L's and S's in the Land of Israel

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2021

[Link to publication](#)

Total number of authors:
1

SVENSK EXEGETISK ÅRSBOK

86

På uppdrag av Svenska Exegetiska Sällskapet
utgiven av Blaženka Scheuer

Innehåll

L's and S's in the Land of Israel: *'Ereṣ Yiśrā'ēl*, Jeremiah 10:11, Isaiah 1:5, and Lateral and Breathy Snake Killing[*]

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INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the persuasiveness of what one is saying—and its ability to remain in listeners' memories—depends not only on the content of the message but also on how it is delivered. This goes for biblical phraseology as well as for traditionally inherited

poetry—and for modern research articles, for that matter. Here, I shall endeavor to highlight and study a number of instances in which a certain class of sounds of ancient Semitic provenance are used to create euphonic, sound-playing expressions found in the Hebrew Bible. I will discuss certain examples of how sounds that can be thought of as being "L's and S's" at the same time survived longer than one might think in the Land of Israel—in more senses than one. And we will observe how this type of sound-play can help explain important developments in Israelite (or perhaps better, Judahite) religious and national self-understanding, in the form of the phrase "the Land of Israel." We will also look at cases from Jeremiah and Isaiah and, finally, at early terminology for poetic snake-killing in Northwest Semitic, that may have been borrowed from Indo-European *Vorlagen* and may provide information about the phonologies of both. Along the way, we will discuss certain old euphonic techniques of Northwest Semitic poetry found in the Hebrew Bible (and other places) and their relationships with linguistic development—i.e., we will be looking at cases of direct interaction between historical linguistics and literary analysis.

I will base my discussion in four instances of wordplay, all involving the same sort of original sound—the lateral fricatives. These sounds, which existed in Proto-Semitic and its early descendants (including Proto-Northwest Semitic) are without a doubt the most unstable parts of the Semitic phonological inventory. The only part of the family that still keeps them alive today in what appears to be their original form is Modern South Arabian, i.e., languages such as Mehri and Soqotri, which have the sound [ɬ], a fricative, voiceless *l*, so to speak, the same sound that is known in Europe in the form of the Welsh *ll*. In all other Semitic languages, these sounds merged into other ones or changed so as to make them unrecognizable. Hebrew, however, did keep one of the lateral fricatives (*ś*) down into the historically attested period. It did later merge into [s] phonetically, but in classical spelling, it was still rendered with a sign different from *sāmekh*, viz., the same letter-shape as *šîn*, which shows that it was originally a different sound, and as the Tiberian

Masoretes invented a special diacritic for this "*śîn* pronounced as [s]" (i.e., the *śîn* dot), they effectively created a specific letter—*śîn* (שׂ)—for the inherited voiceless lateral fricative (even though they certainly did not pronounce it as one anymore, but as a simple [s]). In modern Semitics, the original pronunciation of this letter is agreed to have been the very [ɬ] known from Modern South Arabian.

The Lateral Background

So, how do we know that ancient (pre-Masoretic) Hebrew actually pronounced this sound (*ś*) as a voiceless lateral fricative [ɬ], the sound that it has in Modern South Arabian? We know it, partly, based on ancient transcriptions of Northwest Semitic words into Greek. The specific example which more or less proves it conclusively is the Greek word βάλσαμον ("balm," an English word itself borrowed from the Greek one, via Latin as an intermediary). This word, which was borrowed from a Northwest Semitic language (probably either Phoenician or Hebrew itself) appears in Hebrew as *bōśem*, "fragrance." Note here how the phoneme in the middle of the Hebrew word is rendered in Greek as -λσ-: i.e., the sound represented by *ś* sounded like something of a cross of an [l] and an [s] to Greek ears. This fits exactly with the sound we know today from Modern South Arabian: the lateral fricative [ɬ].[1] In fact, the "l and s" analogy is even more apt than that, as it appears that there are a number of isolated cases in which ancient Semitic languages

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[1] The βάλσαμον example (as well as some other relevant evidence), is succinctly presented in Leonid Kogan, "6. Proto-Semitic Phonetics and Phonology", in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, edited by Stefan Weninger et al., Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 36 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 54–151 (78–80). The classic study on the subject of lateral fricatives in Semitic is Richard Steiner, *The Case for Fricative-Laterals in Proto-Semitic*, AOS 59 (American Oriental Society: New Haven, 1977). A recent valuable contribution is Jan Keetman, "Die Triade der Laterale und ihre Veränderungen in den älteren semitischen Sprachen", *UF* 41 (2009), 449–468.

actually misconstrued the *ś* phoneme as a sequence of an [l] and an [s] and re-segmented roots based on this.[2]

The other lateral fricative of early Semitic was the emphatic counter-part of *ś*. This Proto-Semitic phoneme, mostly rendered as **ṣ́*, seems originally to have been an ejective, preaffricated lateral fricative—a very complex sound which would be rendered in the International Phonetic Alphabet as [ˈɬʼ]. This sound was even more unstable than the unem-phatic one—it changed to other sounds in most Semitic languages. In Arabic, it became what is today mostly pronounced as a pharyngealized *ḍ* (even though a lateral pronunciation, apparently often [ɮˤ] or similar sounds, seems to have been general in medieval times and is kept in some reading traditions and dialects to this day).[3] In Aramaic, the sound evolved into something that was rendered with the letter *qôph* in earlier texts and the letter *'ayin* in later ones, a fact to which we will be re-turning in greater detail soon. The same development seems to be in ev-

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[2] One example is probably present in the Aramaic verb *slq*, "to go up," with its anomalous imperfect, in which *-sl-* appears as *-ss-*. See Leonid Kogan, *Genealogical Classification of Semitic: The Lexical Isoglosses* (Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2015), 387 (with further references), where it is pointed out that this strange morphophonological behavior—in connection with the possibility that the root is connected etymologically with Akkadian *šaqû(m)*, "rise, ascend"—suggests that it did in fact contain an original **ś* which was misunderstood and resegmented as a sequence of [s] and [l] in some verbal forms but not in others. In footnote 1111 on the same page, Kogan mentions another example (Jewish Babylonian Aramaic *'arsĕlā'*, meaning "hammock", from earlier **'arś-*), which is also analyzed in Steiner, *Fricative-Laterals*, 130–136.

[3] The phonological history of the Arabic version of the phoneme (and the pre-modern data for its realization) is well delineated in Ahmad Al-Jallad, *A Manual of the Historical Grammar of Arabic: Notes on Key Issues in Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax (version 2020-1)*, available from academia.edu, 49–52. See also Kogan, "Phonetics", 72–75. For specifics on modern preservation of the lateral emphatic in Arabic, see Barry Heselwood et al., "Lateral Reflexes of Proto-Semitic **ḍ* and **ḏ̣* in Al-Rubūʿah Dialect, South-West Saudi Arabia: Electropalatographic and Acoustic Evidence", in *Nicht nur mit Engelszungen: Beiträge zur semitischen Dialektologie: Festschrift für Werner Arnold zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Renaud Kuty et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2013), 135–144.

idence in the famous cladistic conundrum that is the Deir 'Allā inscription, which uses the <*q*> spelling.[4]

An important word containing this historical phoneme, one that will be quite central to the arguments of the present article, is the word for "land," "earth," or "netherworld," the word appearing in Hebrew as *ʾereṣ*. The cognate of this word in Arabic is *ʾarḍ^{un}*, and in Aramaic (in the definite state), it is *ʾarqā*ʾ in the earlier spelling and *ʾarʿā*ʾ in the later one—the fact that these words have these sounds where Hebrew has *ṣādēh* is a definite sign that the emphatic lateral fricative appeared here—thus, the word originally was ***ʾarṣ̌-*. In Hebrew, the sound fell together with *ṣādēh*, and it is thus we find it in the expression *ʾereṣ yiśrāʾēl*, "the Land of Israel," which forms part of the name of this article. Already at this juncture, we may note that this expression includes one actual and one at least historical lateral fricative: both an actual *ś* and the reflex of the historical **ś̌*. Thus, when looking for sound-playing lateral fricatives in "the Land of Israel," I mean that quite literally. We shall return to this expression later in the article.

The fact that the Semitic lateral fricatives were very unstable sounds in many branches of the language family can be seen in the history of the word for the numeral "three," the word that ends up in Hebrew as *šālôš*. This word originally began with a lateral fricative, which can be seen in the Ancient South Arabian (Sayhadic) branch of Semitic—in Sabaic, belonging to that branch, the word is preserved as *ślṯ*, that is, it started with a lateral fricative, then the normal lateral *l*, and finally an interdental fricative (*ṯ*, phonetically [θ], the sound of English "th" in "thing"); with vowels, the word would have sounded something like [ɬalaːθ-], which is quite a tongue-twister. This early Semitic form was al-

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[4] As noted already in the classic study of Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā*, Harvard Semitic Series 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1984), 111–112. The spelling of the historical emphatic lateral with a <*q*> also appears in Samʾalian, see Paul Noorlander, "Samʾalian in its Northwest Semitic Setting," *Orientalia* 81 (2012), 202–238 (209–210).

tered in both Arabic and Northwest Semitic: both remade it into *t̠lt̠* (i.e., phonetically [θal:aθ-]), with the lateral fricative dissimilated from the "normal lateral" [l] and assimilated to the interdental.[5] This word still appears as *t̠alāt̠-* in Classical Arabic, as *šālôš* in Hebrew, as *t̠lt̠* in Ugaritic and as *t̠ĕlāt* in Aramaic. The lateral fricative in this hard-to-pronounce word has been assimilated and dissimilated away—this is certainly due to the complex original form of the word itself, but also to the inherent instability of the lateral fricatives as such.

This instability is key to understanding the use of these phonemes as tools of creative wordplay in the Hebrew Bible. The very "strangeness"

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[5] I also describe this relationship (and the phonetic realization thereof) in Ola Wikander, *Ett hav i mäktig rörelse: Om de semitiska språken* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2019), 96, 158; cf. Stefan Weninger, "7. Reconstructive Morphology," in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, edited by Stefan Weninger et al., Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 36 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 151–178 (166–167). Incidentally, this change in Northwest Semitic and Arabic (the "classical" Central Semitic languages) is a possible sign that the Sayhadic languages, which have lately often been classified as Central Semitic rather than as "South Semitic," is actually somewhat less close to Northwest Semitic and Arabic than this reclassification would suggest. As I argue based on other points in Ola Wikander, "The Call of **Yaqtulu*: The Central Semitic Imperfective, Nominalisation, and Verbal Semantics in Cyclical Flux", *UF* 50 (2019 [2020]), 435–451 (444, n. 16), it may well be the case that Sayhadic stands between the Central Semitic and the "South Semitic" languages, so to speak, or more specifically, that it shared a period of development with the other Central Semitic languages but left that fold earlier than the breakup into Proto-Arabic and Proto-Northwest Semitic, and thus is only Central Semitic in a wider sense. One piece of evidence supporting this is the fact that the Ge'ez (traditionally "South Semitic") also preserves a reflex of the lateral fricative in the word for "three." All of this, however, presupposes that the assimilation/dissimilation in the "three" word in Arabic and Northwest Semitic was a common innovation and not two separate developments. One may note that some Sayhadic languages (other than Sabaic) *do* show such a change, which shows that it could happen in other places as well (and may have spread as an areal feature). See Norbert Nebes and Peter Stein, "Ancient South Arabian," in *The Ancient Languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia*, edited by Roger D. Woodard (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145–224 (159).

of the sounds within the phonological system of Hebrew made them excellent implements for a sort of literary use that—in a very complex and sophisticated way—could combine euphonics with a kind of early analysis of the sound system itself. And, as we shall see, this type of wordplay probably has an earlier pedigree within the history of the Northwest Semitic subfamily. It thus provides an example not only of exegetically important literary usage, but also of proto-linguistic awareness and, as I shall argue, of an inherited pattern of early Northwest Semitic poetics. The three are, indeed, one. The "lateral wordplay" was a feature that could be employed both in the context of literarized, prophetic utterance and, as we will see further on, in the very phrase "the Land of Israel" itself—giving the function of this technique direct and central relevance for the history of Judahite theology and ethnic self-understanding.

Jeremiah 10:11, Sound-Law Play with the Emphatic Lateral, and the "Son of Darkness" in the Baal Cycle

Our first example is actually not from Hebrew itself, but from one of the Aramaic parts of the biblical canon: the isolated verse Jer 10:11, which is remarkably not part of the major Aramaic passages, but is inserted into a longer passage wholly in Hebrew. This verse, as we shall see, includes not only a piece of sound-play based on old lateral fricatives, but one toying with historical sound developments in a highly sophisticated way.

   This case of "lateral sound-play" is interwoven with another complex question of Hebrew historical phonology: that of the realization of the emphatic phonemes at various points in the history of the language. My own position is that, whereas the emphatics in Northwest Semitic started out as ejectives, they were on the way to developing pharyngealization or some sort of "backing" as a phonetic correlate of emphasis already in Antiquity—and the emphatic lateral fricative *$\acute{s}$, in many ways

the least stable sound of all in the Semitic family, is a case in point.[6] As mentioned earlier, Aramaic treated the emphatic lateral fricative in a different way than did Hebrew: turning it into a back phoneme written using the letter *qôph* in older texts and with and *ʿayin* in younger ones. This is the historical sound being played with in the text we shall now be discussing.

Often, when the difficult question of the realization of emphatic phonemes in Semitic languages is discussed, there is a tacit presupposition that every (stage of a) language must have one such realization for all the different emphatic phonemes. This, in my view, is not a warranted belief, and the Aramaic spellings of the reflex of the $*\acute{s}$ phoneme reflect this issue. The common modern interpretation of these spellings (with which I concur) is that they represent a sort of back dissimilation of the historical emphatic affricate [ʦ̬'], passing through something like [ᵏʦ̬'] or [ᑫʦ̬'] and ending up first as something like [ᑫχ'] (written with *qôph*) and subsequently being identified with /ʁ/, i.e. *ġayin* (and, by implication, finally *ʿayin*, as *ġayin* later collapsed into that sound not only in orthography but in pronunciation as well).[7] We shall now look at a literary example of this principle in action. This, as mentioned, is the biblical verse Jer 10:11 which, in one and the same verse, famously includes two different spellings of the word meaning "earth," Proto-(Northwest) Semitic *ʾarṣ́-*, in the Aramaic singular definite state: *ʾarqāʾ* in one poetic half-line, and *ʾarʿāʾ* in the next. The verse runs:

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[6] For my previously published views on the question of the emphatics in Northwest Semitic, see Ola Wikander, "Emphatic, Sibilants and Interdentals in Hebrew and Ugaritic: An Interlocking Model," *UF* 46 (2015): 373–397. The views presented there are partly revised and fine-tuned in my forthcoming article "A Tale of Ṭēths, Thētas and Coughing Qôphs: Emphatics and Aspirates in Northwest Semitic, Greek and Egyptian," which is in many ways a kind of partner and *Gegenstück* to the present article. I refer the reader there (and to the 2015 article) for additional and more detailed ideas of mine on the developments of the emphatics specifically.

[7] For a succinct presentation of a possible model for these developments, see Kogan, "Phonetics," 99.

Kidnâ tēʾmĕrûn lĕhôm
ʾĕlāhayyāʾ dî-šĕmayyāʾ wĕʾarqāʾ lāʾ ʿăbadû
yēʾbadû mēʾarʿāʾ ûmin-tĕḥôt šĕmayyāʾ ʾēlleh

Thus you shall say to them:
"The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth—
may they perish from the earth, and from below the heavens."

The well-known verse Jer 10:11 suggests, I propose, a pronunciation in flux, in which the (older) *qôph* spelling represents a glottalized affricate [ᑫχʼ] or [ᵏxʼ], and the *ʿayin* (or, rather, *ġayin*, as the sign was certainly bivalent as this time) spelling represents something like [ᶜʁ], with the glottalization having switched (in this phoneme) to voicing.[8] Aramaic would have borrowed the <*q*> letter from Phoenician at a time when that language had [kʼ], i.e., an ejective emphatic, as the normal realization thereof, as well, but later, Greek data suggests, backing became a main sign of Phoenician /q/—this is suggested by the fact that the Greek descendant of the letter <*q*> (the rare letter *qoppa*) is mainly found before the back vowels /u/ and /o/.[9]

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[8] One notes with some interest that already Carl Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, Band I: Laut- und Formenlehre* (Berlin: von Reuther & Reichard, 1908), 134, and, following him, Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1927), 26 (§6c), argued some sort of voiced stop as the pronunciation of the Aramaic reflex of **ṣ́* (they all call it a "velar" stop, but probably mean "uvular"), which is somewhat similar to the velar/uvular affricates argued here—but they thought that it was the <*q*> spelling that indicated the voiced stage in the development. They do, however, add the idea that some sort of voiced velar fricative was a "Zwischenstufe," as Bauer and Leander put it, on the way to the full identification with *ʿayin*.

[9] See Roger D. Woodard, "*Phoinikēia Grammata*: An Alphabet for the Greek Language," in *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient Word*, edited by Egbert J. Bakker (Chichester, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 25–46 (29–30). For further arguments concerning this and related matters, see my forthcoming "A Tale of Ṭēths, Thētas and Coughing Qôphs." The /u/ and /o/-phenomenon for the use of *qoppa* in early Greek is discussed in greater detail there. One possible objection to my analysis that this phenomenon points to a development

The verse from Jeremiah suggests not only that the Aramaic sound in question was in flux, but also that the author of the line was at some level aware of that state of affairs. Noting an ongoing sound change and actually using it for creative, literary purposes shows quite a high degree of sophistication—the acoustic difference was used for poetic effect. This is the main point that we shall be discussing in this section.

This is not the only time such a difference has been employed for the purpose of poetic word play in ancient Northwest Semitic literature. One famous instance can be found in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, when it appears that the vacillating reflexes of the Proto-Semitic emphatic inter-dental fricative in Ugaritic (another notoriously unstable phoneme) are co-opted for a similar purpose, when the text seems to play with the two variants *ġlmt* and *ẓlmt*—both probably meaning "darkness" and occurring in the phrase *bn ġlmt/ẓlmt* ("the Son of Darkness," plausibly explained as an epithet of the God of Death, Mot).[10] One possible explanation for this type of "doublet play" is that both variants existed at the same time in different specific speech communities, and that the author took advantage of this as a stylistic touch.[11]

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towards backing of Phoenician *qôph*, formulated by A. Z. Foreman (pers. comm.), is that the Greek use before these vowels could have to do instead with a "syllabic" interpretation of the name of the letter *qoppa* itself, i.e. /qo/. This model would not explain the use before the other back vowel /u/, however.

[10] The passage is KTU 1.3 VI 7–9.

[11] Thanks to Aljoša Šorgo for pointing this factor out. It should, by the way, be noted that using the opposition between more archaic and more innovative linguistic versions of a specific feature for poetic purposes is certainly not an uncommon phenomenon cross-linguistically (and, indeed, oft-occurring in modern language poetry as well). For one typological parallel, see the varying between older and more recent forms of gerundive forms in Tocharian B for metrical reasons—on this, see Hannes A. Fellner, "The Tocharian Gerundives in [B]-*lle* [A]-*l*," in *Usque ad Radices: Indo-European Studies in Honour of Birgit Anette Olsen*, edited by Bjarne Simmelkjær Sandgaard Hansen et al., Copenhagen Studies in Indo-European 8 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2017), 149–159 (151).

There is another similar case of two probable reflexes of the same proto-root in Ugaritic being used parallelistically—in KTU 1.12 I 36–37, where the verb *mẓ'* ("to encounter," "to meet," "to reach") is used in direct poetic parallel with *mġy*, "to come," which is probably a variant of the same original root (note that the unstable Ugaritic phoneme *ẓ*—the old emphatic interdental fricative, which sometimes, and seemingly somewhat unpredictably—turns into *ġ*—is involved here as well).[12]

The existence of this type of wordplay in the Ugaritic literature heightens the analytical and typological probability of something similar obtaining in the Aramaic phrase in Jeremiah (as opposed to the discrepancy there just being a case of vacillating orthography). It appears likely that this type of "sound-law play" was a thing, so to speak, in Northwest Semitic poetry. Leslie C. Allen refers to the occurrence in Jeremiah as a "stylistic dissimilation"; he notes that both spellings of the "earth" word appear in Egyptian Aramaic papyri from the 400s BCE, but I would argue that their co-occurrence in a single verse hints at something deeper (as, indeed, Allen's own suggestion of "stylistic dissimilation" seems to do as well).[13]

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[12] See Kogan, *Genealogical Classification of Semitic*, 265, with n. 738, 739. On the famous conundrum of the Ugaritic "come" word (which appears to show not only the *ẓ* > *ġ* change but a wholly unparalleled switch from III-*'āleph* to III-*y*), I would like to suggest the following. If the switch to <*ġ*> is indicative of "backing" starting to appear as a realization of (at least some of) the emphatic letters in Ugaritic, the final *'āleph* of the original root *mẓ'* may have been reinterpreted as an extended part of the glottal release of the "old" glottal emphatic (perhaps through the beginning obsolescence of that feature), and when the letter switched to a uvular realization, the glottal was thus swallowed in the change, necessitating a switch of the resulting to another weak category, namely III-*y*. The answer to the problem must lie in the peculiar form of the old version of the root itself, which would have been extremely glottal-prone in its earliest forms. Such a development could, in fact, in itself be a sign of glottalization starting to dissolve as a separate co-articulation (first reinterpreted and conflated with the actual following glottal stop, then "swallowed" into a uvular fricative).

[13] Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2008), 128.

A Chiasm of Sounds

Another—and rather dramatic—sign of a conscious poeticizing of the sounds of Jer 10:11 (also noted by Allen) is the chiastic structure of the verse, and the similarity of the words *'ĕlāhayyā'* and *'ēlleh* on the one hand and *'ăbadû* and *yē'badû* on the other. The chiastic structure of the verse is also noted by Noam Mizrahi, who sees the verse as typical of fifth century BCE Official Aramaic.[14]

The chiasm is not only based on content but, importantly for our purposes, very much centers on the sounds of the constituent words. The words are clearly set up to match each other phonologically—and, as we shall see, this is done not only on one level, but two.

The "phonetic chiasm," according to the MT, is as follows (with the matching words set up next to each other):

'ĕlāhayyā'	⟷	*'ēlleh*
šĕmayyā'	⟷	*(tĕḥôt) šĕmayyā'*
'arqā'	⟷	*'ar'ā'*
'ăbadû	⟷	*yē'badû*

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[14] Noam Mizrahi, *Witnessing a Prophetic Text in the Making. The Literary, Textual and Linguistic Development of Jeremiah 10:1–16*, BZAW 502 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 114. He also explicitly notes the wordplay between *'ăbadû* and *yē'badû*. Mizrahi argues (202) that the Aramaic-language verse was inserted in the mid-fifth century BCE based on Persian propaganda. As mentioned, he dates the verse securely to the Official Aramaic period (Chapter 3, §3.4) and mentions the interplay between the two spellings of the historical emphatic lateral as typical of fifth century Aramaic prose. The use of Aramaic in the verse is argued to represent a result of the interplay between "in-group" speakers of Hebrew and "out-group" speakers of Aramaic in relationship to monotheism and "idolatry"; originally, Mizrahi argues, the Aramaic phrase was quoted from a different source, the language carrying no special significance, while the choice of language later became important in the context of an identity as a "House of Israel" that was becoming bilingual but wanted to contrast Hebrew and Aramaic (Chapter 3, §6). Personally, I have no problem with the suggestion that the verse originally came from a different source; however, for the reasons given in the main text, I think that the choice of Aramaic (or, if the quotation suggestion is true, the keeping of the quotation in Aramaic) is anything but coincidental.

In graphical form, we can illustrate the higher-level chiasm in the fol-
lowing way:

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┌   ĕlāhayyāʾ
│       dî-šĕmayyāʾ
│  ┌        wěʾarqāʾ
│  │  ┌         lā ʿăbadû
│  │  └         yěʾbadû
│  └        měʾarʿāʾ
│       (ûmin-těḥôt) šĕmayyāʾ
└   ʾēlleh
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These chiasms suggests that the *ʾarqāʾ*/*ʾarʿāʾ* doublet (for actual *ʾarᵃχʾāʾ*—
ʾarʿʁāʾ) is quite consciously chosen. As we shall see, it is rather probable
that this and the other sound play effects were one of the reasons—or
perhaps even the main reason—for this single verse being in Aramaic
instead of Hebrew.

Reconstructing the Jerermiah 10:11
Phonetic Chiasm Even Further

The only somewhat anomalous doublet in this series in *šĕmayyāʾ* ⟷
(*těḥôt*) *šĕmayyāʾ*—due to the same word recurring twice, as opposed to
the more complex parallelisms in the other cases. I would like cautiously
to suggest the possibility that this is a corruption of an original doublet
šĕmayyāʾ ⟷ *těhômayyāʾ* ("heavens—deeps"), which would fit the con-
text—in an especially fitting way, as it creates an adversative chiastic
parallelism between "heavens" and "deeps" (quite similar to the one be-
tween *ʿăbadû* and *yěʾbadû*, "they [did not] make—may they perish").
One thinks here of Scott Noegel's discussion of meristic divine creation
"from the heavens all the way to the underworld," so to speak, as a com-
mon form in Ancient Near Eastern theological thinking (an idea he ar-
gues is present even in Gen 1).[15]

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[15] Scott B. Noegel, "God of Heaven and Sheol: The 'Unearthing' of Creation," *HS*
58 (2017), 110–144. Cf. the Ugaritic collocation known from the Baal Cycle: *tʾant šmm*

The form *tĕhômayyā'* is known from Targumic Aramaic (and the word *thwm* is known from numerous other Aramaic dialects), and it is not unthinkable that it may have been present in the Imperial dialect of Jer 10:11 as well (especially probable in an Israelite context, as the *-ô-* vowel betrays its origin as a Hebrew loan—a native Aramaic word would have had an *ā*).[16] *Tĕhômayyā'* would fit well with the attested *tĕḥô(t šĕ)mayyā'*, with a simple graphic mix-up of *h* and *ḥ*, and the *wāw* mater would fit perfectly.

With this conjecture in place, the chiasm becomes (I have added a reconstruction of the phonological forms of the "earth" words as they approximately would have sounded at the time of composition):[17]

ĕlāhayyā'	⟷	*'elleh*
šĕmayyā'	⟷	*tĕhômayyā'*
'arᵈχ'ā'	⟷	*'arᶜʁā'*
ʿăbadû	⟷	*yē'badû*

'm 'arṣ / thmt 'mn kbkbm ("a talk between Heaven and Earth / of the Deeps with the stars", KTU 1.3 III 24–25), which shows the parallelistic and meristic relationships quite clearly.

[16] The "deep" word has been argued to be known from Imperial Aramaic in an attestation from the Aramaic-language section of the fourth century BCE Lycian-Greek-Aramaic Letoon/Xanthos trilingual (see HALOT, s.v. *tĕhôm*, and the edition in André Dupont-Sommer, "La stèle trilingue récemment découverte au Létôon de Xanthos: le texte araméen", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 118 [1974], 132–149 [137, line 23]), as the name of a god. However, this reading has been challenged: see, for example, Javier Teixidor, "The Aramaic Text in the Trilingual Stele from Xanthus", *JNES* 37 (1978): 181–185 (185). The online *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* database (http://cal.huc.edu/) records its presence in Qumran Aramaic, early Targumic, Galilean, Palestinian Targumic, Samaritan Palestinian, Syriac, Babylonian Aramaic of the magic bowls, Late Jewish Literary Aramaic, and Mandaic, Jewish Babylonian (Talmudic) Aramaic, as well as Gaonic Babylonian Aramaic. Notably, Imperial Aramaic is not mentioned there.

[17] The rest of the text is, however, kept in Masoretic vocalization for simplicity—the vocalic system would have been rather different when the text was written.

In such a context, the *’arqā’* ⟷ *’ar‘ā’* (= *’arᵍχ’ā’* ⟷ *’arᶜʁā’*) doublet would fit like hand in glove. This is not simply a chiasm of meaning, but of sound as well. It creates a nice parallel (of a sort) with the *‘ayin-’āleph* interchange between *‘ăbadû* and *yē’badû*. Using the—etymologically identical though differently realized—versions of the "earth" word (**’arṣ̌-*) together in this way in a way reminds one of the principle of "phono-semantic matching," a term for the process in which a borrowed word is chosen not only based on its meaning but also on its phonetic similarities to existing lexical material in the receiving language.[18] If one of the historically divergent forms was in fact "internally borrowed" from a synchronically existing but phonetically subtly different form of Aramaic, this would in fact be exactly what is going on: the author "borrows" a word from a dialect just a tiny bit different from his or her own, but does this knowingly, matching the meaning of the word with the extreme similarity to the existing word in his/her own spoken dialect of Aramaic, and then uses this difference for poetic purposes. The other possibility would be the two variants just representing a spelling variation of a sound that was difficult or impossible to render using the normative orthography (as *ᵍχ’* or *ᶜʁ*), but to my mind, this is less plausible, as (a) the powers of orthographic normativity would probably have leveled such a difference out over time and (b) the *other* lines of the micro-poem include definitive cases of very similar sound-play (*’ĕlāhayyā’* ⟷ *’ēlleh*, *‘ăbadû* ⟷ *yē’badû*). Thus, an actual phonetic—and phonological—difference is more parsimonious here.[19]

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[18] On the concept of phono-semantic matching, see Ghil‘ad Zuckermann, *Language Contact and Lexical Enrichment in Israeli Hebrew*, Palgrave Studies in Language History and Language Change (Houndmills, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 34–37.

[19] I say this even though I generally am quite sympathetic to the methodological attitude taken by Craig Melchert, *Anatolian Historical Phonology*, Leiden Studies in Indo-European 3 (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), 2, that not every orthographic variation in an ancient language should be ascribed to actual phonological difference, "prefer[ring] rather to seek first an orthographic motivation ... and to admit linguistic variation only when absolutely necessary."

Again, this complex historical word play needs to be in Aramaic to work—and with the "heavens-deeps" conjecture added to the mix, that fact becomes even more pertinent. In Hebrew, the plural of *tĕhôm* is *tĕhômôt*, which would not work at all as a soundalike for *šāmayim* ("heavens"). In Aramaic, however, *šĕmayyā'* ⟷ *tĕhômayyā'* (the latter form known from later forms of Aramaic) works excellently.

Some commentators have argued that our verse is simply a later explanatory Aramaic gloss or scribal insertion;[20] another perspective is that of Holladay, who argues similarly to what I do here: that the chiastic and punning structure of the verse is a sign of the verse being early and the choice of language quite deliberate.[21] He did not, however, discuss the detailed implication of the dual spellings of the historical emphatic lateral; I thus submit that this factor provides strong support for the view that the verse is quite consciously constructed both in content, choice of language and in the way in which it toys with an ongoing phonological development. The author of the verse seems to have been aware of a sound-law in the process of operating (similarly to the Baal Cycle passages mentioned above), using it to make a poetic point. The fact that both the Ugaritic and Aramaic texts independently use this technique may, as mentioned, be a sign that this type of meta-linguistic playfulness goes back to early Northwest Semitic poetic diction, follow-

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[20] Thus, for example, John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 324, n. 9; 330; and John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday. 1965), 77, n. d. A similar position is taken by Noam Mizrahi (see above, n. 14). The idea goes back to Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901), 101, who sees the introduction of the Aramaic "Randbemerkung" as a sign of "die Kritiklosigkeit der Abschreiber und Redaktoren" (!). One may note with some interest that Duhm also notices the wordplay on *'ĕlāhayyā'* ⟷ *dî-šĕmayyā'* and *'ăbadû* ⟷ *yē'badû*.

[21] William A. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986), 324–325, with further references.

ing the classical historical linguistic dictum: "Durch zweier Zeugen Mund, wird alle Wahrheit kund."[22] In fact, we will look at yet another example in the final outlook of the present article (one involving the Song of Deborah).

As Holladay notes,[23] Jer 10:11 talks of gods who have not made the heavens and the earth in a way that seems to invoke the old Northwest Semitic title "God, creator of the heavens and the earth," well-known from Gen 14:19 and numerous extra-biblical sources (famously represented in the Hittite—but originally translated from Canaanite—Elkunirša text); this also supports the notion that the poetic phrase hearkens back to Proto-Northwest Semitic poetic phraseology and technique.

I want to underscore, however, that I do not mean to imply that the verse would represent some sort of *ipsissima verba* of the prophet Jeremiah, nor that it must belong to an especially early stratum of the text. My point does, however, entail that even if it does represent an insertion, that insertion itself goes back to something earlier, possibly a traditional poetic phrase that needs to be in Aramaic in order for the phonological wordplay to function. It uses what appears to be a technique of Northwest Semitic poetics to play with the phonological developments of Aramaic itself and of its reflexes of that most unstable of sounds, the emphatic lateral fricative (as do the cases referred to from the Baal Cycle, using the emphatic interdental—its "partner in instability," so to speak). The break-down of these phonemes is turned into a poetic device by these Northwest Semitic poets.

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[22] This so-called *Principle of Postulation* goes back to August Fick, and is itself a variant of Goethe's statement "Duch zweier Zeugen Mund wird allerwegs die Wahrheit kund"; August Fick, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen: Ein sprachgeschichtlicher Versuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd ed., 1870)—the motto appears on the title page!

[23] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 334.

Another Example: Isaiah 1:14

The next example of "lateral sound-play" that we shall take a look at is from the first chapter of Isaiah—an interesting literary placement, given that it is a common stance that this initial chapter was one of the final elements to be added to the book, thus making this a relatively "late" instance of the phenomenon.[24] As we shall see, this is important given the question of relative phonology for the sound-changes discussed in this article.

The relevant verse—presented as words spoken by YHWH—runs:

> Ḥodšêkem ûmôʿădêkem śāněʾâ napšî
> Hāyû ʿālay lāṭōraḥ
> Nilʾêtî něśōʾ

> "Your moon-feasts and seasonal gatherings my *nefesh* hates,
> they have for me become a burden—
> I am too tired to bear them / I am tired out by bearing them!"

Here, the relevant sound-play on lateral sounds occurs in the last part of the tricolon—*nilʾêtî něśōʾ*, which also happens to be the exclamatory statement towards which the crescendo of the verse has been building: "I am too tired to bear them!" If we read the second word of this phrase in a more historically conservative pronunciation, the /ś/ is, or course, a lateral fricative, meaning that both words are made up of or start with consonantal sequences of the following structure (remembering that /l/ is the normal, most phonologically unmarked lateral sound in the language):

> *n* → lateral → *ʾāleph*

If one tries to pronounce *nil'êtî nĕśō'* with an [ɬ] for the /ś/ phoneme—even without considering the differences in vocalization which would have been there in pre-Masoretic Hebrew, one easily hears the intended sound-play, especially if one makes the effort of actually pronouncing the final *'āleph* of the second word (something the Masoretes would not have done but which is quite probable for the period in which the text was composed).

This repeated sequence of words—including a marked lateral phoneme in a sort of "consonantal rhyme" with an unmarked one, the normal [l]—highlights the exegetical import of the phrase and its role as the summit of the verse. It is, of course, no coincidence that it occurs in the final line of the tricolon, emphasizing its centrality. The sound-play and the poetic structure work as one. On a more purely exegetical level, the wordplay serves to underscore the close relationship between the two words: *nil'êtî nĕśō'*, "I am too tired to bear them / I am tired out by bearing them," becomes a unit by means of the echoing sounds. The heaviness and the tiredness are two sides of the same coin, and the phonology of the phrase underscores this in a highly sophisticated manner, as the two words are made up of echoing, similar phonological material. It is also noteworthy that one of the words in the first line of the verse, *śānĕ'â* ("hates"), also includes the lateral sound, serving as a sort of buildup to the main event, so to speak.

As an aside, one may note with some interest that the Targum Jonathan translation, which was done at a period when the sound-play was certainly no longer living (*śîn* having by that time lost its lateral realization and just being transformed into [s]) has lost the semantic integration as well. It translates the phrase as *'asgētî lĕmišbāq*,[25] "I have forgiven them many times," a theoretically possible rendering which is, however, rather contextually improbable and is rendered even less probable given the sound-play, which ties the two words together into an exegetical unit in a way that the Targumic understanding of the words

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[25] Text available at https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Isaiah.1?lang=bi.

does not. I would argue that it is probably no coincidence that this Targumic reinterpretation occurs at a point when the sound-play is no longer audible, and thus the phrase less held together by euphonic means.[26] This underscores how this type of phonological creativity (and the lack of understanding thereof) can have direct import for exegesis.

As mentioned, this rather clear instance of lateral sound-play is also important for the question of relative chronology. Isaiah 1 is usually regarded as the latest part of the book to be added to the whole, and yet, even such a late composition still includes a case of sound-play that demands that the lateral pronunciation of *śîn* was still alive and well (at least in some dialects or recitational milieux). One should note that a late, living lateral pronunciation of *śîn* is suggested by the Septuagint rendering of *kaśdîm* (or Armaic *kaśdā'ē*) as χαλδαῖοι.[27]

The Expression "the Land of Israel"

The Isaiah case we just looked at—with its repeating consonantal structure and use of the euphonic play to underscore a very important phrase—in a way constitutes a sort of proof of concept for the perhaps more astounding instance of lateral sound-play we now come to: the expression "the Land of Israel."

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[26] One could, theoretically, argue that it is significant that Targum Jonathan to this verse refers to the Israelite God using the circumlocution *mêmrî* ("my Word"), and that this could be a subtle hint referring to the wordplay; however, the phrase is common in the Targums and occurs numerous times in that very chapter, making a specific meaning here unlikely. On the phenomenon, including in the present verse, see Edward M. Cook, "The Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Targums," in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, edited by Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 92–117 (101–103).

[27] On this, see, e.g., Geoffrey Khan, *A Short Introduction to the Tiberian Masoretic Bible and its Reading Tradition*, Gorgias Handbooks (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2nd ed., 2013), 57.

The phrase *ʾereṣ yiśrāʾēl* is—perhaps surprisingly—not very common in the text of the Hebrew Bible. It occurs in Ezekiel, when describing the ideal dwelling-place of the returnees,[28] and in Chronicles. There is also one attestation in 1 Sam 13:19, mentioning that, due to the embargo on iron working instituted by the Philistines, there were no iron-workers to be found in "the Land of Israel," and the phrase also appears in 2 Kings 5:2, 4 and 6:23. In later Jewish history, however, it of course becomes very important indeed, and still is today.

The usage of this phrase on the part of the Judeans (and Yehudite returnees) and their descendants is, from a religio-historical perspective, rather strange. This ties together with the much-debated question of why Judahites started—to an extent even earlier than the Exile, but especially after it, during the Persian period—to appropriate the name "Israel," traditionally the name of their northern enemy.[29] Arguments have been made for the role, specifically, of the tribe of Benjamin in creating this reinterpretation, and this may certainly be correct—but I would like to propose that an additional factor played a part in the process.[30] I will argue here that—at the literary level, at least—the choice of this phrase (or at least its spread and subsequent prevalence) is due in part to its phonological form.

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[28] On the use of the phrase in Ezekiel, see Wojciech Pikor, *The Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel*, LHBOTS 667 (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

[29] For an introduction to and discussion of this conundrum, see Lester L. Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Vol. 1: Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, LSTS 47 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 168–171. For the following, it may be interesting to note how Grabbe explicitly refers to the appropriation of "Israel" as a "literary or theological usage of some sort" (170), which fits well with the rhetorical/euphonic perspective taken here.

[30] On the question of the relationship between Judahite and Israelite identity in general, see, e.g., Andrew Tobolowsky, "Israelite and Judahite History in Contemporary Theoretical Approaches," *CurBib* 17 (2018), 33–58. The idea of the role of the Tribe of Benjamin was argued by Philip R. Davies, *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, LHBOTS 485 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), who saw the assuming of an Israelite identity on the part of the Judahites as a post-exilic phenomenon (see esp. chapters 7 and 8).

What I would like to present is the idea that the very form of the phrase *ʾ ereṣ yiśrāʾēl* was a factor in its adoption as a term for the land of the Judahites as well. As seen at the beginning of this article, the expression includes one, and perhaps two lateral fricatives: the *ś* in *Yiśrāʾēl* and perhaps the historical *ṣ́* that was once there in the "earth/land" word. As mentioned, Hebrew normally lost the emphatic lateral fricative *ṣ́* and merged it into *ṣ* in orthography as well as pronunciation, but it has been suggested by, for example, Tania Notarius that it may perhaps have been dialectally preserved in some forms of Hebrew speech.[31] One may note the much-discussed fact that the notoriously complex root meaning "to laugh" appears in Hebrew written both as *ṣḥq* and as *śḥq*, a variation that could perhaps imply an attempt to render a dialectally preserved

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[31] Tania Notarius, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Hebrew*, Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 234, n. 20. On similar conservatism in Aramaic, see eadem, "ʾq(n) 'wood' in the Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea: a Note on the Reflex of Proto-Semitic /*ṣ́/ in Imperial Aramaic", *Aramaic Studies* 4 (2006), 101–109. Gary A. Rendsburg, "Ancient Hebrew Phonology," in *Phonologies of Asia and Africa (Including the Caucasus)*, *Volume 1*, edited by Alan S. Kaye (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 65–83 (72), is noncommittal on the issue, saying that there is no positive evidence for the preservation of the emphatic lateral fricative into Hebrew but acknowledging that dialectal preservation is indeed a possibility. A similar position— skeptical to preservation of the emphatic lateral (as there is no separate spelling for it in Hebrew) yet acknowledging the possibility of its presence dialectally—can be found in idem, "Phonology: Biblical Hebrew," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics: Volume 3: P–Z*, edited by Geoffrey Khan et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 100– 109 (103), pointing to the Shibboleth story of Judg 12:6 as a sort of proof of concept for sounds being preserved in Hebrew dialects despite having no separate orthographic representation. Keetman, "Die Triade der Laterale," section 4 (with table), appears to accept an emphatic lateral for the very earliest stages of Hebrew (at least it is possible to read his table that way), but he makes no statement on the periodization of its preservation. However, he does state that, in his view, unemphatic *ś* had started to change to simple [s] at the point of the adoption of the alphabet, and at that "level" of his table, he does seem to indicate that the old emphatic lateral would also have lost its lateral feature.

ṣḥq.[32] What I will do here is to examine what could be the result if this was indeed the case, specifically for the "Land of Israel" phrase. In effect, what I will be doing is a sort of phonological "case-testing" to see what happens if one presupposes that the emphatic lateral was, in fact, dialectally preserved in this case.

What would this have meant? It would have meant that the phrase *ʾereṣ yiśrāʾēl* had a natural euphonic quality to it, rooted in the principles of "lateral sound-play" that we have seen in other places in this article and the oft-occurring love for phonic ornamentation known from ancient Northwest Semitic. If one just looks at the phonological form of the expression carefully, one finds a rather remarkable structure:

> *ʾrṣ yśrʾl*

Both words show a very similar phonological structure, but in opposite orders. In the first word, we start with a glottal stop (*ʾāleph*), then we find a *rēš* and then the (old) emphatic lateral fricative (*ṣ́*). The second one starts with a *yôdh*, but after this we find a lateral fricative (*ś*), a *rēš* and an *ʾāleph* (followed, strictly, by the most common lateral, *l*). Thus, the structure is:

> *ʾāleph-rēš*-(old) lateral → lateral-*rēš*-*ʾāleph*

The two words making up the expression thus form virtual inverses of one another. Both words include lateral fricatives, a glottal stop and a rhotic, but in opposite orders. The second word is, in effect, a poetic in-

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[32] Though one should not discount the possibility of a dissimilation being in evidence here. Thanks to Benjamin Suchard for a discussion concerning this root and its phonological interpretation. Tania Notarius (see previous footnote) also uses this root as an argument for a dialectal preservation of the lateral emphatic in Hebrew. Richard Steiner, *Fricative-Laterals*, 117, also seems to reckon with the possibility that the emphatic lateral was there beneath the surface, so to speak, in the Hebrew "laugh" root as well (in "early Biblical times", as he puts it), written using *ṣ*, and that the variant with *ś* was created out of it by dissimilation. Kogan, "Phonetics," 78, mentions the possibility with a question mark.

version of the first one. One could well refer to it as a sort of "phonetic chiasm."

This, I argue, would have increased the euphonic effect of the phrase. For a sort of parallel to this structure (though not involving lateral fricatives in that case) can famously be found in the two initial words of the Hebrew Bible, the *bĕrē'šît bārā'* of Gen 1:1, which both include the sequence *bēt → rēš → 'āleph*, which is certainly not by chance. Another similar case is the *'am 'ămōrâ* ("Gomorrah-people") of Isa 1:10—incidentally from the same chapter that includes the "I am too tired to bear them"-phrase that we looked at in the previous section, which is certainly not a coincidence but shows an author highly skilled at this type of poetic wordplay.[33]

This means that the historical Semitic laterals appear to have influenced the "rhetorical efficiency" of this highly religio-historically important phrase. What could this have meant in practice? It would have meant that the phrase was especially well suited for recitation, for political or religious oratory exhortations, for memorization. If one wants a rallying call, a "slogan," so to speak, to which to attach one's national and/or religious aspirations, this type of euphony quite helpful—one is reminded of such famous phrases as *Liberté*, *Egalité*, *Fraternité* (which uses the identical and rhyming derivational ending of the three words to great effect).

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[33] Although the Isa 1:10 case is, it must be granted, somewhat less clear-cut, as it is quite probable that the name of Gomorrah still had the historical *ġayin* at the point of composition of that text, turning it into more of a sort of "soundalike-ism" than one of identical sounds (unless, of course, one wants to argue the position that this verse in fact suggests an early instance of the *ġayin-'ayin* syncretism). Another interesting case (not involving laterals) from the beginning chapters of Isaiah is *ṣîḥê ṣāmā'* ("parched with thirst") from Isa 5:13; in that case, the two *ṣādēhs* go back to an emphatic affricate/ sibilant in the former case and an emphatic interdental in the latter, as shown, e.g., by Arabic cognates (cf. the relevant entries in *HALOT*), which fell together in Hebrew, making the wordplay work (in the latter case, Ugaritic *ġm'* is also definitive evidence, as its initial phoneme indicates a historical emphatic interdental).

If we reconstruct the phrase back to its earlier Hebrew phonology, we end up with something like this:

ʾarṣ yiśraʾel

If one pronounces this with lateral sounds, it is almost impossible not to hear the euphonic "echo" of the words.

Does this mean that the phrase was "invented" out of poetic whole-cloth, so to speak? No, probably not: rather, it would have been a matter of an existing phrase "sounding good" and thereby gaining ground as the political realities permitted—a fascinating piece of interaction of religio-political history (the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Exile, etc.) and phonologically influenced poetics. A poetic survival such as this implies that the expression was probably there beneath the surface for a while before becoming common in written literature—quite probable, as it would have been its euphony that helped it stick, so to speak. Also, given the lack of separate letters for the lateral(s), an oral (and aural!) background for the phrase is highly likely. The fact that the book of Ezekiel uses the phrase for the idealized land of the future returners in a way signals the emergence of a poetic national consciousness, turning the phrase into written literature.

I would actually argue that this enhanced euphonic property of the phrase can be used as a sign that the emphatic lateral was indeed present here and there in Hebrew. If one presupposes that it was, the rhetorical efficacy of the expression becomes that much greater. It should be noted, however, that even if the emphatic lateral fricative *ṣ́ was indeed dead and gone by the time of the rise of the expression, the co-occurrence in the phrase of the lateral *śîn*[34] and the lateral *l* of "Israel," in

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[34] I do not find it necessary to view the double use of the *šîn*/*śîn* letter as a sign that the non-emphatic lateral fricative *ś had switched to [s] already at the time of the adoption of the Hebrew alphabet, as does Keetman, "Die Laterale Triade," section 4. He argues that the orthographic overlap between *šîn* and *śîn* suggests a switch of *ś to a pure sibilant at an early point in Hebrew, but I find it quite probable that a voiceless lateral fricative would have sounded similar enough to a sibilant to have been written with that

combination with the chiastic *ʾālephs* and *rēšs*, on their own make for a euphonic phrase. This means that the possibility of a dialectally pre-served *ś* is not strictly *necessary* for the sound-play to work (it would work, though less impressively so, with sibilants/affricates)—on the contrary, as mentioned, the already proven sound-play may be used as an argument *for* such marginal preservation. The sound-play gets even stronger if the emphatic lateral is there.

There is, of course, the important question of relative chronology. It is often argued that the lateral pronunciation of *śîn* started to disappear in the exilic period (due to the increased amount of confusions between *śîn* and *samekh* in spelling),[35] but it must be stressed that this may in all probability have been a gradual process. The appropriation of "the Land of Israel" terminology probably started before the Exile and then grew in importance. In fact, the exilic time itself may well have provided the "perfect storm" for this development (even though its greater literary footprint came later, in Rabbinic literature): it provided the historical situation that "needed" it (cf. the use of the phrase in Ezekiel), yet it was early enough that the lateral fricatives could still be there. However, it is not the latest possibility—the example from Isa 1:14 above suggests that the lateral *śîn* was kept later than that at least in some milieux (note also the later development in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic—see above, n. 2); this means that the end of the Exile is not necessarily a *terminus ante quem* for the rhetorical development of the phrase "the Land of Israel" sketched above.

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sign, especially as *sāmekh* would have started to deaffricate from [ˈs] to a pure sibilant [s] during the lifetime of Classical Hebrew, which would make the traditional spelling with *śîn* more of an argument *against* an early pronunciation [s] for that letter (why not use *sāmekh* from a much earlier age for the old unemphatic lateral fricative if it had already become an [s]?). Indeed, the very fact that Hebrew *šîn* started to be pronounced (at some point or other, I would guess rather early) as [ʃ] rather than its probable Proto-Central Semitic pronunciation [s] is indicative of *sāmekh* having started to lose its affrication, as a chain-shift is probably going on here.

[35] E.g., Rendsburg, "Phonology," 73.

A Final Outlook: The Proto-Northwest Semitic Phrase *maḥaṣ́a naḥaša* ("he slew the Serpent"), Its Background as an Indo-European Borrowing, and Its Relevance for Indo-European Phonology

As a final point, I will look at a case of "lateral sound-play" at a level earlier than that of the Hebrew Bible (or the Ugaritic texts, for that matter). This is a case that is of relevance both for the history of Northwest Semitic poetic phraseology and—somewhat surprisingly—for the phonological history of early Indo-European as well(!). It builds on work I have previously done on poetic borrowings from Indo-European to Semitic (and, by extension, Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic).

The Ugaritic-Hebrew verb *mḫṣ/mḥṣ* ("to strike") has a complicated history.[36] In my 2017 book *Unburning Fame*, I used that verb as part of a reconstruction of a possible Proto-Northwest Semitic (or perhaps even earlier) poetic phrase related to the traditional terminology for stories about gods killing serpent monsters or dragons, a phrase of which descendants and continuations then recur in Hebrew and Ugaritic literature.

The underlying argument was that this phrase—which I reconstructed, on the basis of a number of Hebrew and Ugaritic textual entities, as *maḥaṣa naḥaša*, "he killed the Serpent"—may have represented a calque (loan-translation) of the early Indo-European phrase *$eg^{wh}ent\ og^{wh}im$* ("he killed the serpent"), reconstructed by Calvert Watkins as the basic form of the Indo-European dragon-slaying formula in his seminal work *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (1995) on the basis of many different Indo-European serpent-slaying myths and expressions, which he argued were linguistically and poetically descended from it. What I argued was basically that the many similarities between such

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[36] For an early and important study of this root (though now dated in certain respects), see Moshe Held, "*mḫṣ/*mḫš* in Ugaritic and Other Semitic Languages (A Study in Comparative Lexicography)," *JAOS* 79 (1959): 169–176.

Indo-European serpent-killing stories and the Northwest Semitic ones are no coincidence, but derive from an early loan from the former into the latter—and I thus posited that this borrowing actually took place at the phrase level.[37]

In the earlier publication, I reconstructed this Semitic phrase with an emphatic sibilant/affricate in the first word, as described: **maḥaṣa naḥaša*—arguing that the sequence nasal → guttural → sibilant in both words represents an attempt to create a sort of counterpoint (using different sounds) of the assonance or almost-alliteration of the two **gʷʰ-s* in the Indo-European phrase from which it was calqued. Deeper study of the phonology of the Semitic phrase suggests, however, that the situation was more complex—viz., that first word was originally not **maḥaṣa* but **maḥaṣá* (the similar roots **mḫṣ* and **mḫṣ*, both meaning something like "strike," having been conflated—see below for more on this).

If one looks at the Arabic and Sayhadic data (outside of Northwest Semitic) and possibly at Aramaic *mĕḥā'* (within it) on this Semitic verb, it appears quite clear-cut that the version of the verbal root to be reconstructed is one ending in the emphatic lateral fricative *ṣ́*.[38] In the Aramaic word (known already from Old Aramaic), the guttural sound that would have appeared at the end was apparently dissimilated from the *ḥ* (a somewhat anomalous development, it must be admitted—we shall look at another variant presently).

One rather spectacular instance of this word in the Hebrew Bible— quite possibly showing a similar "historical linguistic wordplay" to that

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[37] Ola Wikander, *Unburning Fame: Horses, Dragons, Beings of Smoke, and Other Indo-European Motifs in Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, ConBOT 62 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 60–67. The main textual entities on which I based my reconstruction are KTU 1.5 I 1–8; Deut 33:11; Judg 5:26; 2 Sam 22:39; Isa 27:1; Hab 3:13; Pss 18:39; 68:22; 110:5, 6; and Job 26:12. A mimation is quite possible: **naḥašam*.

[38] Many of the relevant forms of the root can be found in Kogan, *Classification*, 266 (with n. 741; see also 257). Kogan firmly goes with the reconstruction with an emphatic lateral as the final consonant, but note that he also lists Geʿez *maḥaṣa*, which is not the form clearly reflecting a lateral (cf. the main text above).

discussed above concerning the Jeremiah passage and two Ugaritic instances—can be found in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:26), which has *māḥăqâ rōʾšô* ("she struck his head"), with the *q*-spelling of **ṣ́* known from Old Aramaic (probably an Aramaic borrowing), immediately followed by *ûmāḥăṣâ* as a direct parallel, showing the "real Hebrew" spelling. Here again, different dialectal developments of the same phoneme are used for parallelistic poetic effect, just as we saw earlier, again underscoring the traditionality of this Northwest Semitic poetic technique.[39] Both forms, however, suggest a preform *mḫṣ́*, with an emphatic lateral fricative.

The image does become somewhat murkier, however, if one takes the Old Ethiopic data into account. In Geʿez, it appears that there are two(!) cognates of the relevant verb (*maḥaḍa*/*məḥḍa* and *maḥaṣa*), one of which matches up with Arabic in a rather surprising way: Arabic also has two parallel roots that seem relevant: *maḥaḍa* ("beat, churn butter") and *maḥaṣa* ("trample"). The complex situation is shown by the fact that Geʿez has forms with both *ḍ* (the old emphatic lateral) and *ṣ*, matching the two Arabic verbs—but only in the matter of that letter, as Geʿez consistently shows *ḥ*, not *ḫ* (though there is also *maḥaḍa*, "suffer labor pains").

As pointed out by Gábor Takács, there appear to have been two parallel Proto-Afroasiatic roots with a similar structure and meaning from an early period on, and these two roots seem to have influenced each other. The Proto-Afro-Asiatic provenance is suggested by the existence of a probable Egyptian cognate—*mḏḥ* ("to cut wood, to build by carpentry").[40]

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[39] On this duality (and on the Aramaic forms of the word in general), see Aaron Koller, "Hebrew and Aramaic in Contact," in *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Languages*, edited by Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 440–455 (441).

[40] Gábor Takács, *Etymological Dictionary of Egyptian, Volume III: m-*, HdO 1:48/3 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 857–861 (enumerating the above and many other relevant lexical forms). Note that Takács appears to think that the varying consonants in the Geʿez

What all this means is that the version I reconstructed in 2017, *maḫaṣa*, could in fact be possible as a conflated form reflecting both the preforms having falling together as one. Within Northwest Semitic, only the Aramaic form seems to be able to decide between the lateral **ṣ́* and affricate **ṣ* for the root in that sub-family, and that Aramaic form is rather anomalous, given the dissimilation of the *ʿayin* to *ʾāleph*. There is, however, the Song of Deborah version mentioned above, which would argue for the lateral fricative, if borrowed from early Aramaic. Both the variants of the root are present in Arabic and Geʿez, and seem to have influenced each other (as the Geʿez data indicates). However, the use of **ḫ* as opposed to **ḥ* in Ugaritic does tip the scales in the favor of **maḫaṣ́a* for early Northwest Semitic. Even though both roots may well have been there, being conflated along the way, the version with the lateral must probably be postulated as having been present in Proto-Northwest Semitic. And this gives us something to work with, especially important for the present purposes, as it then involves lateral sound-play.

Thus, we come to the really interesting part. If one reconstructs the Proto-Northwest Semitic phase with an emphatic lateral, the match with the proposed Indo-European loan-giver is even greater, as that sound is quite marked indeed, thus matching the poetic sound of the Indo-European **gʷʰ*. The Proto-Indo-European sound **gʷʰ* is one of the most marked and unstable sounds of that language family, much as the emphatic lateral fricative is in Semitic, making both excellent to use for poetic purposes. This opens up a fascinating possibility: that the early Semitic borrowing of the Indo-European phrase not only created an analogue of the quasi-alliteration of **egʷʰent ogʷʰim* (or, in more modern Indo-Europeanist terms, **egʷʰent h₃egʷʰim*) by way of the repeated nasal → guttural → sibilant(ish) structure that I argued in *Unburning Fame*,

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forms are simply due to spelling differences between *ṣ* and *ḍ* on page 858, but on page 859, the latter version—*maḫaḍa* or *məḥḍa*—is explicitly connected to the second root variant, though with "[irreg. -ḥ-]". To me, the easiest explanation is that yes, there were two root *Nebenformen*, but that these constantly influenced each other.

but also by using the most marked and disintegration-prone phoneme of the respective language, as does the Indo-European prototype (*g^{wh} in Indo-European, *$\acute{s}$ in Semitic). The sounds are images of one another, and serve the same poetic purpose.

This, in fact, becomes a supporting piece of evidence for the pronunciation of the Indo-European sound itself. There has been much discussion of whether or not the sounds reconstructed as breathy voiced stops in Proto-Indo-European were actually pronounced as such; it is especially unclear, as no single language actually preserves such a sound for *g^{wh} (it is a wholly reconstructed one). But if the present argument holds true, and the loan between Indo-European and early Semitic was indeed intended to emulate the sound-play of the original, the use of a highly marked, lateral sound with a special phonation-type—ejectivity/emphasis—supports the reconstruction of Indo-European *g^{wh} as a *highly-marked phoneme with a special phonation type: breathiness.*

The reconstruction thus illustrates poetic calquing through something similar to phono-semantic matching (as defined by Ghilʿad Zuckermann—see n. 18 above). What is "matched" here is not an existing word in the target language, but a sound pattern. As an additional and incidental result, this comparison supports the interpretation of *g^{wh} as a breathy-voiced, highly marked and complex phoneme (as opposed to suggestions questioning the breathy phonation),[41] as I argue that the choice of the complex (and unstable) Semitic sound *$\acute{s}$—with a special airstream mechanism as well as added affrication—represented a conscious way of imitating the dual (and to Semitic ears, "strange") occurrences of *g^{wh} in the PIE phrase. This is important from a methodological perspective as well, as it underscores how the study of inherited and borrowed poetic phraseology and formulae can shed light of the actual phonology and phonetics of the languages involved—even when discussing purely reconstructed proto-languages. Also, the fact that the history

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[41] For an example of a reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European without breathy consonants, see Robert S. P. Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics*, rev. by Michiel de Vaan (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 128. There are many others.

of a Northwest Semitic poetic expression can (indirectly) help with the phonetic reconstruction of an Indo-European one—and of the phonetics of early Indo-European—is rather astounding, illustrating the methodological fruitfulness of this type of comparative/interdisciplinary study of both a literary/traditio-historical and linguistic nature.

By the way, one could argue there may perhaps be an available *terminus post quem* for the adoption of the poetic phrase in Semitic. This is the semantic load of the word **naḥaš-*; as pointed out by Kogan, it seems that the specific meaning "snake, serpent" for this term developed at the Proto-Central Semitic level—or at least after the separation of East Semitic (which would mean at the West Semitic level). This is shown by the Akkadian (East Semitic) cognate of the word, *nēšu(m)*, meaning "lion" (!) (excepting a few interesting references, e.g. in *Gilgamesh*, to snakes as "lions of the ground"). This seems to imply the term originally had a wider meaning, like "beast" or "wild animal,"[42] and would imply that the borrowing was made after this semantic change.[43] It would, of course, be possible to imagine a more general poetic phrase meaning "he killed the beast," but that would not fit as neatly with the probable Indo-European *Vorlage*.[44]

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[42] See Kogan, *Genealogical Classification of Semitic*, 300, with n. 855 (he uses "wild animal," with a further reference to SED II no. 159 [*non vidi*]).

[43] One should note, however, that there are known instances of the opposite type of development. A very dramatic example indeed comes from the Tocharian branch of Indo-European, which appears to have expanded the inherited Indo-European term for "louse" into the general meaning "animal"—see, e.g., Václav Blažek, "Tocharian Linguistics During the Last 25 Years," in *Tocharian Studies*, edited by Michal Schwarz (Brno: Masaryk University, 2011) 2–9 (4), with further references (originally published in *Archív orientálny* 56 [1988], 77–81).

[44] The exact form of Indo-European that acted as the loan-giver into Semitic is certainly up for debate; it would probably not have been Proto-Indo-European itself, but some branched variety post-dating it. One possibility could perhaps be early Proto-Indo-Iranian, but an even more suggestive one would be Proto-Anatolian (the Anatolian branch being the one including Hittite, Luwian, Lycian, etc.). One problem here is that the "snake" word is not directly attested in Anatolian; however, there is the alluring

In Conclusion

In all of these cases, the attested biblical text shows us the traces of a once highly prominent—and marked—type of phoneme, which later

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suggestion that *illuyanka-*, the Hittite word for the snake of the chaos battle (and the one occurring with the reflex of $*g^{wh}en$-, the classical snake-killing word, in the Hittite serpent battle myth) is actually a compound of the word appearing in English as "eel" and a relative of the $og^{wh}i$-/$*h_3eg^{wh}i$- ("snake/serpent") word, thus meaning "eel-snake" (see Joshua Katz, "How to be a Dragon in Indo-European: Hittite *illuyankaš* and its Linguistic and Cultural Cogeners in Latin, Greek and Germanic," in *Mír Curad: Studies in Honor of Calvert Watkins*, edited by J. Jasanoff, H. C. Melchert, and L. Oliver, Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 92 [Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1998], 317–334; contra Alwin Kloekhorst, *Dictionary of the Hittite Inherited Lexicon*, Leiden Indo-European Dictionary Series 5 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 384). This, if true, would show that the "snake" word was there in the precursors to Anatolian, something that is generally probable, given the wide attestation of the word in other branches.

Another issue with the Anatolian possibility could be argued to be that the classical form of the snake-killing phrase needs the past-tense marking augment $*e$- or $*h_1e$- before the verb (known, e.g., from Greek and Sanskrit) to work euphonically and rhythmically: $*eg^{wh}ent\ og^{wh}im$ or $*h_1eg^{wh}ent\ h_3eg^{wh}im$ (by the way, the version of the phrase with $*h_3$ in the "snake" word works even better, as that sound may very well have been a labialized uvular or velar fricative, working excellently together with the $*g^{wh}$-s). The attested Anatolian languages, however, do not show the augment for past tense verbs (as a case in point, the Hittite version of the snake-killing myth shows simply *kuenta*, *mutatis mutandis* representing $*g^{wh}ent$). However, it has recently been impressively argued by Stefan Norbruis, *Indo-European Origins of Anatolian Morphology and Semantics: Innovations and Archaisms in Hittite, Luwian and Lycian* (doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden, 2021), 209–232, that there are actually signs of the augment having been present in pre-Proto-Anatolian—the main evidence being historically unexpected lengthened vowel grades in certain Anatolian past-tense forms. As pointed out to me by Aljoša Šorgo (pers. comm.), this would, if true, mean that a full, rhythmical and augmented phrase could well have been borrowed from an early version of the Anatolian branch of Indo-European. As for the receiving language being some form of West Semitic, the possible use of the suffix form in the Semitic phrase is also a supporting factor (as the rise of the perfective use of that form is a characteristic of that branch).

lost its distinctiveness. In some cases, the biblical authors even appear to be aware of the instability of the phoneme, using that fact for creative, literary purposes. And—even more astonishingly—in at least one case (the Jeremiah verse), the author seems to have been aware of the specific phonological developments of Aramaic (as opposed to Hebrew), choosing to use that language for that specific verse. And in another case, I have argued that the phonological shape of an ideologically and (subsequently) theologically loaded phrase—ʾereṣ yiśrāʾēl—which would originally have included not one but two lateral fricatives, would have facilitated the appropriation of that phrase by the Judahites (and later Yehudites). This form of sound-play also appears to help elucidate an early pattern of mythopoetic borrowing between the Indo-European and Semitic linguistic families in the matter of dragon-slaying, in a way that also says something about the phonology of the phrases in both loan-giver and receiver (Indo-European breathy-voiced $*g^{wh}$ being reflected by Semitic $*\acute{s}$ in the borrowed poetic phrase).

The use of lateral sound-play seems to have been a constant in West Semitic and Northwest Semitic poetic history—not unexpected, due to the instability of the sounds (especially the emphatic one). We have also looked at a number of cases in which the differing developments of unstable sounds such as these have been used creatively by Northwest Semitic poets (Hebrew, Aramaic and Ugaritic) for purposes of parallelism, suggesting that this was an inherited technique of Northwest Semitic poetics.

There were both S's and L's in the Land of Israel—and quite possibly something in between as well, and this, I argue, made the phrase memorable, relatable and suited for literary use. An old technique of wordplay was made to coincide with political developments in the history of the Judahite people. The history of Northwest Semitic phonology here overlaps with literary and historical study of the Hebrew Bible, illustrating how these fields can bolster and help each other.

There were many phrases around—there always are. But what made this phrase "stick"—was the S-and-L's of the Land of Israel.