ON THE CORRESPONDENCE
OF HEBREW $s$ TO ESA $s^a$

By A. F. L. Beeston

Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew as now spoken, have a binary phonemic opposition between $[s]$ and $[/]$. Modern South Arabian has a three-way opposition of $[s]$, $[/]$ and a lateralized sibilant; while Epigraphic South Arabian script attests the same there. Brockelmann, Cantineau and others have adopted the hypothesis that a phonemic system of the South Arabian type is a Proto-Semitic feature, and that the other languages have reduced this to a binary system by loss of certain phonemic distinctions. In my article “Arabian Sibilants”, I have claimed that one can observe a fairly regular pattern of etymological equivalences (admittedly not without a minority of exceptions) thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H(ebrew)</th>
<th>ESA</th>
<th>MSA</th>
<th>A(rabic)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$f$</td>
<td>$s^1$</td>
<td>$f$</td>
<td>$s$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$f$ (now pronounced $[s]$)</td>
<td>$s^2$</td>
<td>$f$ (lateralized)</td>
<td>$f$</td>
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<tr>
<td>$s$</td>
<td>$s^3$</td>
<td>$s$</td>
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Garbini has challenged both the Brockelmann hypothesis and this scheme of etymological equivalences. He claims that a synchronic system of the South Arabian type has never existed outside the South Arabian area, so that this phenomenon is an isolated one unconnected with any developments elsewhere; and that the Proto-Semitic system had only a binary opposition between on the one hand $[s]$ and on the other a sibilant phoneme of undefinable phonetic character which has split up, with part of its domain shifting to $[s]$ and part to $[/]$. In a more recent article, P. Magnanini adopts a similar standpoint.

Unfortunately, neither of these two writers has correctly assessed the South Arabian evidence, which is crucial in this connection.

1 J.S.S. vii (1962), 221 ff.
3 “Sulla corrispondenza consonantica arabo $[/]$ ebraico $[s]$”, A.I.O.N. xxxv (1974), 401-8. The title of the article describes the proposition which the author is denying.
Garbini claims that there is no consistent correspondence between ESA $^8$ and H $^8$ and that such a correspondence is observable in only 50 per cent of the cases, while the other half show $^8 = H^8$. Magnanini writes that my scheme as set out above is not “real” because it admits too many exceptions; he specifies eleven alleged exceptions and claims that these “could easily be multiplied by a systematic examination of the material”. Neither claim is justified.

As a preliminary, I must stress that proper names in themselves are not valid evidence for the establishment of etymological connections with other languages. The meaning of a word is essential in establishing such connections; but within its own context a proper name “means” the person or thing that it denotes and nothing else. We can often guess at the semantic origin of a name on the basis of other evidence: i.e. the occurrence, within the same language, of the same or a similar term in a context where it is not a proper name. But if a root is not attested otherwise than in a proper name, we have no means of guessing the semantic background of the name, and therefore no means of establishing an etymological connection in another language.

Of Magnanini’s eleven specific examples, only two are in fact valid: namely, ESA $^8$ $^8$ $^8$ “help” (and various associated senses) = H $^8$ $^8$; and ESA $^8$ $^8$ C. 544/10 “pasturage” = H “eleb. Of the others:

(i) “$^8$ $^8$ = $^8$”. The ESA term for “bind, take captive” is $^8$ $^8$, reliably attested in Ja. 665/22 and Ry. 506/6. In C. 372/3 $^8$ $^8$ is a misreading, and the correct reading as established by G. Ryckmans is $^8$ $^8$. The only occurrence of the root $^8$ $^8$ is $^8$ $^8$ R. 2869/4, where it is a toponym.

(ii) “$^8$ $^8$ = baras”. The sense of the Hebrew word, “destroy”, is totally unacceptable in the two contexts, R. 3951/4 and C. 373/2, where the ESA term occurs, and it is impossible to regard the two words as cognate. The ESA verb is probably a Hiphil stem.

(iii) $^8$ $^8$ is attested in ESA only in a proper name – and alongside $^8$ $^8$ which also occurs only as a proper name. No etymological conclusions can be drawn from this.

(iv) ESA $^8$ $^8$ is similarly attested only as a proper name, and there are no grounds for claiming an equivalence with H $^8$ Diton (in preference e.g. to $^8$).

1 La Mascena xl (1947), 190.
2 Jamme’s idea that it is a verb meaning “be abused” (A $^8$) in Ja. 647/14 is erroneous; it is there certainly a clan name.
(v) $^\omega$w is attested only in $^\omega$ww C. 308/1, where its meaning is very uncertain. The context, which deals with agricultural exploitation, seems to call for some such rendering as “bring into cultivation”, or “irrigate” (thus Rhodokanakis), or “acquire, possess”, and a variety of etymologies have been proposed. At all events, Conti Rossini’s equation with H ša‘āb “look, gaze” cannot be sustained.

(vi) $^\omega$s ‘f “promise” is undoubtedly a denominative from a word meaning “lip”, H šapab; it is not related to šapat “place, put”, where $^\omega$s < *$^\omega$t, as is evidenced by A ‘ufyab. See further my note in Vetus Testamentum viii (1958), 216-17.

(vii) “$^\omega$s$t = H $^\omega$sfr”. $^\omega$s$t$ C. 733, preceded by kbr, is interpreted by the Corpus as a proper name. Since the title kabir is almost always followed by a tribal name, this is much more plausible than Rhodokanakis’ “tax-collectors”, A buš$t$. The $^\omega$s$t$ R. 3951/1 are certainly a social class, but again not tax-collectors; the existence of a distinct class of publicani in the South Arabian social scene is in the highest degree improbable. There is a possibility (though no more) that this was a class of “poorer folk”, thus cognate with H āšar “be indigent”. Conti Rossini’s citation of H hašrat mayim (II Sam. xxii. 12) is valueless, since the H word is a hapax and of extremely uncertain meaning; besides “sieve” (A hašara) it has been thought to mean “gathering” (A ḫalara) for which there is support in the Vulgate and in Ugaritic; or compared with A hašāb “crassior pars liquidae”.

(viiia) ‘rs $^\omega$s is not an architectural feature. In C. 308/6 ‘rs means “plantations” and is cognate with A ġarasa “plant”. The same word in R. 3512/3 is in a context too obscure to warrant any attempt at etymologizing. ‘rs $^\omega$s R. 2778/6 is the object of the verb $^\omega$s$t$, normal in the so-called “hierodule” texts, and is certainly there the proper name of a woman. The equation with H ‘erš and A ‘ārš cannot be sustained.

(ix) The only ESA term which can be reliably cited as cognate with H šad and A sayyid is $^\omega$t$^\omega$d C. 597/2, where the Corpus renders it “princes”. $^\omega$t$^\omega$d is commonly accepted as meaning either “council” and thus cognate with H šad, or “a type of edifice” (but see below in Appendix G). The precise nature of the individuals called

1 Feigin, J.N.E.S. ix, 40 ff. The Vulgate interpretation derives from post-biblical šf “sift”. The suggestion is by no means unattractive when one recalls the ancient concept of the “firmament” as a solid sheet pierced with holes through which rain comes down from “the waters which are above the firmament”.

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ṣ̌wd and linked with the king in the Minaean texts R. 2808/2 and 2907/2 is obscure; they could be “councillors” just as well as “chieftains”, and in the Minaean context (where the “high council” figures prominently in the polity) are more probably the former.

I turn now to the more general claims. Particular importance attaches to š, which is the crux of the whole problem. The ESA lexicon as known to us at present comprises, if we exclude roots attested solely in proper names, 81 roots containing š. Among these, there are 18 (listed in Appendix A) of which the meaning is unknown, either because the context is fragmentary (by damage to the stone) or because it does not point with sufficient clarity to the sense of the word in question. When we are confronted with a hitherto unknown term in an inscription, a possible etymology is a normal point of departure for our investigation of its meaning. But the tentative interpretations based on etymology must be strictly controlled by their suitability to the context. If the context is not of a nature to furnish this control, etymological hypotheses are wild shots in the dark, and cannot be justified.

Secondly, there are 34 roots which have no discernible cognates in Biblical Hebrew (listed in Appendix B).

Thirdly, there is a small group of words which constitute a highly specialized class: namely ṣ̌mašṣ̌ “tutelary goddess” = šemeš, ṣ̌ṣ̌ “three” = šaloš, and ṣ̌ṣ̌ “foundation” = šoreš “root”. It is evident that in these either assimilation or dissimilation has been at work to destroy the original pattern.

The residue comprises 21 “regular” instances of ṣ̌ = ṣ̌ (Appendix C), plus three which must be regarded as dubious (Appendix D). On the other side of the picture, there is only one clear instance of ṣ̌ = ṣ̌, namely ṣ̌ṣ̌ ṣ̌ṣ̌ ṣ̌ṣ̌ mentioned above, and one which is dubious (Appendix E). Giving Garbini “the benefit of the doubt”, by excluding the three dubious regularities and including the one dubious irregularity, we find that the anomalies are just under one-eighth of the total—not one-half as he claims.

A similarly exhaustive analysis of š would be more troublesome, because of frequent uncertainties whether the letter is part of the root or represents a šššššššš or šššššš verb stem. However, if one confines oneself to equivalences which can be regarded as certain, one finds 25 cases of the regular correspondence with H š (Appendix F), against only two anomalies: namely šššššš ššššš which has a range of usage comparable with H ‘asab, and ššššš ššš “favour, prosper” with H ššššš.
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$s^3$ presents greater problems. Its total incidence is decidedly less than that of either of the other two letters, so that in any case one expects to encounter fewer H cognates. The clearest cases are $'s^3r$ "take captive" = 'asar mentioned above; $mw^3d$ R. 2869/6 "foundation" = H mosad; $ks^3w|b^w$ R. 3427/2 "garment of byssus" = kesut; and $bs^3l$ Ry. 335/7 "destroy, raze (a town)" = H salle-ba (Jer. 1. 26). $s^3g^b$ R. 4069/6 describes the destruction of a dam, obviously by floods, so that a direct equation with H $sabab$ (II Sam. xvii. 13) "sweep away" would be more pertinent than that proposed by Bauer with Syriac $shap$. Add also $s^m^k$ "go up" with H $samak" raise, lift up". Other cases are more speculative, such as that of $bs^3r^w$ with basar mentioned above; and $ts^3b^b$ Ja. 631/32, rendered by Jamme as "turn aside" = H sabab, though I would myself prefer a rendering "engage (with the enemy) at close quarters" which makes the relationship with the H verb more dubious. The only clearly anomalous case here is $s^b^3^i = 'esb$ also mentioned above.

The MSA material has been analysed by me a good while ago. The results there broadly support my scheme of "normal" correspondences; anomalies constitute approximately one-seventh, regularities six-sevenths, of the total recognizable etymologies. South Arabian material as a whole therefore exhibits between 85 and 90 per cent conformity with my posited "normal" scheme. Garbini claims that any equivalences observable between South Arabian and the other languages which do happen to conform to the "normal" scheme, are purely fortuitous and random. I submit that it is impossible to regard a conformity rate of over 85 per cent as fortuitous.¹

APPENDICES

A. ESA roots of unknown meaning, which contain $s^3$

\begin{itemize}
  \item $s^3^m^b$ C. 320/3, R. 3306B/2. $s^3^b^h$ C. 81/8. $s^3^k^m - m^3^k^m^m^m$ Baroda, $m^3^k^m$ Ta. 1/3 (a social class: has been tentatively compared with Akkadian $mu^3^k^m^m^m$ but this is dubious). $s^3^m^r$ R. 4784/2. $s^3^m^r$ R. 3966/8. $s^3^m^r$ R. 4970. $s^3^m^v$ C. 308/8 (see above). $s^3^g^l$
\end{itemize}


² All this leaves quite open the question whether a three-term system in this phonemic domain is Primitive Semitic in the widest sense, or not. All that it tends to show is that such a system lies behind the Hebrew-Aramaic group, Arabic, and South Arabian.
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Ry. 509/8 (a social class, tentatively rendered "workmen" by comparison with A ḫuql, but dubious). ššm R. 3958/3 (some kind of agricultural installation, but of unknown nature). ššm R. 283/4. ššm - mbš ššl R. 3962/4 (Rhodokanakis "portions", but very dubiously). ḫbr, bsšm C. 93/3. woš R. 2983/1. woš C. 670/1. woš R. 3945/6. ššm C. 548/10 (it is difficult to take seriously the proposal that this could be the Akkadian preposition šīn "from"; Akkadian prepositions form a class by themselves quite unlike the prepositional system of the languages we are dealing with). nšš C. 548/10 (the Corpus rendering "be expelled" and equation with H nataš "abandon" cannot be sustained; it depends on the inadmissible interpretation of ššm mentioned above. Further, there is too great a semantic gap between "being expelled" as the punishment for an offence, and the voluntary act of "abandonment"). qaf R. 4664/1.

B. ESA roots containing šš with no H cognate

ššm barter.
ššbr mbšbr C. 83/3 public, well known: A mulabbar.
ššaf look (favourably) on: A šafa.
ššft ššwš a measure of length.
ššft purchase grain: Yemeni A šiyātāb.
ššm bodily incapacity, injury: A šānā deface, disfigure.
ššr I C. 548/4 garment: Geez šw' linen.
ššr II šštr* R. 4931/3 proclamation, publication: A šā'a be disseminated (of news).
šškr defeat, rout (an enemy). Evidently not related to H šakar wages.
ššmt malice: A šawātāb.
ššnn C. 548/12 a kind of foodstuff: A šanān.
šššb tribe: A šā'b.
ššfr labour force, corvée: A šāfrāb servant.
ššgt malice, ill-will, evil eye: A šā'ā stare.
ššgs Fa. 30/6, Gl. 1538/8 prohibition: A akṣṣṣṣ prevent.
ššgs bršg R. 3961/2 dig, open up (a grave): A šaqqa split.
ššgt summit, coping (of a building).
ššbb save, protect, deliver.
ššt R. 5040/1 buy: A šarā; C. 313/3, NNAG. 12/13 deliver, save (?) < redeem).
ššt legal due, obligation; watercourse: A šariāb.
ššt arise, occur, happen.
šššbb dagger.
šštq Fa. 30/3, 124/9 bond (legal and financial).
šštg C. 547/9 irrigation ditch: A šarā. H šrg "plait" can hardly be the same root.

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C. 533/4 go: A mala.

qs^b make new: A qasib.

qs^d C. 282/6 crop damage (from storms).

qa^m C. 308/9 fruit garden: Geez qasim.

rs^d R. 1917/8 absolve (?) < put right, A ruld).

rs^w a religious functionary; commonly assigned to A ritswab gift (?) < "maker of offerings".

'rs^a lacerate oneself Fa. 14/3: A 'arala. Evidently not related to H ri.

'ry^a detachment, unit (of an army): A geyj.

r'y^a remove, pilfer, abstract.

C. Roots exhibiting ESA s^ = H t

s^ml north, bs^ml ?face north, and s^m C. 426/5 ill omen, are all evidently derived from the notion of "left-hand", H sm'.

s^dw C. 660/4 field: H la'deb.

s^br novilunium, first day of the month: H tabaromim crescent-shaped ornaments.

s^ym set, place: H twm.

s'b^c copious, abundant: H tbc.

s'b sheep/goat: H tbc.

s'b^f enemy, illwisher: H le'me.

s'b^r I barley: H tw'orab.

s'b^r II know: H t'or.

s'fg abundant: H tfg.

s'ft promise: H taphab (see above, p. 52).

s'frk associate: H trk.

s'rq mtrq east: H toreq red, bright.

bs't I good news: H bitorab.

bs't II flesh: H batar.

bs'k bs'kt wife: H balak as in Ps. lxxviii. 50, Job xxxiii. 18, Prov. xxiv. 11, "spare, protect, preserve (from harm)"); the semantic parallel is the A use of bbarim "sacrosanct, protected person" as a polite designation for a wife. Conti Rossini's attempt to relate the word to H balag "love" must be rejected; in the Near Eastern social climate it is unthinkable that "loved one" should be a formal designation of a legal wife. The masculine forms bs'k R. 4192/2 and mbr'kt C. 341/89 probably indicate (as Garbini proposes) "cognati, kinsmen (by marriage)", and are susceptible of a similar semantic explanation, since A bbarim can also (see Lane) be applied to "friends whom one is bound to protect".

nt^r undertake: H nala'.

'sr ten: H 'efer.

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Various senses clustering round "display, spread out", e.g.
"open country" and "promulgate": H paraq.

NG: gain control of (an enemy town): H nagaq rule despottiically.

FST: C. 462/4 enquire: H hapaq investigate.

D. Possible but dubious instances of ESA sunt = H f

BPF: C. 140/64 BPF in a context relating to flood damage; cf. perhaps
bmake soak, drench.

'ahq labour, work, with a possible semantic link with H 'eteg strife.

NIG: raze, destroy (a town); query < "reduce to mud": H heraq earthenware.

E. Possible but dubious instance of ESA sfr = H f

BPF: C. 541/44 a part of the Marib dam structure: H hapaq bind, tie up.

F. Instances of ESA sfr = H f (the H words are too well known to need quoting)

Sfwr chiefain (see above). Sfrw evil. Sfr7 write.
Sfr7m peace. Sfrm name. Sfrz hear. Sfrf lower part. Sfrg7 irrigate.
Sfrg7 roof. Sfr7s6 six. Sfr7m tongue. Sfr7s7 forget.

G. msod as an edifice

This was later related to Geez hod "burn" and conjectured to be an "altar of burnt sacrifice". The contexts now available show that this is mistaken. The meaning is probably "council chamber, audience hall", and not to be dissociated from the other usage.