Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 332, n. 2; P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka (Rome, 1993), p. 119, n. 2; E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Leuven, 1997), pp. 324–26, 522; L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, 1994–2000), p. 98; Israel, "Il pronome relativo" and Huehnergard, "Etymology."

[8] *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago, 1956–), vol. A/2, pp. 456–60; W. von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik* (Rome, 1952 and 1969), pp. 170, 231, and *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 82–83; J. A. Black, A. George, and N. Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden, 2002), p. 29.

of languages that contain cognates, such as Ugaritic ʾaṯr as a noun 'place'[9] and perhaps in verbal form 'to march';[10] Old Aramaic ʾšr, Imperial Aramaic ʾtr, Biblical Aramaic and Syriac ʾătar, all nouns denoting some variation of 'place';[11] Deir ʿAllā ʾšr 'place';[12] Arabic ʾiṯr, ʾaṯar 'mark, footprint, track', ʾṯr 'to begin, choose; to follow';[13] and Geʿez ʾašar 'trace, footprint, path, track' and 'to follow, look for tracks'.[14]

Based on the strength of the cognate attestation, it is now taken as fact that Hebrew ʾăšer has no etymological relationship with the Proto-Semitic determinative-relative (the position that the two words were etymologically related was advocated in the mid-nineteenth century before the comparative evidence became available). The consensus is that ʾăšer derives from a common Semitic verbal root [*ʾ-ṯ-r] 'to stride, march' and a noun *ʾaṯar with a semantic range of 'step, trace, footprint'. In light of the wide geographic and temporal distribution of this Semitic word, what distinguishes the Hebrew reflex of Proto-Semitic *ʾaṯar is that none of the Hebrew attestations are nominal; that is, Hebrew ʾăšer is always used as a nominalizing function word in the extant data, primarily to introduce relative clauses. Thus Hebrew is sometimes considered innovative in its use of *ʾaṯar,[15] and we have to evaluate whether this is substantiated by the data. Consider first that in addition to using ašru(m)/ašar as a noun 'place', Akkadian also at some point began to use the bound form ašar to introduce relative clauses, at first primarily with locative semantics, as in (1), and then with nonlocative semantics, as in (2).[16]

[9] C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Grammar, Texts in Transliteration, Cuneiform Selections, Glossary, Indices* (Rome, 1965), p. 369; S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 180, D. Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 84, 198; J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (Münster, 2000), pp. 798, 905.

[10] Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, p. 369; Sivan, *Grammar of the Ugaritic Language*, p. 84; Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, p. 547.

[11] R. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus*, ed. J. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1903), s.v.; F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass., 1906 and 1979), s.v.; C.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'Ouest* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 27–28; S. Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik, mit Bibliographie, Chrestomathie u. Glossar* (Leipzig, 1975), p. 528; J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 125–29.

[12] See line 11 in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (*Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla* [Leiden, 1976], p. 174 and comment on p. 285). Note that J. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā* (Chico, California, 1984), pp. 25, 100, lists the word in question in line 9. Although the translations and comments in these works are ambiguous at best, the likeliest analysis of the item b*ʾšr is as a prepositional phrase with nominal ʾšr 'place' (cognate with Aramaic ʾtr) followed by an unmarked relative, i.e., 'On the site (where) the stick would lead the ewes, hares are eating grass' (E. Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II* [Leuven, 1994], p. 133; cf. A. Lemaire, "Fragments from the Book of Balaam Found at Deir Alla: Text Foretells Cosmic Disaster," *BAR* 11/5 [1985]: 26–39; M. Weippert, "The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā and the Study of the Old Testament," in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAlla Reevaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21–24 August 1989* [Leiden, 1991], pp. 151–84; M. Djikstra, "Is Balaam Also among the Prophets?" *JBL* 114 [1995]: 43–64); Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary*, p. 126).

[13] E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 vols. (London, 1863), vol. 1, pp. 18–19.

[14] A. Dillman, *Lexicon Linguae Æthiopicae cum indice latino* (Leipzig, 1867), cols. 739–40; W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez (Classical Ethiopic): Geʿez-English/English-Geʿez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots* (Wiesbaden, 1987), p. 45.

[15] See, for example, Huehnergard, "Etymology," p. 124.

[16] While both of the examples cited above are null-head (i.e., "headless" or "independent") relative clauses (so also Huehnergard, "Etymology," p. 107, n. 31), they illustrate the locative and nonlocative semantics of ašar nonetheless. The entry under ašar in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (vol. A/2, pp. 413–16) as well as the entries under ašru(m) in von Soden (*Handwörterbuch*, vol. 1, pp. 82–83) and Black, George, and Postgate (*Concise Dictionary*, p. 29) suggest that ašru(m) had added the relative function in the earliest attested stages, i.e., Old Akkadian. Additionally, the citations in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* entries for

(1) Old Assyrian *ašar* relative (locative): BIN 4 5:26 (*CAD* A/2:413)

ašar	*ṭuppū*	*ibaššiūni*	*tertaka*	*lillikamma*
REL.LOC	tablets	be(3MP DUR)	instruction-your	go(2MP PREC)

let your instruction go (as to) where [≈ the *place* that] the tablets are available

(2) Old Assyrian *ašar* relative (nonlocative): CCT 3 30:25 (*CAD* A/2:413)

ašar	*damquni*	*lu*	*nīpuš*
REL	good	MOD	do(1 CP PRET)

let us verily do what [≈ the *thing* that] is good

In light of the numerous glosses provided for *ašar* by the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* ('as soon as', 'while', 'if ', 'in case', 'with', 'before', 'in the presence of ', 'from', and 'instead of '),[17] as well as the fact that some contexts unambiguously demonstrate that *ašar* is used following nonlocative heads, one wonders if many of the other locative-relative examples listed are a bit forced, thrust into the Procrustean bed defined by the nominal etymology of *ašar*. It is also relevant that Aramaic and Ugaritic attest to the non-nominal use of **ʾaṯar*, as a preposition 'after, behind'.[18]

(3) Biblical Aramaic **ʾaṯar*: Dan. 7.7.

bāʾtar	*dənâ*	*ḥāzê*	*hăwêt*	*bəhezwê*	*lêlyāʾ*	*waʾărû*
in-place.of	this	see(MS PTCP)	be(1CS PERF)	in-visions.of	night	and-behold
ḥêwâ	*rəbîʿāyâ*					
creature	fourth					

after this I saw in night visions—and behold—a fourth creature

(4) Ugaritic **ʾaṯar*: *KTU*[2] 1.5 VI 23–25

bʿl	*mt*	*my*	*lim*	*bn*	*dgn*	*my*
Baal.NOM	dead(3MS PERF)	WH	people.NOM	son.NOM	Dagan.GEN	WH
hmlt	*aṯr*	*bʿl*	*ard*		*barṣ*	
multitudes.NOM	after	Baal.GEN	descend(1 CS IMPF)		in-earth	

Baal is dead, what of the people? The Son of Dagan (is dead), what of the multitudes? *After Baal* I will descend into the earth.

Both Aramaic and Ugaritic reflect the use of this noun, 'place', as a preposition meaning 'after',[19] and, if the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* is to be followed, Akkadian already

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ašar and *ašru(m)* illustrate the very fine line between the locative noun 'place' followed by an unmarked relative, for example, 'the place (that/where)' and its use as a locative relative, 'where'. Despite standard assertions to the contrary (which go back at least as far as R. Kraetzschmar, "The Origin of the Notae Relationis in Hebrew," *Hebraica* 6 [1890]: 296–302), a number of the entries could easily be analyzed as (null-head) relative clauses, without any locative semantics directly associated with the item *ašru(m)*.

[17] *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. A/2, pp. 413–16 s.v. *ašar*; vol. A/2, pp. 456–60 s.v. *ašru(m)*.

[18] Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary*, p. 127; Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, §19.424 reads at least one case of Ugaritic *aṯr* as a relative. This has since been challenged by most scholars; see the discussions in A. F. Rainey, "Observations on Ugaritic Grammar," *UF* 3 (1971): 160–62; Aartun, *Partikeln 1*, p. 29, and *Partikeln 2*, p. 81; D. Pardee, "A Further Note on *PRU V*, No. 60," *UF* 13 (1981): 156; and Dietrich and Loretz, "ʾTR, AṮR, AṮRYT und AṮRT."

[19] If there is a diachronic element to the relationship of **aṯar* 'place' and 'after' in Aramaic, the earliest Aramaic occurrences of the preposition *b-* 'in, with'

witnessed in the second millennium the use of *ʾaṭar as a multifaceted function word. The semantic shifts witnessed in Akkadian (of which Hebrew ʾăšer may be a result), Ugaritic, and Aramaic all appear to be exemplary cases of "grammaticalization."[20] Specifically, the Akkadian change from a noun 'place' → locative relative → relative[21] is easy to conceptualize and is possibly paralleled by Greek *pou*, German *wo*, Persian *kujā*, and Chinese *só*.[22] Unfortunately the data do not allow us to reconstruct a sure diachronic path of change between the lexical and functional uses of *ʾaṭar in Akkadian, or in Ugaritic and Aramaic, and since the discernible phonetic changes involved (i.e., the use of the bound form for Akkadian *ašar* and the quiescence of the /ʾ/ in the Aramaic form) reflect regular sound changes in these languages, we cannot with confidence invoke the process of grammaticalization[23] as it is now commonly understood, either within the specific languages in question or in Semitic as a whole.

If we should be tentative in describing what happens with *ʾaṭar in languages that exhibit both nominal and functional uses, how much more for Hebrew, in which *ʾaṭar serves only as a function word. We simply lack the necessary data to complete the reconstruction, and if we were to have adequate second-millennium data from Akkadian, Aramaic, and Ugaritic to call the story of Semitic *ʾaṭar a case of grammaticalization,[24] we would still need to

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followed by *ʾaṭar might provide the link relating to the reanalysis and semantic bleaching, for example, *mlk zy* [*ysq wymlk*] *bʾšrh* 'a king who will come up and rule *in his place* [→ *after him*]' (H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Band 1, *Texte* [Wiesbaden, 1966], p. 222B, 2–3); cf. Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary*, p. 127. Similarly, with reference to the Ugaritic use of *ʾaṭr* Pardee states, "If these readings are correct, it becomes clear that *ʾaṭr* is not functioning as a relative pronoun, though the syntactic function of the word here is the very one that led to its becoming a relative pronoun (accusative of respect off a noun meaning 'place' = 'in whatever place' → 'wherever' → 'which'" ("A Further Note," p. 156).

[20] For definition and discussion of grammaticalization, see n. 48 below.

[21] See B. Heine and T. Kuteva, *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (New York, 2002). T. Givón ("The Evolution of Dependent Clause Morpho-syntax in Biblical Hebrew," in E. C. Traugott and B. Heine, eds., *Approaches to Grammaticalization* [Amsterdam, 1991], pp. 257–310) presents cross-linguistic data from Lhasa Tibetan, Hewa (a Papau-New Guinean language), and Krio (an English-based Creole) to demonstrate that the development from a noun 'step' or 'place' to a relative word is attested elsewhere. Unfortunately none of the data is as conclusive as he implies. Krio apparently uses a *wh*-word relativization strategy (which does not parallel Hebrew ʾăšer at all). The Hewa data he supplies indicate that this language forms relatives by using a copy of the head noun; this implies that *any* item may function as the "relative word," and therefore the locative example he cites is in no way analogous to Hebrew ʾăšer. Finally, the Lhasa Tibetan evidence, which suggests that this language has employed items that are also noun-class determinatives as relative words,

is inconclusive.

[22] Kraetzschmar, "Origin of the Notae Relationis," p. 298; Joüon, "Études," pp. 128–33; Israel, "Il pronome relativo," pp. 342–43. Note that, unlike the other items, Persian *kujā* is a complex item, formed from the combination of the relative *kū* and the nominal *gāh* 'place' (see H. S. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi*, vol. 2 [Wiesbaden, 1974], p. 119; D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* [London, 1971], p. 52).

[23] Following the critique of grammaticalization in B. D. Joseph, "Rescuing Traditional (Historical) Linguistics from Grammaticalization 'Theory'," in O. Fischer, M. Norde, and H. Perridon, eds., *Up and Down the Cline—The Nature of Grammaticalization* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 45–71.

[24] The Canaanite of the El Amarna tablets reflects a *terminus a quo* for the use of *ʾaṭar as a relative word. A. F. Rainey asserts that the function of *ašar* is "not a true relative" and that however the Hebrew relative developed "it was hardly under the influence of EA Akkadian!" (*Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by the Scribes from Canaan*, vol. 3 [Leiden, 1996], pp. 70–71); this unsubstantiated conviction aside, the syntax of many of the examples mirrors relative clause structure and thus should be analyzed as relatives. It is tempting to suggest that El Amarna Canaanite is the missing "grammaticalization" link, showing us a transition point squarely between the early second-millennium situation, represented by Old Babylonian and Old Assyrian in which *ašru(m)/ašar* is used both as a noun and a relative word, and later Hebrew usage, when ʾăšer has lost its nominal lexical entry and retained only its relative function. But once again, without any demonstrable nominal use in Hebrew, we are left without a sure diachronic path; in other words, given the gap between

account for the Hebrew situation, that *'ăšer* witnesses only the nominalizer use of **'aṯar*. Thus grammaticalization is an inappropriate description for the etymology of *'ăšer* regardless of the processes that occurred before Hebrew. This does not preclude, however, the grammaticalization of *'ăšer within* Hebrew. I shall return to this question below, the answer to which carries implications for the etymology of Hebrew *šeC-*. First, let us consider the possible cognate evidence for *šeC-*, assuming for the moment the current consensus that it has no relation to *'ăšer*.

III. Cognate Evidence for Hebrew *šeC-*

Since Bergsträsser's "Das hebräische Präfix ש," the etymology of *šeC-* from the Akkadian relative *ša* has rarely been questioned.[25] The Akkadian item itself is an oddity, since, based on the evidence that Eblaite adds to the discussion of the Semitic sibilants, it can only represent the *ad hoc* devoicing of the Proto-Semitic determinative-relative **dū/tū*.[26] Even so, it seems to make its way (whether by inheritance or borrowing is difficult to discern) into not only Hebrew but also a few other Northwest Semitic contexts. There is evidence of a relative *š* in the following contexts: the alphabetic Cuneiform text from Tanaach,[27] an Ammonite amulet/seal ca. 600 B.C.E.,[28] and a Philistine text.[29] Additionally, the determinative pronoun/genitive marker in Punic and few late colonial Phoenician inscriptions is often considered to be cognate,[30] and it is possible that the relative *'š* in Phoenician (Standard through late Neo-Punic)[31] and Ammonite[32] are cognate.[33]

the dual use of *'ăšer* in pre-Hebrew Semitic and the singular use of *'ăšer* in Hebrew, it is possible that Hebrew and Canaanite actually inherited the nominalizing use directly from Akkadian rather than as the end-product of a grammaticalization process that started in East Semitic and made its way through Northwest Semitic.

[25] See n. 47 below.

[26] See A. Faber, "Semitic Sibilants in an Afro-Asiatic Context," *JSS* 29 (1984): 189–224; P. Fronzaroli, "Le pronom déterminatif-relatif à Ebla," *MARI* 5 (1987): 267–74; Huehnergard, "Etymology."

[27] M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU: second, enlarged edition)* (Münster, 1995), 4.767. See F. M. Cross for the view that the text contains a relative: *kkb' lp'm / kpr š yḥtk l / dw* "Kôkaba to Pu'm/The fee fixed [lit. 'which is/ was set or fixed'; n. 24] (has been) remitted to / him" ("The Canaanite Cuneiform Tablet from Tanaach," *BASOR* 190 [1968]: 44–45). Cf. D. R. Hillers, "An Alphabetic Cuneiform Tablet from Tanaach," *BASOR* 173 (1964): 45–50; Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, pp. 76–77; Huehnergard, "Etymology," p. 106, n. 19.

[28] K. P. Jackson, *The Ammonite Language of the Iron Age* (Chico, California, 1983), pp. 77–80; A. E. Aufrecht, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions* (Lewiston, New York, 1989), pp. 145–48, no. 56.

[29] F. M. Cross, "The Epigraphic Record: A Philistine Ostracon from Ashkelon," *BAR* 22/1 (1996): 64–65.

[30] J. Friedrich and W. Röllig, *Phönizisch-Punische Grammatik: 3. Auflage, neu bearbeitet von M. G.*

Amadasi Guzzo unter Mitarbeit von W. R. Mayer (Rome, 1999), pp. 72–73; C. R. Krahmalkov, *A Phoenician-Punic Grammar* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 93–95; Huehnergard, "Etymology," pp. 105–6.

[31] Jean and Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 285–86; Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *Dictionary*, pp. 1089–94; C. R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (Leuven, 2000), pp. 77–80 and *Grammar*, pp. 93–95.

[32] Jackson, *The Ammonite Language*, pp. 51–52; Aufrecht, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, pp. 214–19, no. 80. One occurrence of *'š* also exists in the recently discovered Khirbet el-Mudeiyineh inscription discussed in A. F. Rainey, "The New Inscription from Khirbet el-Mudeiyineh," *IEJ* 52 (2002): 81–86; Rainey argues that the text is actually written in "Israelite/ Phoenician" (p. 82), but the context as well as the language suggest that the language is either Moabite or Ammonite (I am grateful to Brian Peckham and Annlee Dolan for discussing this text with me). Also it is possible that the Deir ʿAllā 'Balaam' text, whatever its linguistic identity, contains an example of relative *'š* (Hackett, *The Balaam Text*, pp. 31, 101; Huehnergard, "Etymology," p. 3), but for a rebuttal of the relative reading for the *'š* in this text, see W. R. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine, 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Philadelphia, 1985), p. 85.

[33] The relationship between *š* and *'š* in these Northwest Semitic languages is far from clear, and the two may bear only a superficial similarity and have no etymological connection; see Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, 1936), p. 55;

Two final comments are necessary before proceeding to consider the various syntheses. First, if the Phoenician and Ammonite relative ʾš are cognate to the Akkadian relative ša and do not represent the grammaticalization of the lexeme ʾš 'man' into a relative, we would have to suppose that the initial /ʾ/ is prothetic.[34] Second, we must account in some way for the gemination that occurs when the clitic šeC- is attached to its host, for example, šeC + šām 'there' → šeššām 'which there' (Ps. 122:4). Although we have little to go on in Hebrew, since šeC- does not have a free form, Akkadian ša may hold the answer, particularly the Old Akkadian declined forms. While the masculine singular forms are typically normalized with short vowels (šu NOM, ši GEN, ša ACC), the attested feminine singular (šātu NOM, šāti GEN) and common plural (šūt GEN) forms have long vowels. This variation might be explained by the lag/progressive assimilation of the glottal plosive /ʾ/, the alveolar lateral approximant /l/, or the alveolar nasal /n/ to the preceding vowel, for example, *šaʾtu/*šaltu/ *šantu → šātu.[35] The masculine forms with the short vowels could then be explained by either a misunderstanding of the morphophonology of ša or the shortening of the long vowel when the word is cliticized (i.e., $C\bar{v} \rightarrow Cv/\_\#$, where # is the clitic word boundary).[36]

The weakness of the account that I have sketched to this point is the assumption that šeC- is to be related to Akkadian ša. On the one hand, in the absence of any other apparent cognate, it seems not only feasible but likely that Akkadian ša is the source for Hebrew šeC-. On the other hand, as Huehnergard notes, the presence of two relatives in Hebrew, both of which must be traced back to the single Proto-Semitic determinative-relative *ḏū/ṯū, is uneconomical, at least at the comparative Semitics level.[37] Since the etymology of the z-series Hebrew relatives from *ḏū/ṯū is uncontroversial in that it is precisely what we expect in West Semitic,[38] according to Huehnergard it must be the etymology of šeC- that is open to question. We will now consider the proposals that have been put forward to account for the etymology of these two relative words in order to make sense of the morphology, distribution, and situation within the comparative Semitic context.

Gevirtz, "The Phoenician Particle אש"; Schuster, "Der Relativsatz"; Friedrich and Röllig, Grammatik, p. 73; Krahmalkov, Grammar, p. 94. Krahmalkov asserts that the occurrences of the Phoenician item š- are not as a relative word, but a "determinative pronoun, serving primarily to express an indirect genitive relationship"; however, he does suggest that this item and Hebrew šeC- are related.

[34] See Gevirtz, "The Phoenician Particle אש."

[35] See von Soden, Grundriss, pp. 24–35 on the assimilation in Akkadian, and pp. 47–48 on the Old Akkadian forms of the determinative-relative; see also R. Hasselbach, Sargonic Akkadian: A Historical and Comparative Study of the Syllabic Texts (Wiesbaden, 2005), pp. 161–64. I am grateful to Douglas Frayne for suggesting this possibility.

[36] Although ša is often not represented as a proclitic in the writing conventions of Akkadian or in normalization, its features (for example, a function word that is "in construct"; von Soden, Grundriss, p. 47) make its clitic status certain.

[37] "Etymology," pp. 118–19.

[38] See, in general, Pennacchietti, Studi; also Moscati, Comparative Grammar, pp. 113–14; Lipiński, Semitic Languages, pp. 324–27. For representative Semitic cognates, see Ugaritic ḏ (Tropper, Ugaritische Grammatik, pp. 234–38); Byblian Phoenician z (Friedrich and Rölling, Grammatik, p. 209; Krahmalkov, Grammar, pp. 93–94); Edomite zy (S. Aḥituv, "An Edomite Ostracon," in Y. Avishur and R. Deutsch, eds., Michael: Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies in Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer [Tel-Aviv and Jaffa, 1999], pp. 33–37); Old Aramaic z and zy, Imperial Aramaic zy and dy, and Biblical Aramaic dî (Segert, Altaramäische Grammatik, p. 177; V. Hug, Altaramäische Grammatik der Texte des 7. und 6. Jh.s v. Chr. [Heidelberg, 1993], pp. 135–36); Classical Arabic ʾallaḏī and ḏū (W. Wright, A Grammar of the Arabic Language, 3d ed. [Cambridge, 1962], pp. 270–73; cf. W. Fischer, Grammatik des Klassischen Arabisch, 3. verbesserte Auflage [1972; Wiesbaden, 2002], pp. 130–31); and Geʿez za (A. Dillman, Ethiopic Grammar, Second edition enlarged and improved (1899) by Carl Bezold [London, 1907], p. 119; T. O. Lambdin, Introduction to Classical Ethiopic [Geʿez] [Missoula, Montana, 1978], p. 106; J. Tropper, Altäthiopisch: Grammatik des Geʿez mit Übungstexten und Glossar [Münster, 2002], p. 47).

IV. ACCOUNTING FOR HEBREW *šeC-*

The nineteenth century produced a number of creative proposals for the etymologies of *ʾăšer* and *šeC-*, and the excellent summaries and critiques by Gaenssle, Israel, and Huehnergard allow me here to summarize even more briefly.[39] All of the proposals fall into three basic camps: (1) those that derive one item from the other; (2) those that derive both items from a shared proto-form; and (3) those that conjecture no etymological connection between the two.

Most nineteenth-century scholarship falls into the first camp, which assumes that these two function words are related and so focuses on discerning which one is earlier and the nature of the derivational process. There are two directions for deriving *šeC-* and *ʾăšer* in this camp, and both had adherents. Many followed the view of Gesenius that the *ʾăšer* is the earlier form and *šeC-* a later reduced form; the processes involved were identified as the aphaeresis of the initial /ʾ/ and the assimilation of the final /r/ (thus accounting for the gemination of the first consonant when *šeC-* is prefixed).[40] Alternatively, the opposite derivation was proposed, perhaps first by Sperling, that *šeC-* was the earlier form and that *ʾăšer* was a lengthened form by means of a prothetic /ʾ/ and the dissimilation of the final gemination first into /l/, which later "hardened" to /r/.[41]

The second camp derives both *ʾăšer* and *šeC-* from a common reconstructed or hypothetical source, either *ʾšl* or *šl*. The proto-form *ʾšl* was promoted by Ewald; he suggests that this form began as the combination of three demonstrative particles, *ʾ*, *š*, and *l* (by analogy with Arabic *allaḏī*).[42] The developmental path from *ʾšl* includes similar sound changes as the previously noted proposals: *ʾšl* becomes *ʾăšer* by the "hardening" of the /l/ to /r/, and *ʾšl* becomes *šeC-* by the assimilation of the /l/ and aphaeresis of the /ʾ/. Böttcher suggests what he must have considered a simpler hypothesis than Ewald's: he begins with the proto-form *šl*, on analogy with the reconstruction of the Hebrew article *haC-* as *hal*.[43] The addition of a prothetic /ʾ/ and the "hardening" of the /l/ produced *ʾăšer*, and the assimilation of the /l/ to the initial consonant of the host word produced the clitic *šeC-*.

The problems with both of these first two approaches were well known even in the nineteenth century. Both the Gesenius and Sperling proposals start and end with the existing lexemes, although they also both resort to sound changes that are either not attested at all in Hebrew or West Semitic (the assimilation of /r/) or not well attested in Semitic until the

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[39] Gaenssle, *The Hebrew Particle*; Israel, "Il pronome relativo"; Huehnergard, "Etymology."

[40] W. Gesenius, *Ausführliches grammatisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache; mit Vergleichung der verwandten Dialekte* (Leipzig, 1817), p. 224, and *Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1835), vol. 3, pp. 1345–46; J. Olshausen, *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache* (Braunschweig, 1861), p. 439.

[41] A. G. Sperling, *Die Nota relationis im Hebräischen: Ein Beitrag zur hebräischen Lexicographie und Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1876), pp. 15–22; C. R. Brown, "The Relatives • שֶׁ and אֲשֶׁר," *Hebraica* 1 (1884): 249–

50, and "A Note on the Relative (אֲשֶׁר)," *Hebraica* 2 (1885): 117–18; cf. Eitan, "Hebrew and Semitic Particles," for a variation on this proposal.

[42] G. H. A. Ewald, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Bundes*, 5th ed. (Göttingen, 1844), p. 384.

[43] F. Böttcher, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache* (Leipzig, 1866–68), vol. 2, pp. 78–82.

[44] F. Hommel, "אֲשֶׁר, ursprüngliches Substantiv zu trennen von -שֶׁ (-שַׁ), ursprünglichem Pronominalstamm," *ZDMG* 32 (1878): 708–15; Kraetzschmar, "Origin of the Notae Relationis."

late first millennium B.C.E. (the prothesis of /ʾ/ and especially the aphaeresis of /ʾ/).[45] The objections to Ewald's solution are similar: the "hardening" of /l/ to /r/ as well as the assimilation of /l/ are both *ad hoc*, unattested sound changes, and the aphaeresis of /ʾ/ arguably does not occur in Semitic until late in the first millennium B.C.E. Böttcher's proposal combines all of the difficulties of the previous ones and thus suffers all of the already mentioned weaknesses of unattested and *ad hoc* sound changes.

Thus the third camp regarding ʾăšer and šeC- that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century built upon the perceived weaknesses of the previous two basic camps as well as the presence of a potential Akkadian cognate *ša* and became the consensus in the twentieth century. This story is one of distinct origins for the two Hebrew nominalizers ʾăšer and šeC-. In accordance with the cognate evidence provided above in section II, ʾăšer is connected to the Akkadian noun-cum-relative *ašru(m)/ašar*, and, again, in accordance with the apparent cognates listed above in section III, šeC- is connected to the Akkadian determinative-relative *ša*.[46] This is the position advocated by Bergsträsser, whose argument seems to have effected the closure of the vigorous, century-old debate, at least until the appearance of Huehnergard's recent challenge.[47]

V. GRAMMATICALIZATION[48] AND šeC-

Huehnergard presents a novel approach to an old solution: using grammaticalization theory, he argues for the derivation of šeC- as a reduced form of ʾăšer. His main points are

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[45] On the evidence related to the prothesis of /ʾ/ and the aphaeresis of /ʾ/, see Garr, *Dialect Geography*, pp. 47–48, 50–52 respectively. For further discussion of the aphaeresis of /ʾ/, see n. 51 below.

[46] Hommel, "אֲשֶׁר"; B. Stade, *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1879), p. 133; F. Delitzsch, *Prolegomena eines neuen hebräisch-aramäischen Wörterbuchs zum Alten Testament* (Leipzig, 1886), p. 44; Kraetzschmar, "Origin of the Notae Relationis"; Gaenssle, *The Hebrew Particle*. (Gaenssle promotes this view independently of Bergsträsser, of which he does not appear to have been aware; note that Gaenssle's dissertation was published in two versions: a University of Chicago monograph in 1915 and a two-part submission in *AJSL* 31 [1914]: 3–66 and 31 [1915]: 93–159.) For discussion of the Akkadian relative clause and specifically the relative word *ša*, see Langdon, "Etymology of the Babylonian Relative Pronoun"; Ravn, *So-Called Relative Clauses in Accadian*; von Soden, *Grundriss*, pp. 216–21; Deutscher, "Rise and Fall" and "Akkadian Relative Clause"; Gai, "Relative Clauses of Akkadian and Old Akkadian"; and Huehnergard, *Grammar*, pp. 185–88.

[47] While Kautzsch (*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, p. 444, n. 1) considers the etymology "still a matter of dispute" in 1910, undoubtedly writing before Bergsträsser's article had appeared, by the time that Joüon discusses the etymology in 1913 ("Études," pp. 128–39), only the theory of the distinct etymologies of the two relative words was presented; the other theories were

ignored. See also the unambiguous presentation in H. Bauer and P. Leander's historical grammar (*Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* [Hildesheim, 1922], p. 264). The 'separate etymology' view has rarely been questioned since 1909, with the notable exceptions of Eitan, "Hebrew and Semitic Particles," pp. 178–84; C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen, 1956), pp. 145–46; and Huehnergard, "Etymology."

[48] Grammaticalization, at its simplest, is a label for discussing a subset of diachronic changes that occur in language. In particular, it is the convergence of reanalysis (i.e., the categorical reassignment of a lexeme), semantic change (typically from more concrete to more abstract meaning), and phonetic reduction. For an introduction to grammaticalization as a theory, as well as the history of the concept, see P. J. Hopper and E. C. Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 2003). For a discussion of whether grammaticalization is legitimately a distinct phenomenon or rather an epiphenomenon, see F. J. Newmeyer, *Language Form and Language Function* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998) and the responses in Heine and Kuteva, *World Lexicon*, pp. 2–5 and Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, pp. 132 ff. For a critique of grammaticalization from the perspective of traditional historical linguistics, see B. D. Joseph. "Is There Such a Thing as 'Grammaticalization'?" *Language Sciences (Special Issue—Grammaticalization: A Critical Assessment)* 23 (2001): 163–86 and "Rescuing Traditional

as follows: (1) that Hebrew ʾăšer is derived from the common Semitic substantive 'place'; (2) that it has undergone 'grammaticalization' into a relative word; and (3) that šeC- is simply the reduced, clitic form of ʾăšer, formed by the aphaeresis of the initial /ʾ/-syllable and assimilation of the final /r/ to the initial segment of the clitic's host. Huehnergard suggests that the reanalysis and phonetic reduction of Hebrew ʾăšer must have taken place by the twelfth century B.C.E., in order to account for the presence of Hebrew šeC- in Judg. 5:7 as well as the early first-millennium appearance of Phoenician ʾš and Ammonite š. Thus the process had to have occurred in the Canaanite ancestor that produced Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite.[49]

Huehnergard frames this proposal in terms of three core processes of grammaticalization theory: (1) categorial reanalysis (ʾăšer as a substantive to ʾăšer as a function word), (2) semantic change (the lexical meaning 'step' or 'place' was fully bleached so that the item became a function word), and (3) phonetic reduction (from a free form *ʾašar to a clitic with the reduced shape of šeC-). This appears to explain ʾăšer and šeC- so well that he calls the history of ʾăšer "a parade example of the process of grammaticalization." Furthermore, he cites cross-linguistic data as support for the idea that the grammaticalization of a word is not a sudden and final event but that "earlier forms may coexist with later ones," in our case, the coexistence of the long form ʾăšer and its reduced form šeC-.[50] Huehnergard's expert synthesis of the Semitic data is very attractive but not without weakness.

First, the two phonological processes used in the derivation of šeC- from ʾăšer are identical to those proposed in the nineteenth century. From the perspective of traditional historical and comparative linguistics, both are undesirable for the same reasons listed above in section IV. Briefly, while Huehnergard cites Arabic and Syriac as supporting evidence for loss of word-initial /ʾ/ in Semitic, these data are much later, and, more importantly, from what we can discern from writing conventions, the loss of word-initial /ʾ/ does not occur regularly in West Semitic through the first millennium B.C.E.[51] As for the assimilation of

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(Historical) Linguistics," pp. 45–71. For instance, particularly relevant to the current study is Joseph's claim that,

> grammaticalization theory, it seems to me, perhaps inadvertently, often takes stances that are quite at odds with constructs and notions about language and language change that have long been held and upheld within traditional historical linguistic frameworks; for those schooled traditionally, therefore, grammaticalization comes across as just flat out wrong. For instance, just to give a taste of what is to come, certain ways in which phonetic reduction is invoked in discussions of grammaticalization fly in the face of what is known about the regularity of sound change and the sorts of conditioning that can hold on sound changes ("Rescuing," p. 47).

[49] A. F. Rainey and R. S. Notley's recent assertion (*The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* [Jerusalem, 2006], p. 112) that Hebrew should be distinguished as a Transjordanian dialect, along with Moabite, over and against the Canaanite languages, such as Phoenician, on the basis of one isogloss (the lexeme

used as the copular verb) is wholly unconvincing.

[50] "Etymology," pp. 120–21.

[51] Garr discusses the aphaeresis of /ʾ/ (*Dialect Geography*, pp. 50–52), and it is clear that, notwithstanding the very tenuous support from a few personal names in Standard Phoenician and from the numeral 'one' ḥd (< ʾḥd) in Old Aramaic, Samalian, and Deir ʿAlla, there is no firm evidence of this sound change through the majority of the first-millennium languages of Syria-Palestine. (For a discussion of the scanty Achaemenid Aramaic evidence, see M. L. Folmer, *The Aramaic Language in the Achaemenid Period: A Study in Linguistic Variation* [Leuven, 1995], pp. 109–14.) By the late Hellenistic period we have limited but clear evidence of Palestinian Hebrew personal names with the aphaeresis of /ʾ/ (A. Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* [Cambridge, 1993], pp. 128–29). The toponym data in Y. Elitzur, *Ancient Place Names in the Holy Land: Preservation and History* (Jerusalem and Winona Lake, Indiana, 2004), however, provide a counterbalance, since they suggest that even in proper nouns the /ʾ/ was quite often retained well into the Common Era (see especially his discussion on p. 298).

the final /r/, nowhere else in the phonology of ancient Hebrew do we see the consonant /r/ assimilate, nor does this occur in any of the closely related languages. As support for the assimilation of /r/ Huehnergard appeals to evidence[52] from Jewish Babylonian Aramaic that the verb from the root [ʾ-m-r] 'to say' becomes ʾəmā when it precedes the enclitic preposition l(ə)- 'to', i.e., the /r/ assimilates to the /l/.[53]

The problems with the appeal to Jewish Babylonian Aramaic are multiple. First, the assimilation of the /r/ in the verb 'to say' to a following enclitic l(ə)- is not at all consistent, and it is relatively late. Boyarin in his study of this phenomenon states that it "is most common in the late or Geonic dialect . . . is more restricted but still well attested in the normal Talmudic dialect, and considerably less prevalent in the special (archaic?) dialect of certain tractates."[54] Second, the assimilation occurs only on the final consonant of verbal roots. Third, it is not only /r/ that assimilates, and it is not only /l/ that the /r/ assimilates to: /l/, /m/, /r/, /b/, and /d/, and perhaps /n/ and /t/ sporadically assimilate as the final consonant of a verb.[55] Moreover, while the anticipatory assimilation of these sounds is most commonly to the preposition l(ə)-, it also happens with other clitic prepositions, such as b(ə)-.[56] Jewish Babylonian Aramaic witnesses a phenomenon that we have yet fully to describe and one that is broader than the proposed assimilation of Hebrew /r/ in ʾăšer. According to Boyarin, what we have in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic is "a syntactically conditioned phonological change, extended beyond its original environments by analogy," but he is quick to admit that determining the precise conditions has yet to be done.[57] Although it does demonstrate that /r/ *can* assimilate in a Semitic language, this phonological issue in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic is far from straightforward and can hardly be used to support the assimilation of final /r/ in Hebrew ʾăšer.

Appropriately, Boyarin makes one point quite clear in his conclusion. He stresses how different these sound changes in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic are from superficially similar types of assimilation in contemporaneous Semitic languages, such as Syriac.[58] And he warns that "Babylonian Jewish Aramaic cannot be used as support for apocope or vocal realization of /r/ in final position."[59]

Here it is necessary to consider briefly the issue of "regular sound change." Identifying regularity of sound innovation and correspondence has long been a canon of the neogrammarian historical and comparative linguistic enterprise; sound change lacking the expected correspondence or a discernible conditioning environment, in other words, an

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[52] It is not insignificant that though Huehnergard's main thesis is that Hebrew ʾăšer and šeC- are related by the process of grammaticalization, his appeal to comparative evidence as support for the sound changes proceeds from the framework of historical and comparative linguistics, not necessarily grammaticalization theory (see Joseph, "Rescuing," on this methodological issue in general).

[53] "Etymology," pp. 121–22; see M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat Gan, Israel and Baltimore, 2002), p. 141.

[54] D. Boyarin, "The Loss of Final Consonants in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic (BJA)," *Afro-Asiatic Linguistics* 3/5 (1976): 103.

[55] "Loss of Final Consonants," p. 103. Huehnergard recognizes this feature of Boyarin's argument in a footnote ("Etymology," p. 122, n. 100) but does not follow Boyarin's stricture against using Jewish Babylonian Aramaic to explain superficially similar changes in other Semitic languages.

[56] "Loss of Final Consonants," p. 104.

[57] Ibid., p. 107.

[58] Huehnergard does not appeal to the attested (but rare) assimilation of /r/ in Akkadian, although he might have. Von Soden notes that /r/ becomes /š/ before /t/ and /k/ but also that the assimilation of /r/ to a following consonant is very rare (*Grundriss*, p. 35). As with the appeal to Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, this very sporadic change in East Semitic does not strongly support the assimilation of /r/ in Hebrew.

[59] "Loss of Final Consonants," p. 107.

ad hoc change, is admitted only as a last resort.[60] Thus within the traditional historical and comparative linguistic approach, the proposal for the loss of word-initial /ʾ/ and especially the assimilation of /r/ in Hebrew is to be greatly dispreferred. But Huehnergard situates this proposed change within the framework of grammaticalization, and in the growing body of grammaticalization studies, irregular sound change is sometimes more freely admitted in association with the grammaticalization process.[61] If we accept, then, the core principles of grammaticalization theory to be legitimate, we cannot out-of-hand dismiss deriving *šeC-* from *ʾăšer* by means of the loss of word-initial /ʾ/ and assimilation of /r/. The qualification by Rubin is interesting in this regard (particularly in light of his problematic position on the regularity of grammaticalization-influenced sound change; see n. 61):

Since the pursuit of regularity is the goal of the historical linguist, one can suggest that invoking grammaticalization is sometimes an easy solution. That is to say, one might believe that the ability to label something as grammaticalized is an automatic license to claim irregularity. One must be aware of this temptation, however, and recognize that grammaticalization is not a fallback category into which one can place any development that cannot be otherwise explained. We must exhaust every attempt to derive attested forms by regular sound change; only then can irregularity of sound change be comfortably excused.[62]

So even if we were to invoke grammaticalization, we must justify an irregular sound change by exhausting all other options. But herein lies the second major problem with the *šeC-* from *ʾăšer* solution. I asserted above that the evidence does not allow us to trace a sure diachronic path of reanalysis, semantic bleaching, and phonetic reduction for *ʾaṯar* in Hebrew or other Semitic languages; we simply lack the appropriate pieces of the puzzle. Even if we were to speculate that Akkadian *ašar* underwent some sort of grammaticalization from the earliest stages of the language, in which the item was solely nominal, to slightly later stages (not much later, though, since non-nominal uses are attested in Old Assyrian), in which it took on function word status, the *ʾăšer* inherited by Hebrew does not fit the

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[60] R. Anttila, *Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (Amsterdam, 1989), pp. 85–86.

[61] A. D. Rubin, *Studies in Semitic Grammaticalization* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 2003) goes so far as to assert that one of the characteristics of grammaticalization is that it "is often accompanied by irregular phonological reduction" (p. 4), and he cites as support Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, pp. 154–59. But this is a misleading representation of Hopper and Traugott, who do *not* make any strong statements about the correspondence of irregular sound change and grammaticalization. They do admit at the end of the relevant discussion that grammaticalization may "set things up for special phonological changes" (*Grammaticalization*, p. 158), but to take this as a strong principle that they advocate is misreading their arguments. A careful reading of the section cited produces the following statements: "Many of the phonological changes . . . are not peculiar to this process but are simply part of the same processes of assimilation, attrition, and other kinds of reduction that are found more generally in non-

prominent syllables and across junctures" (p. 156); "the seemingly arbitrary erosion accompanying the morphologization process of the copula verb as a transitivizing suffix [in Nez Perce] is in fact the result of well-established changes in the general phonology of the language" (p. 157); "In morphologization, as in all grammaticalization, we must ask whether there are any rules characteristic of morphologization that are not part of the general or historical phonology of the language. . . . Since morphologization necessarily involves the emergence of new morpheme boundaries and other junctural phenomena, and the juxtaposition of segmental clusters in ways not found internal to words or across 'older' morpheme boundaries, and since usually there is a prosodic reduction of the new affix, any special phonological changes are to be attributed to these subtypes of phonological change rather than to any intrinsic change from 'lexical' to 'grammatical'" (p. 158).

[62] Rubin, *Semitic Grammaticalization*, p. 6.

same direction of grammaticalization.[63] I have argued elsewhere that Hebrew ʾăšer is not a multivalent function word (such as Akkadian ašar seems to be; see above) but is restricted to nominalizing clauses (i.e., introducing relative and complement clauses).[64] Thus to move from a more general meaning in Akkadian to a more restricted meaning in Hebrew is contrary to another major principle of grammaticalization theory: unidirectionality. If Hebrew ʾăšer lies along the grammaticalization path that had begun with Akkadian ašar and that Hebrew inherited, it would necessarily have to be a more abstract function word, perhaps a general subordinating conjunction (even more general than traditionally thought and presented in the standard lexica). So to connect Hebrew ʾăšer with Akkadian ašar as a product of a long and multilanguage grammaticalization process is simply too speculative.

It is possible that ʾăšer grammaticalized only *within* Hebrew, and in this way we could account for both the shape and slightly more general function of šeC-. And instead of appealing directly to the process of grammaticalization to explain the assimilation of the /r/, perhaps the justification for the loss of word-initial /ʾ/ and assimilation of /r/ is to be found in the role of frequency in sound change.[65] For instance, J. Bybee argues that frequency is a significant factor in phonological change, viz., higher frequency lexical items exhibit a phonological change before lower frequency items, and this restricted sound change then often diffuses to become a "regular" sound change.[66] This might seem to support an innovative sound change in Hebrew such as the assimilation of /r/, which first occurs in the very frequent nominalizer ʾăšer (thus producing šeC-). The drawback, of course, is that this sound change never spreads to lower frequency items (or any other items at all), which then brings us back to the assimilation of /r/ in ʾăšer as no more than a highly restricted *ad hoc* change.

A more serious problem for proposing that šeC- is a further grammaticalized form of ʾăšer is that šeC- already occurs at the earliest stage of Hebrew and Canaanite, as shown

[63] An anonymous *JNES* reviewer of this article correctly noted that grammaticalization is mostly studied *within* a language and not *between* languages. Note, however, the increasing interest in grammaticalization and language contact (see Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, pp. 212–30 and, especially, B. Heine and T. Kuteva, *Language Contact and Grammatical Change* [Cambridge, 2005]). In the case of "genetically-related" languages such as Akkadian and Hebrew, and specifically when the discussion has a diachronic dimension, it is difficult to discern whether the later language, Hebrew, simply borrowed an already grammaticalized form from a contemporaneous stage of Akkadian or whether Hebrew inherited an item undergoing grammaticalization. In either case, the borrowing/inheritance would allow for the process to be interrupted *in the receiving language*. In other words, ʾăšer could have continued the general direction of grammaticalization initiated in Akkadian, presumably influenced by language contact, or ceased to experience any further change in its Hebrew form. These same issues apply to the Aramaic and Ugaritic forms of *ʾaṯar and their relationship to Akkadian ašar as well as to the relationship of Hebrew šeC- and Akkadian ša. (On this last

point, I am inclined to see the Phoenician as the means by which ša entered Hebrew, specifically the dialect of the northern Israelite kingdom during the period of strong trade relations with the Phoenician city-states; I am indebted here to discussions with Brian Peckham and his expertise on Phoenician language and history.)

[64] See my "Headlessness and Extraposition: Another Look at the Syntax of אשר," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 27 (2001): 1–16; "The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2002); and "The Story of Ancient Hebrew אשר," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies (Abr-Nahrain)* 43 (2006): 7–26.

[65] The suggestion that frequency might account for the *ad hoc* nature of the assimilation of /r/ ʾăšer to produce šeC- was made by two participants of NACAL 34, where a shorter version of this study was presented.

[66] J. Bybee, "Word Frequency and Context of Use in the Lexical Diffusion of Phonetically Conditioned Sound Change," *Language Variation and Change* 14 (2002): 261–90; and "Mechanisms of Change in Grammaticalization: The Role of Frequency," in B. D. Joseph and J. Janda, eds., *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 602–23.

above in section III. As Huehnergard notes, this cannot have been a late development in ancient Hebrew: it must have occurred by the twelfth century B.C.E.[67] But then why do Hebrew, Moabite, and Edomite retain ʾăšer, while Phoenician, Ammonite, and Philistine do not? Also, why do Hebrew, Phoenician, Ammonite, and Philistine exhibit the grammaticalization (or, simply, phonetic reduction) of ʾăšer to šeC- but Akkadian, Aramaic, and Ugaritic, which all exhibit the nominal and non-nominal use of ʾăšer, do not? It seems that for as many of the problems that the grammaticalization solution for relating ʾăšer and šeC- may solve, it creates as many if not more.

VI. Conclusion

What is the end of the matter? I draw three interrelated conclusions from the data. First, while the Semitic cognates for Hebrew ʾăšer are clear, the *how* and *when* of ʾăšer as a nominalizer in Hebrew remain unknown. Second, from the data we have in Hebrew, we must admit that ʾăšer and šeC- coexist without any discernible etymological relationship. Third, the lack of explicit diachronic connections strongly suggests against using grammaticalization theory to explain either ʾăšer as a grammaticalized version of Akkadian ašar (or Proto-Semitic *ʾatar) or šeC- as a grammaticalized form of ʾăšer.

Let us consider one final issue. If šeC- were to be etymologically connected to ʾăšer, not in terms of grammaticalization but simply in terms of a phonetically reduced variant, we would have to judge the merits of the proposal based on the principles of traditional historical and comparative linguistics. Specifically, we still face the problem of the assimilated /r/. And, admittedly, it could have happened, since *ad hoc* sound changes do exist (for example, the Akkadian relative ša must reflect an *ad hoc* change to the postalveolar fricative the /ʃ/ from the dental fricative /ð/ or /θ/ of the Proto-Semitic determinative-relative *dū/tū). So how do we move forward in rendering a linguistic judgment in a situation such as this?

On the one hand, the consensus that Hebrew ʾăšer and šeC- are not related accords with the phonological system of ancient Hebrew—as we know it, at least—and traces the etymology of both words to well-known Semitic items. But it does complicate the historical-comparative scene, since the Hebrew lexicon would then contain two reflexes of one Proto-Semitic item. On the other hand, the šeC- as a reduced form of ʾăšer scenario simplifies the historical-comparative scene and creates greater symmetry between East and West Semitic. At what cost, though? It complicates the phonology of Hebrew, Phoenician, Moabite, and Edomite by introducing an *ad hoc* sound change.

The proposal to derive šeC- from ʾăšer raises a serious methodological question: given two competing proposals that both achieve elegance and simplicity within their respective spheres but result in complications in the competing sphere, which is to be preferred? Does it matter, furthermore, that one solution operates at the more concrete level of an individual language's grammar, while the other operates at the more abstract level of

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[67] "Etymology," p. 123. An important qualification to taking Judges 5 as "twelfth-century" is that this dating is based on two assumptions: (1) the presence of the relative šaC- is an actual archaic item rather than a later editorial attempt to archaize, and (2) the writing conventions preserved in the Masoretic tradition can be taken as witness to the relative age of the language in the passage. Both assumptions have been challenged (see I. Young, "The 'Archaic' Poetry of the Pentateuch in the MT, Samaritan Pentateuch and 4QExodᶜ," *Abr-Nahrain* 35 [1998]: 74–83).

interlanguage relationship? In the case of the ancient Hebrew relative words, deriving *šeC-* from *ʾăšer* does fit the Hebrew (and the rest of the Canaanite languages that use some variation of *š*) into a nicely symmetrical comparative Semitic picture, with West Semitic using the *z/d*-reflex of the Proto-Semitic demonstrative-relative and East Semitic using the *š*-reflex. My objection is that this requires us to complicate the phonology of ancient Hebrew even though other solutions exist. Rather, I suggest following a variation of Occam's razor for historical and comparative linguistics: "If the apparent connection between two words contains phonetic difficulties, the linguist should look elsewhere for a more economic solution."[68] Deriving *šeC-* from *ʾăšer* fails this test, at least if we accept the same assumptions, viz., the priority of identifying regular sound change.

The solution that emerged out of the nineteenth century as the consensus stands the test of time; it provides a plausible explanation for the data with a minimum of speculation: *ʾăšer* is derived from a common Semitic noun 'place', and *šeC-* is cognate to the East Semitic (and Phoenician and Ammonite) *š*-relative. So how did Hebrew end up with two reflexes of the Proto-Semitic determinative-relative **dū/tū*? None of the imaginable plausibilities restores symmetry between East and West Semitic, but two centuries of historical and comparative linguistic investigation should have taught us by now that our desire for symmetry within language families and dialect geography must often take a back seat to the messy and asymmetry-producing realities of language contact, competing dialects, social registers, and the use of dialectal variation for reasons of style and rhetoric in literary compositions—all issues that belong in a complete analysis of *ʾăšer* and *šeC-* in ancient Hebrew.[69]

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[68] Anttila, *Historical and Comparative Linguistics*, p. 331.

[69] I deal with all of these issues in *The Relative Clause in Ancient Hebrew* (tentative title), in preparation for Eisenbrauns in their series Linguistics Studies in Ancient West Semitic.