



Abraham Jacob Berkovitz, Stuart W. Halpern, Alec Goldstein, eds. *Lexical Studies in the Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Inscriptions: The Collected Essays of Hayim Tawil*. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2012. \$39.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60280-216-2.

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Published on H-Judaic (February, 2013)

Commissioned by Jason Kalman

Comparative Lexicography Revisited

The charismatic teacher Moshe Held produced many disciples during his tenure at Columbia from the 1960s until his untimely death in 1984. Many of them have carried on his methods of comparative North Semitic typological and lexicographic studies, especially his signature contribution: the use of what he termed “inter-dialectal semantic equivalents” to explain difficult expressions in the Hebrew Bible and other Northwest Semitic inscriptions on the basis of Akkadian materials. By this is meant that words that have the same basic meaning in two culturally related languages may well share derived and idiomatic usages as well, even if they are not cognates.

One of the more productive of these students is Hayim Tawil, who recently published a monographic compendium of such ideas in *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (2009). The volume under review is a collection of his earlier essays, compiled by some of his students from Yeshiva University.

What characterizes this approach is that it privileges Akkadian sources over all others, even those that might be typologically or etymologically closer, such as Aramaic, while often glossing over substantive differences. Rarely is there an attempt to explain how and why such parallels might exist, other than, say, the Assyrian contexts of Isaiah of Jerusalem or the Babylonian ones of Deutero-Isaiah, or a careful distinction made between loan words and cognates. One frequently gets the impression that the sole reason for studying Akkadian is to generate such ideas rather than to master the literature and culture of ancient Mesopotamia for its own sake or

within the context of the ancient western Asia as a whole. Indeed, for many such students (and scholars!) in the early and middle years of the twentieth century this was undoubtedly true! Nonetheless, many of Tawil’s original suggestions have stood the test of time, even if an equal or even larger number have not, and it is convenient to have all of his detailed arguments collected here.

I was impressed in reviewing these articles to discover that in general I find his suggestions for dealing with epigraphic texts far more convincing than his efforts in biblical Hebrew lexicography. But upon reflection, that the former are primary texts while the latter have passed through the hands of many scribal correctors surely plays a role in this impression. Some of the more impressive suggestions are: *np̄c yd* in Daniel 12:7 as “a term of non-allegiance” (pp. 91-98); the discussion of the imagery of the “little sister” as a fortification in Song 8 (pp. 126-128); “A Curse Concerning Crop-Consuming Insects in the Sefire Treaty and in Akkadian: A New Interpretation” (pp. 311-319); *b’lmy* as “in my youth” in KAI 214:1 (Samalian) (pp. 278-280); and *qmw ʿmy* as “they aided me,” also in KAI 214:1 (pp. 278-280). (This is a good example where a more closely related text would have been useful and even more convincing: the Elephantine letter *TAD D7.1 5*—published in 1929—reads: *ʿzly qwmy ʿmh bswn ywm ʿznh* [go and assist him at Syene today].)

Unfortunately the editors have chosen to have all of the text reset rather than photographically reproducing the original articles. It appears that OCR was used, for the number of uncorrected misreadings—especially in the case of Semitic texts—is truly egregious, seriously mar- rying an otherwise useful volume.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

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Citation: Stephen Kaufman. Review of Jacob Berkovitz, Abraham; Halpern, Stuart W.; Goldstein, Alec, eds., *Lexical Studies in the Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Inscriptions: The Collected Essays of Hayim Tawil*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. February, 2013.

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