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Article in *Journal of Semitic Studies* · March 2008

DOI: 10.1093/jss/fgm042

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ON SOME ALLEGED DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PROTO-SEMITIC PHONEME /t/ IN IRON AGE CANAANITE DIALECTS*

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Abstract

This article takes issue with two proposals made in recent scholarship concerning the development of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ in Iron Age Canaanite dialects: 1) retention of this phoneme in the dialects of Transjordan, and 2) its merger with the phoneme /t/ in the Hebrew of northern Cisjordan. The article argues that both proposals are untenable. Proposal (1) is based on a problematic interpretation of Judg. 12:5–6 and of the spellings of an Ammonite royal name in an Ammonite seal impression (*b'lyš*) and in Jer. 40:14 (*Ba'ālīs*). Moreover, this proposal is contradicted by the evidence of Neo-Assyrian spellings of Transjordanian proper names, which testify to the merger of /t/ with /š/: ^{ur}*As-tar-tu* (the city of Ashtaroth) and likely also ^m*Ba-a'-sa* (a royal name which is argued to derive from the original root *b't*). Proposal (2) is contradicted by the evidence of Hebrew inscriptions from northern Cisjordan, which consistently render the Proto-Semitic /t/ with the letter š. It is possible that the phoneme /t/ was initially retained in the Hebrew of northern Cisjordan, but there is no positive evidence to support such a possibility. Hence, it is more reasonable to uphold the view that the merger of /t/ with /š/ was characteristic of all Iron Age Canaanite dialects.

How does one reconstruct the phonology of a language, whose speakers lived thousands of years ago? In the words of a recent reference book on comparative Semitic linguistics, 'The phonemes of ancient written Semitic languages are reconstructed on the basis of various indications, such as traditional pronunciation, description by mediaeval grammarians, transcriptions in other languages and scripts, orthographic peculiarities, and comparative Semitic linguistics' (Lipiński 1997: 106, §10.10).

* I wish to express gratitude to my teachers, Profs Mordechai Cogan and Steven E. Fassberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who read an earlier draft of this article and offered valuable remarks. Needless to say, the responsibility for all the views presented in this article is exclusively mine.

Of course, for those languages and dialects that did not survive beyond the ancient times, the first two criteria are irrelevant, and the remaining three are often not sufficient for a definite reconstruction — especially when the amount of textual evidence pertaining to a given language or dialect is scanty. Yet, even in such cases, careful attention to the available evidence and to the way in which it relates to the general edifice of comparative Semitic linguistics is often sufficient to allow at least a tentative reconstruction of the phonology of a poorly attested language or dialect. Or, looking at the other side of the same coin, such attention allows one to invalidate those possibilities of phonological reconstruction which do not fit the evidence, however circumscribed the latter may be. The purpose of the present article is to describe two cases, in which a careful consideration of the available evidence allows us to invalidate some proposals made about the development of the Proto-Semitic voiceless interdental /t/ in different Canaanite dialects of the Iron Age (1200–586 BCE).¹

I

The first case has to do with Canaanite dialects that were spoken to the east of the Jordan river: the Hebrew of the Israelite population in Transjordan, and Ammonite. The *locus classicus* for the notion that the Hebrew speech of Transjordanian Israelites differed from that of the inhabitants of Cisjordan is the ‘shibboleth story’ in Judg. 12:5–6:

Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. Whenever one of the fugitives of Ephraim said, ‘Let me go over’,

¹ It has to be noted that although ‘[c]urrent linguistics distinguishes sharply between speech and language, between sounds and phonemes’ (Lipiński 1997: 103, §10.7), the phonemic analysis of any given language cannot proceed without an attempt to define, at least approximately, the manner of articulation of the phonemes involved. The conventional reconstruction of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ as a voiceless interdental [θ] is based, first and foremost, on the traditional pronunciation of Classical Arabic. However, in Ugaritic, which had certainly retained /t/ as a distinct phoneme, there is some evidence supporting such reconstruction (Troppner 2000: 112–13, §32.114.19; and cf. *ibid.*, 119, §32.144.310).

Although all features of Proto-Semitic are, by definition, reconstructed, only those phonemes and morphemes, which are postulated for Proto-Semitic without being attested in the known Semitic languages, will be marked in the following discussion with an asterisk (*). The same mark will be used for those forms in known Semitic languages, which are not fully attested in extant sources but are reconstructed based on considerations of comparative Semitic linguistics (e.g., vocalized forms of words attested in West Semitic inscriptions of the Iron Age in consonantal spelling only).

the men of Gilead would say to him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' When he said, 'No', they said to him, 'Then say Shibboleth', and he said, 'Sibboleth', for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time.²

At first sight, the story appears to relate that the word pronounced as [šibbōlet] by the inhabitants of Gilead, the area of Israelite settlement in Transjordan,³ was pronounced as [sibbōlet] by the people of Ephraim, the inhabitants of the central hill-country of Cisjordan.

However, there is no certainty that the traditional (Masoretic) pronunciation of Hebrew, which underlies the forms *šibbōlet* and *sibbōlet* as they are apparent to the present-day reader of the Hebrew Bible, has correctly preserved the phonetic peculiarities of the Hebrew dialects of Gilead and Ephraim in the Iron Age.⁴ This uncertainty is due not only to the late date of the activity of the Masoretes (over a millennium after the end of the Iron Age), but also to the fact that the Masoretic pronunciation of Hebrew did not, in all likelihood, stand in a direct connection with the earlier dialects of Gilead and Ephraim. Hence, the phonemic structure of the word š/sibbōlet and the manner of the articulation of its first consonant by the populations of Gilead and Ephraim during the Iron Age have been matters of disagreement among scholars.⁵

One of the theories raised concerning the dialectal differences underlying the shibboleth story holds that in the spelling *šibbōlet* for

² Translation according to the NRSV.

³ This definition is somewhat oversimplified, since in most cases in the Hebrew Bible, the term Gilead is circumscribed to the area of Israelite settlement in Transjordan south of the Yarmuk river, while the area of settlement north of the Yarmuk river is specified as Bashan (see, e.g., Deut. 3:10–13, 4:43, Josh. 17:1–5, 1 Kgs 4:13). However, in a number of cases, the term Gilead is used in the Hebrew Bible with reference to the whole territory of Israelite settlement to the east of the Jordan river. Thus, in Deut. 34:1, YHWH shows Moses the whole land promised to Israel, including 'Gilead as far as [the city of] Dan' (that is, including the territory to the north of Yarmuk), and in Josh. 22:9, 15, 'the land of Gilead' is specified as the territory of all the tribal units who received their allotments of land in Transjordan. In any event, no scholar has ever considered the Yarmuk as a boundary between different dialects of Transjordanian Hebrew in the Iron Age.

⁴ Indeed, the vocalization of the word š/sibbōlet in the MT does not reflect the vocalization of this word in the Iron Age Hebrew, which was probably *š/subbult(u) (Hendel 1996: 72, n. 1). However, for ease of discussion, the word š/sibbōlet will be cited below in its Masoretic vocalization; in the case that the original vocalization of the word is important for the particular point under consideration, the reconstructed Iron Age vocalization will be considered along with the Masoretic one.

⁵ For a summary of different views on this point, see Hendel 1996: 70.

the word pronounced by the Gileadites, the letter š stands for the phoneme /t/, which was retained in the Hebrew dialect of Gilead but could not be marked with a separate letter in the 22-letter alphabet (of Phoenician origin), in which Hebrew was written.⁶ On the other hand, according to this theory, the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ was not retained in the Hebrew dialects of Cisjordan, and the speakers of those dialects were unable to articulate this phoneme.⁷ The best they could do to imitate the Transjordanian word [tībḇōlet] was to pronounce [sībḇōlet]⁸ — a pronunciation which the MT renders by the spelling *sībḇōlet*.

This theory was first proposed by Ephraim A. Speiser over sixty years ago (Speiser 1942), and has been more recently reiterated by Gary A. Rendsburg (Rendsburg 1988a, 1988b). Rendsburg recognized the point made by Speiser's critics that the only alleged positive evidence for a Proto-Semitic root *tḇl — the Aramaic form *tublā' (pl. *twbly*) in the Jerusalem Targum (Pseudo-Jonathan) to Gen. 41:6 — is, in all likelihood, a doctored back-formation from the Hebrew *šībḇōlet* (Marcus 1942: 39; Kutscher 1967: 173–4; Emerton 1985: 150–1). Still, Rendsburg contended that 'there is no reason not to assume' that the root *tḇl underlies the Biblical Hebrew noun *šībḇōlet* = 'stream, torrent', as opposed to the root šḇl underlying the noun *šībḇōlet* = 'ear of grain' (Rendsburg 1988b: 75).⁹

⁶ This proposal rests on two premises: first, that in the Hebrew writing tradition of Gilead, the letter š was polyphonous, standing for both the phonemes /t/ and /š/ (leaving aside the question of the phoneme /s/); and second, that the author of the shibboleth story was aware of the Gileadite spelling convention in regard to the phoneme /t/. Both of these premises, however, lie well within the range of probability, if one is ready to accept the notion that the phoneme /t/ was retained in the Hebrew dialect of Gilead (for the polyphonous character of several letters of the Hebrew alphabet during the first millennium BCE, see Blau 1982).

⁷ It is generally assumed that to the west of the Syro-African Rift at least (i.e., in Cisjordan and in Phoenicia), the Proto-Semitic /t/ had merged with the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /š/ (see, e.g., Garr 1985: 28–30). However, as will be shown below, the most recent proponent of the retention of /t/ in the Canaanite dialects of Transjordan, Gary A. Rendsburg, has also proposed that in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan, the Proto-Semitic /t/ had merged with the voiceless dental plosive /t/.

⁸ This may be compared to the situation when 'readers of the Qur'an who have no interdentalals in their own language and try to pronounce them, often realize /t/ as [s]' (Lipiński 1997: 121, §13.9). The spelling of the word [sībḇōlet] with the letter s implies that by the time when the shibboleth story was composed, the Proto-Semitic phoneme /s/ had shifted from a voiceless dental affricate *[tʃ] to a dental fricative [s] (for an original affricate realization of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /s/, see Faber 1992: 8, and the literature cited there).

⁹ For *šībḇōlet* meaning 'stream, torrent' in Biblical Hebrew, see Isa. 27:12,

To bolster his proposal, Rendsburg adduced another example, in which the Proto-Semitic /t/ is rendered by the letter š in a text originating from Transjordan and by the letter s in a text originating from Cisjordan. An Ammonite seal impression discovered at Tell el-ʿUmeiri, about ten miles southeast of Amman, and dated on paleographic grounds to the early sixth century BCE, reads: *lmkm'wr 'bd b'lyš* (Herr 1985). The patron of the owner of this seal is most likely to be identified with the Ammonite king mentioned in Jer. 40:14 as *Ba'ālš*,¹⁰ and in Rendsburg's view, the element -yš in the name *b'lyš* reflects the Proto-Semitic root *yṯ* = 'to save' (Rendsburg 1988a: 257–8, 1988b: 73).¹¹ On the other hand, in the name of the Ammonite king *Nāḥāš* (1 Sam. 11:1, etc.), an etymological /š/ is spelled in the Hebrew Bible with the letter š.¹² Assuming that the original /š/ was articulated in Ammonite the same way as in the Hebrew of Cisjordan (Judah), Rendsburg claimed that the original /t/ must have been retained in Ammonite as a distinct phoneme and articulated in such a way that would be perceived by the inhabitants of Judah as closest to [s] — that is, as a voiceless interdental (Rendsburg 1988a: 257–8, 1988b: 73–5).¹³

Ps. 69:3, 16; for *šibbōlet* meaning 'ear of grain', see Job 24:24, and in the plural, Gen. 41:5–7, etc.

¹⁰ The spelling βελισα in the LXX reflects, in all likelihood, the final 'ayin that was preserved in the name of the Ammonite king in the LXX *Vorlage* (Hendel 1996: 71, 73, n. 14). Robert Deutsch has recently published a stamp seal with the inscription [l]b'lyš[] mlk b[n'm]n (Deutsch 1999). However, since this seal has not been discovered in a controlled archaeological excavation, its authenticity may be in doubt. Moreover, the restoration of ' in *b'lyš[]* and the reading *b[n'm]n* are not certain (Becking 1999: 13–14).

¹¹ For the Proto-Semitic root *yṯ* and its etymological connection with the Hebrew *yš* = 'to save', see Sawyer 1975; Voigt 1997. Walter W. Müller adduced more examples of the occurrence of the root *yṯ* in ancient North and South Arabian inscriptions and argued convincingly against the assumption of the root **wṯ* as a doublet of *yṯ* (Müller 1979, esp. 27–8, *pace* Eph'al 1974: 111, n. 20, 1982: 114). Yet, the suggestion of Müller about an etymological connection between the root *yṯ* and the root *yf* = 'to be high, exalted', in ancient Arabian dialects is not credible (see Voigt 1997: 172–5).

¹² In addition, 2 Sam. 17:27 records the name of an Ammonite *Šōbî*, son of *Nāḥāš* — probably the same *Nāḥāš* mentioned elsewhere as the king of Ammon. Yet, because the etymology of the name *Šōbî* is unclear, Rendsburg excluded it from his discussion (Rendsburg 1988b: 76, n. 15).

¹³ Rendsburg's distinction between 'the way the Judean writer *heard* the royal Ammonite name spelled *b'lyš*' and 'the way the Judean writer *pronounced* the Ammonite name' (Rendsburg 1988b: 75; italics preserved) is artificial. The author of Jer. 40:14 might well have been sensitive to the distinct Ammonite pronunciation of /t/, but when he came to render this phoneme in the terms of the 22-letter alphabet available to him, he would not necessarily turn to the Ammonite orthographic con-

Rendsburg's conclusion has managed to make its way into recent reference books on comparative Semitic phonology and linguistics (Lipiński 1997: 120, §13.7; Rendsburg 1997: 69–70).¹⁴ And yet, it appears to be plainly wrong.

First, the idea of the Biblical Hebrew noun *šibbōlet* = 'stream, torrent' being derived from the root **tbl* is unacceptable. Despite Rendsburg's statement that 'we have no cognates for *šblt*, "stream," anywhere in Semitic' (Rendsburg 1988b: 75), already Speiser had recognized that this noun 'can scarcely be separated from Arab. *sbl* = "rain, flow"' (Speiser 1942: 11).¹⁵ The development of the Arabic /s/ from the Proto-Semitic /š/ is normal;¹⁶ its development from the Proto-Semitic /t/ would be difficult to account for. Speiser, who saw in the Aramaic form **tublā'* in the Jerusalem Targum to Gen. 41:6 an actual witness to the Proto-Semitic root **tbl*, considered this root an irregular doublet of the Proto-Semitic *šbl*.¹⁷ However, since the form **tublā'* is evidently not authentic, there is no reason whatsoever to posit irregularities of this kind, while the existence of the Proto-Semitic root *šbl*, with a meaning connected to bodies of water, is beyond doubt.

Second, Rendsburg's explanation of the orthographical differences in the spellings of *šibbōlet*/*sibbōlet* and *b'lyš* /*Ba'ālīs* is not the only

vention. He could as well try to choose a letter used in Judean Hebrew for rendering the phoneme, whose articulation would seem to him most similar to that of the Ammonite /t/. The logic of choosing the letter *s* and the phoneme /s/ would then be the same as the logic of non-Arabic speakers trying to imitate the Classical Arabic /t/ with a [s] (above, n. 8). Rendsburg's conclusion about the retention of the phoneme /t/ in Ammonite had been reached independently, but based on the same seal impression, by Knauf and Maáni 1987: 91. However, Knauf and Maáni did not connect their conclusion to the shibboleth story in Judg. 12:5–6.

¹⁴ In a recent introductory survey of Transjordanian Canaanite dialects of the Iron Age, Simon B. Parker mentioned the retention of /t/ in Ammonite as a possibility, but did not offer a definite conclusion (Parker 2002: 47, and n. 11).

¹⁵ The last edition of the Biblical Hebrew dictionary of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (revised by Johann J. Stamm) lists the following Arabic nouns having to do with water and derived from the root *sbl*: *sabal* = 'flowing rain', *sublat* = 'widespread rain', *sabbālat* = 'well' (HAL 1296a; HALOT 1394b).

¹⁶ Of course, it is the Hebrew *šibbōlet* = 'stream, torrent' that makes it clear that the first consonant is the Proto-Semitic /š/ rather than the Proto-Semitic /s/ (which would also develop into /s/ in Arabic). The form *šwblt'* is also attested in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, and the form *šebbeltā'* in Syriac, but both appear only in the collocation *šwblt' dnh'r'šebbeltā' dēnahrā'*, which may be a calque from the Hebrew *šibbōlet hannāhār* in Isa. 27:12 (see HALOT 1395a; Brockelmann 1928: 752b; Sokoloff 1990: 539b).

¹⁷ 'This points to a Proto-Semitic doublet with *t* ... alongside the normal form with a sibilant. How such a doublet arose is beside the point' (Speiser 1942: 12).

plausible one. Thus, Alice Faber has suggested that the original articulation of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /š/ was a voiceless dental fricative *[s], and its development into a palato-alveolar fricative [ʃ] occurred in Canaanite dialects only during the Iron Age, in some dialects earlier than in others, but in all Canaanite dialects this development had been preceded by the merger of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ with /š/ (Faber 1992: 8–9).¹⁸

Robert Woodhouse, building on Faber's theory, proposed that the shift *[s] > [ʃ] in articulation of the phoneme /š/ in Canaanite languages and dialects had occurred in the vicinity of high vowels (*i* and *u*) earlier than in the vicinity of non-high vowels (e.g., *a* and *o*), and in the dialects of Cisjordan earlier than in those of Transjordan (Woodhouse 2003, esp. 286).

Thus, the noun *šibbōlet* was normally pronounced by the Ephraimites as [šibbōlet], but when trying to emulate the Gileadite pronunciation — which is the whole point of the shibboleth story — the Ephraimites would say [sibbōlet].¹⁹ However, since the Ephraimites' phonetic trick did not save their lives (at least in the view of the story's author), there must have been some difference between the articulation of the phoneme /s/ in Ephraimite and the articulation of the phoneme /š/ in Gileadite in the vicinity of high vowels — perhaps in the terms of apical vs. laminal articulation (cf. Woodhouse 2003: 274).

¹⁸ The shift from *[s] to [ʃ] in the articulation of the phoneme /š/ in Canaanite languages and dialects must have generally predated the shift from *[ts] to [s] in the articulation of the phoneme /s/ (see above, n. 8), or else the phonemes /š/ and /s/ would not be distinguishable.

¹⁹ Or, if we consider the reconstructed Iron Age vocalization, the Ephraimites would normally pronounce *[šubbult(u)], but when trying to emulate the Gileadite pronunciation, they would say *[subbult(u)] (see above, n. 4). Josef Tropper proposed an explanation for the shibboleth story based on the assumption that the form *šubbult or *šubbolt was characteristic of the Gileadite dialect, whereas the form *šibbult or *šibbolt was characteristic of the Ephraimite dialect. In Tropper's view, the front vowel *u* in the first syllable of the Gileadite form caused a markedly alveolar ([s]-like) articulation of the first consonant in the Gileadite dialect, while the back vowel *i* in the first syllable of the Ephraimite form caused a markedly palatal ([ʃ]-like) articulation of the first consonant in the Ephraimite dialect. Hence, the Ephraimites, trying to emulate the pronunciation of the Gileadite form, pronounced the word in question as *[subbult] or *[subbolt] (Tropper 1997). However, the solution proposed by Woodhouse, which can apply to both the reconstructed original form *šubbult(u) and the Masoretic form *šibbōlet*, is preferable to the solution proposed by Tropper, which is based on an unverifiable assumption about the exact vocalization of the word in question in the Iron Age Hebrew dialects of Ephraim and Gilead.

As for the Ammonite royal name *b'lyš*, its vocalization is admittedly unclear. Analogy with the Biblical Hebrew personal name *ʿlīšā* suggests the vocalization **Baʿlīšā* (Becking 1993: 20). Yet, the Hebrew name itself occurs already in the eighth-century BCE Samaria ostraca in the spelling *lyš*, and it is difficult to suppose that the letter *y* functioned at such an early date as a *mater lectionis*.²⁰ If this difficulty is countenanced, one may consider the element *-šā* in the names *ʿlīšā* and **Baʿlīšā* as the suffix-conjugation form or the participle of the verbal root *tw* > *šw*, meaning either 'to save' (as a doublet of *yṯ* > *yš*) or 'to be noble' (see Becking 1993: 22–4).

On the other hand, if the letter *y* in the spellings *lyš* and *b'lyš* stands for a consonant, it must be the first consonant of the root *yš*, and the development of the name *ʿlīšā* in the MT is probably to be accounted for as: **ʾil-yīšā* ('god will save') > *ʿlīšā*.²¹ The name *b'lyš* in the Ammonite seal would then be vocalized as **Baʿl-yīšā* ('Baal will save'). And finally, one cannot discount the possibility that in the name *b'lyš*, the element *-yš* is a substantive, in which case the vocalization would probably be **Baʿl-yīšā* ('Baal is [the god of] salvation').²²

In any event, it is very likely that in the name *b'lyš*, the vowel preceding /š/ was *i* (either long or short). Hence, in accordance with Woodhouse's theory, the contrast between the articulation of the

²⁰ Cf. Gutman and Loewenstamm 1950: 358. The name *lyš* appears in Ostrakon no. 1 from Samaria (Renz 1995a; 89–90). Ziony Zevit mentioned the spelling *šmyd* in the Samaria Ostraca as an example of an internal *mater lectionis*, since there exists also an alternative spelling *šmd*; however, in Zevit's view, this is the only case of an internal *mater lectionis* in the Samaria Ostraca (Zevit 1980: 13–14).

²¹ The form **yīyšā* > **yīšā* would be natural for the prefix conjugation of the verb *yṯ* > *yš* in the *qal* stem (cf. *JM* §76b); the form **hawšī* > *hōšīā* in the *hipʿil* stem was probably formed by analogy with the original *prima* *w* verbs. For contraction of *yī* into *ī* in **ʾil-yīšā* > *ʿlīšā*, cf. Bergsträsser 1918: §17. Alternatively, the development may have been **ʾilī-yīšā* ('my God will save') > *ʿlīšā* (for contraction of *īyī* into *ī*, cf. Bergsträsser 1918: §17n). The pointing of the letter *š* with *qameṣ* in the name *ʿlīšā* is probably to be explained as resulting from the understanding of the whole name as a substantive rather than as a verbal sentence (cf. *JM* §42b). The development proposed here is preferable to the suggestion that the original vocalization of the name *lyš* was **ʿlyāšā* (as proposed, e.g., by Gutman and Loewenstamm 1950: 358), since the latter suggestion cannot account for the vowel *ī* in the Masoretic vocalization, which is supported by Greek and Latin transcriptions in the LXX, Vulgate and the NT (ibid.). For the use of the verb *yš* in the *qal* stem, cf. the Biblical Hebrew name *Yēšaʿyāhū* (Gutman and Loewenstamm 1950: 358) and the use of the verb *yṯ* in the G-stem in Amorite and Ugaritic personal names (Gelb 1980: 22, s.v. JŠ; Sivan 1984: 292, s.v. Yṯ-).

²² Cf. Aufrecht 1989: 309. It is not clear why Aufrecht, preferring to see *-yš* as a finite verbal form, vocalized the whole name as *Baʿlyāšū* (ibid., 308).

Gileadite and the Cisjordanian /š/ in the vicinity of high vowels would be striking enough for the author of Jer. 40:14 to perceive the sibilant in the name *b'lyš*²³ as closer to /s/ than to /š/ in his Judean dialect. However, the articulation of the phoneme /š/ in the vicinity of non-high vowels, in names such as *Nāḥāš*,²⁴ would not be significantly different in Cisjordanian and Transjordanian dialects, leading to its representation in the Hebrew Bible by the letter š (Woodhouse 2003: 286).

But most importantly, there is in fact positive evidence that the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ had merged with the phoneme /š/ in the Canaanite dialects of Transjordan, as supposed by Faber and Woodhouse,²⁴ at least by the ninth–eighth centuries BCE. This evidence comes from cuneiform spellings of West Semitic proper names in Neo-Assyrian documents.

As has been recognized long ago, the Neo-Assyrian scribes spelled the phoneme /t/ in proper names belonging to those languages and dialects, which had retained this phoneme, with cuneiform signs that serve in Akkadian for rendering the phoneme /t/. The bulk of the evidence comes from Northern Arabian names,²⁵ but there is also the name of ^m*It-'a—am-a-ra* (= *yṯ'mr*), the ruler of Saba' in Southern Arabia, who brought tribute to Sargon II in 715 BCE.²⁶ And in the sphere of Northwest Semitic dialects, one has to mention the bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian inscription from Tell Fekheriye (in the Khabūr basin, northwestern Mesopotamia), dating from the mid-ninth century BCE. The Aramaic version of this inscription consistently spells the etymological /t/ with the letter *s*, including the name of the ruler, on whose behalf the inscription was written: *hdys'y* (Kaufman 1982: 146). However, the Akkadian version spells the ruler's name as ^m*Adad(U)-it-i*, thus pointing out that the consonant marked by *s* in this name was anything but a dental fricative.²⁷

²³ And also *Šōbî*, if the Masoretic vocalization of this name is to be trusted.

²⁴ And also by Hendel 1996: 72, who, however, did not pay attention to the differences in spelling between *Ba'ālīs* and *Nāḥāš* in the Hebrew Bible.

²⁵ For these names, see Eph'al 1982: 58 (^m*Am-me-'a-ta-a'* = *'myṯ*), 113–14 (^m*A-bi-ia-te-e'* = *'byṯ*, ^m*Ia-u-ta-a'* = *ywṯ*, etc.), 230 (^{li}*Ta-mu-di* = Thamūd). For the occurrences of the name *'byṯ* in Northern Arabian inscriptions, see Müller 1979: 23–4.

²⁶ This name also appears in the inscriptions of Sargon II in the alternate spelling ^m*It-[']a—am-ra* (Fuchs 2000: 587). For identification of ^m*It-'a-am-a-ra* as a ruler of Saba' in Southern Arabia, see Eph'al 1982: 228–9. It is likely that this ruler is to be identified with the one mentioned in the earliest Sabaic inscriptions as *yṯ'mr byn bn s'mb'ly* (Robin 1996: 1118–21).

²⁷ For the cuneiform spelling of the ruler's name, see *KAF* 309.8, 19 (Akkadian version). For the Aramaic spelling, see lines 1, 6, 12 (Aramaic version).

Hence, its realization as an actual interdental /t̪/ appears most likely;²⁸ and as a corollary one has to conclude that in other cases as well, the indication of /t̪/ in the Aramaic text by the letter *s* is nothing more than an orthographic convention, the voiceless interdental having been actually retained as a distinct phoneme in the Aramaic dialect of Tell Fekheriye.²⁹

The consistency of the spelling of the phoneme /t̪/ with cuneiform /t/-signs, in Aramaic as well as Arabian names, stands in contrast with those names appearing in Neo-Assyrian sources, which can be shown or at least assumed (absent clear indications to the contrary) to belong to the milieu of Canaanite languages and dialects. In the latter group of names, the etymological /t̪/ is spelled with cuneiform signs that serve in Akkadian for rendering the phoneme /s/ — that is, spelled the same way as the West Semitic phoneme /š/, with which the Proto-Semitic /t̪/ had merged in the best known Canaanite dialects, such as Phoenician and Cisjordanian Hebrew.³⁰ Therefore, attestation of Transjordanian proper names, which include the etymological /t̪/, in Neo-Assyrian sources would enable us to tell whether this phoneme was retained intact in the Canaanite dialects of Transjordan, as suggested by Rendsburg.³¹

²⁸ The full form of the name would be **Hadd—yit̪ī* = 'Hadad is [the god of] my salvation'.

²⁹ This situation is comparable to the one pertaining in other Aramaic inscriptions of the Iron Age, where the etymological /t̪/ is marked by the letter š, but is commonly assumed to have persisted as a separate phoneme in most Aramaic dialects of the period, to merge later with the voiceless dental plosive /t/. However, sporadic evidence of the merger of /t̪/ with /t/ appears already starting from the seventh, and perhaps even from the eighth century BCE (Folmer 1995: 74; and cf. below, n. 55).

³⁰ Cf. Streck 1998: 132, who used the criterion of the cuneiform spelling of etymological Proto-Semitic interdentals (/t̪/, /d̪/, /z̪/) to distinguish between Canaanite and Aramaic proper names in cuneiform records of the first millennium BCE. For the consistent spelling of the West Semitic /š/ with /s/-signs in Neo-Assyrian sources, see Parpola 1998: xxiv. Examples of names, in which the etymological /t̪/ is spelled with cuneiform /s/-signs and which can be identified on contextual or linguistic grounds as belonging to the Canaanite linguistic milieu, are *Hôšēa*, the last king of Israel, whose name is spelled in cuneiform sources as ^m*A-ú-si-i* (Tadmor 1994: 140, line 17'), and ^m*As-ta—qu-um-me*, a resident of Nineveh c. 700 BCE, the second component of whose name is probably the suffix-conjugation form of the verb *qum* in the G-stem, with the Phoenician shift *ā* > *ō* (cf. Hebrew *qām*), while the first component is the divine name **attar* > **aštar* (Breckwoldt and Parpola 1998: 138).

³¹ The possibility of applying this criterion has been already recognized by Woodhouse 2003: 276, who did not, however, pursue it any further. Nor did Woodhouse mention the consistency in the Neo-Assyrian use of cuneiform /t/-signs for spelling the phoneme /t̪/ in Arabian names, which amounts to a full-fledged orthographic convention, rather than a whim of an individual scribe.

One example of such proper name is that of ^{uru}*As-tar-tu*, a city whose conquest by the Assyrians is depicted on a palace relief of Tiglath-Pileser III from Nimrūd, with the city's name spelled out in the relief's caption.³² This city is commonly identified with the biblical city of Ashtaroth (*ʿaštārôt*), in the area of Bashan, and with modern Tell 'Aštara, c. 35 km to the east from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Wäfler 1975: 118–19; Tadmor 1994: 210). There is no doubt that the name of this city is derived from the name of the Canaanite goddess, which appears in Ugaritic texts as *ʿttrt*, and in the Hebrew Bible as *ʿaštōret* (Day 1992b: 492). Moreover, it is likely that the city of Ashtaroth in the Bashan is mentioned in a number of Ugaritic documents in the spelling *ʿttrt* (*KTU*² 1.100.41, 1.107.17; see Day 1992a: 491³³). That is, the consonant closing the first syllable in the name of this city is the original phoneme /t/. And the eighth-century BCE Assyrian scribe, who rendered this consonant by the cuneiform sign *as*, must have perceived it as a West Semitic /s/ rather than /t/. This means that in the area of Ashtaroth, the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /s/ took place the same way as it did in the Canaanite dialects spoken to the west of the Syro-African rift (Phoenician and Cisjordanian Hebrew).

Three objections may be raised against the use of the toponym ^{uru}*As-tar-tu* as evidence for the phonological development of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ in Transjordanian Canaanite dialects of the Iron Age. First, by the time of Tiglath-Pileser III's campaign against Ashtaroth, this city must have been included in the territory of the Aramaean kingdom of Damascus (Tadmor 1962: 121, n. 30; Wäfler 1975: 119, n. 601). However, if the toponym Ashtaroth were recorded in its Aramaic form, one would expect preservation of the original /t/ or its merger with /t/. The spelling ^{uru}*As-tar-tu* shows clearly that such was not the case, and it stands to reason that the inhabitants of this city, from whom the Assyrian scribe had most likely heard its name, continued to speak their Canaanite (Transjordanian Hebrew) dialect regardless of the language of their royal sovereign.

Second, toponyms as such may display peculiar linguistic features, which are not characteristic in general of the languages spoken by the inhabitants of the relevant locations. However, the peculiar features displayed by toponyms tend to be *more conservative* than the features

³² For a photograph of the relief, see *RLA*, I, Table 37. For a drawing, see Tadmor 1994: fig. 11.

³³ The spelling *ʿttrt* occasionally given by Day is an error.

of everyday language in relevant locations.³⁴ And insofar as Rendsburg's hypothesis of the retention of the phoneme /t/ in Transjordanian Canaanite dialects is concerned, the spelling ^{uru}*As-tar-tu*, which evidently stands for the form **aštartu*, is innovative rather than conservative. Hence, this spelling is valid evidence of the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /š/, at least in the dialect of Ashtaroth by c. 730 BCE.

Third, it is possible that the phonological development of the Proto-Semitic /t/ in the dialect of Ashtaroth, a city located to the north of the Yarmuk river, was different from the development of the same phoneme in Transjordanian dialects that were spoken south of the Yarmuk river, in the territory of Ammon and in the bulk of the territory of Gilead (or in the whole of Gilead, if one follows those biblical sources which distinguish between Gilead and Bashan³⁵). The simplest answer to this objection is that neither Rendsburg nor any other scholar has ever suggested that the Yarmuk was a kind of dialectal boundary for the Canaanite dialects of Transjordan. But in addition, there is possibly an actual example of a proper name which shows the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /š/ in Ammonite in the ninth century BCE.

The relevant proper name is that of ^m*Ba-a'-sa mār* (DUMU) *Ru-hu-bi* ^{kur}*A-ma-na-a-a*, one of the Levantine kings who faced Shalmaneser III in the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE) according to the Assyrian king's monolith inscription from Kurkh (Grayson 1996: 23, line 95). The name ^m*Ba-a'-sa* is identical with that of Baasha (*Bašā*) king of Israel (1 Kgs 15:16, etc.),³⁶ even though the two persons in question were obviously different.

The problem is that the gentilic ^{kur}*A-ma-na-a-a* in the name of the adversary of Shalmaneser III may be understood as referring to either the kingdom of Ammon or to the area of Mount Amana in the Antilebanon range in southwestern Syria. Both interpretations were espoused by different scholars, whose opinions have been surveyed extensively by Rendsburg in a study dedicated to the identification of the kingdom of ^m*Ba-a'-sa* (Rendsburg 1991: 57–8). In that study,

³⁴ A good example of this is the preservation of many originally Canaanite and Aramaic toponyms in the modern Arabic dialects of Palestine (see Zadok 1995–7). Note, furthermore, the following remark of Zadok: 'toponyms... often preserve otherwise irretrievable information concerning early — and often extinct — linguistic strata' (ibid., 95).

³⁵ See above, n. 3.

³⁶ Some Masoretic manuscripts spell the name of the king of Israel as *Bašā*; see below.

Rendsburg supported the identification of ^m*Ba-a'-sa* as a king of Ammon, answering the objections that had been raised against this identification³⁷ and bringing two positive arguments to support it.

³⁷ Yet, Rendsburg's answers to these objections require correction and further detailization. Thus, against the argument that the regular Neo-Assyrian designation of Ammon is *Bit-Am māna* (cf. Cogan 1984: 259), Rendsburg noted the examples of the toponyms *Bit-Bunakki* and *Bit-Zamāni* spelled once as ^{uru}*Bu-na-ku* and ^{kur}*Za-ma-a-ni*, which would demonstrate the possibility of omission of the initial element *bīt* (Rendsburg 1991: 59). Yet, the example of ^{kur}*Za-ma-a-ni*, cited by Rendsburg from Parpola 1970: 91 and coming from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III discovered in Calah, does actually involve the element *bīt* (É), although that element is transposed before the country determinative KUR: É-^{kur}*Za-ma-a-ni* (Grayson 1996: 69, line 143). Likewise, the example of ^{uru}*Bu-na-ku*, coming from the Prism F recension of the royal annals of Assurbanipal (668–27 BCE), has been recently collated by Rykle Borger to read ^{uru}*Bīt* (É)¹-^m*Bu-na-ku* (Borger 1996: 49, F IV 10). On the other hand, the fact that the country *Bīt-Hamban*, in the Zagros mountains, was mentioned a number of times in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions as ^{kur}*Ha-ban*, ^{uru}*Ha-ban* and ^{uru}*Ha-am-ban* (see Parpola 1970: 147), demonstrates that omission of the element *bīt* was indeed possible. Another noteworthy example of this kind is the toponym *Bīt-Humrī* = 'the house of Omri' (i.e., the northern kingdom of Israel), which appears once, in an inscription of Adad-nērārī III (810–783 BCE), as ^{kur}*Hu-um-ri-i* (Parpola 1970: 83; Grayson 1996: 213, line 12). But more importantly, as noted by Rendsburg, the name of Ammon itself appears, in all likelihood, in a geographical list from the reign of Assurbanipal in the spelling ^{uru}*Am-ma-a-[na]* (Rendsburg 1991: 59, n. 19, citing Parpola 1970: 16). The most recent edition of this geographical list upholds the restoration ^{uru}*Am-ma-a-[na]* and the translation 'Ammo[n]' (Fales and Postgate 1995: 4, col. II, line 12), although the editors show some ambiguity regarding the understanding of this toponym and mention it elsewhere as referring to the city of Amman, biblical *Rabbā* or *Rabbat bēnē 'ammōn* (ibid., 179). However, even if the city determinative URU signifies that the royal city of Ammon rather than the whole country was intended, the designation ^{uru}*Am-ma-a-[na]* is obviously derived from the name of the country of Ammon, as are the designations ^{uru}*Bīt-mAm-ma-ni*, ^{uru}*Bīt-Am-ma-na* and ^{uru}*Bīt-Am-ma-na-a-a*, also attested in Neo-Assyrian sources (Parpola 1970: 16; and see Eph'al 1982: 149–50, n. 514). Thus, the spelling ^{uru}*Am-ma-a-[na]* offers direct evidence of the possibility of omission of the element *bīt* in a Neo-Assyrian reference to Ammon.

Regarding the designation *mār Ru-hu-bi*, interpreted by some scholars as referring to the Aramean dynasty and kingdom of Beth-Rehob in the Beqa' of Lebanon, adjacent to Mount Amana (cf. Cogan 1984: 259), Rendsburg noted that 'it is a moot issue whether *Ru-hu-bi* is to be taken as a toponym... or as an anthroponym' (Rendsburg 1991: 59). In fact, it is possible that *Ruhubu* was either the biological father of the king who opposed Shalmaneser III or the founder of the dynasty which ruled the kingdom of Ammon at that period; cf. the mention of ^m*Qa-al-pa-ru-da'-mār* (A) ^m*Pa-la-lam šar* (MAN) ^{uru}*Gūr-gu-ma-a-a* in the Pazarcık stela of Adad-nērārī III (Grayson 1996: 205, lines 17–18). The cuneiform ^m*Pa-la-lam* evidently corresponds to the Hieroglyphic Luwian ¹*La+ra/i+a-ma-*, which appears in the Maraş inscription of the king Qalparu(n)da/Ḫalparuntiyas III of Gurgum (southeastern Anatolia) as the name of both the king's father and the much earlier

First, the name *bš[]* appears, in alphabetic spelling, in an Ammonite ostrakon from Heshbon dating to c. 600 BCE but does not appear so far in Aramaic sources from southwestern Syria or elsewhere.³⁸ And second, the geographic proximity and the cultural connection between the Iron Age Ammon and Arabian-populated areas in the Syro-Arabian desert account well for the mention of ^m*Ba-a'-sa* right after ^m*Gi-in-di-bu-u'*^{kur} *Ar-ba-a-a*, 'Gindibu' the Arabian', in the list of the kings who opposed Shalmaneser III, while it is not clear why a ruler of the presumably Aramaean area of Mount Amana would be mentioned in this position (Rendsburg 1991: 58–61).³⁹

Rendsburg's arguments are attractive but not quite convincing. Yet, the etymology of the personal name *Bašā'*/^m*Ba-a'-sa* deserves a special consideration.⁴⁰ As pointed out by Samuel E. Loewenstamm and Ran Zadok, it is unlikely that the element *ba'* in *Bašā'* is a shortened form of the divine name or epithet *Ba'ēl*.⁴¹ Moreover, in the light of the cuneiform spelling ^m*Ba-a'-sa*, the second consonant

founder of the local royal dynasty (Hawkins 2000: I/1, 262–3, and cf. *ibid.*, 252–3). Also, in the same Pazarcık stele of Adad-nērārī III, the king of Arpad (north-western Syria) appears as ^m*A-tar-šūm-ki mār* (A) ^m*Abi*(AD)-*ra-a-me* ^{uru}*Ar-pa-da-a-a* (Grayson 1996: 205, line 11). *Abi-rāmu* was the father of *Attar-šumki* but not the founder of the royal dynasty of Arpad; that honour belonged to (A)*gūsu*, the father of *Abi-rāmu* (Mattila and Radner 1998: 12–13; Luukko 1998: 56). In any event, there is no necessity to understand the designation ^m*Ba-a'-sa mār Ru-ḫu-bi*^{kur} *A-ma-na-a-a* as referring to the territory of Mount Amana or to the kingdom/dynasty of Beth-Rehob.

³⁸ The ' in *bš[]* is, of course, a restoration, but one that appears very likely. Beside the Hebrew Bible and the Heshbon ostrakon, the name *Bašā'* appears in two Neo-Punic inscriptions (*KAP* 145.37, 166.2). In the first of these occurrences, the name is actually spelt *b's*; however, this spelling evidently results from phonological developments in Neo-Punic, which are beyond the scope of this article (cf. Rendsburg 1988b: 76, n. 5). In any event, the distribution of the name *Bašā'* in Northwest Semitic sources is limited to the Canaanite branch of languages, to the exclusion of Aramaic (and Ugaritic, for that matter).

³⁹ The notion of cultural connection between the Iron Age Ammon and the Syro-Arabian desert is based on the Ammonite material culture and on Arabian elements in the onomasticon of Ammonite inscriptions.

⁴⁰ Rendsburg, in his study of the putative retention of the phoneme /t/ in Ammonite, mentioned this name as an evidence of the etymological /š/ in Ammonite being rendered in Neo-Assyrian records by a cuneiform /s/-sign, and hence allegedly distinct from the etymological /t/ (Rendsburg 1988b: 74). Regrettably, Rendsburg did not specify what evidence exists, in his opinion, for cuneiform spelling of the etymological /t/ in Ammonite proper names in Neo-Assyrian documents, or what considerations moved him to consider the consonant š in the name *Bašā'* to be a reflection of the etymological /š/.

⁴¹ Loewenstamm 1954: 304. Zadok 1988: 62, n. 13, raised the same point concerning the personal name *Ba'ānā'* (1 Kgs 4:12, etc.).

of the name *Baššā'* must be a reflection of the original /' / rather than /ǵ/.⁴² And yet, there is no definite attestation of the root *bš in Semitic languages.⁴³

The solution tentatively proposed by Zadok was to see *Baššā'* as a hypocoristic form of the personal name *Baššēyāh* (1 Chron. 6:25), with the assumption that the element *ba-* in both names is a shortened form of *bēn* = 'son' (Zadok 1988: 59).⁴⁴ This, however, is also problematic. First, Zadok's suggestion implies that the name in the Hebrew Bible should be read *Baššā'* rather than *Baššā'*.⁴⁵ The reading *Baššā'* (or *Baššā'*) is attested in a number of medieval Masoretic manuscripts, but those are few and relatively late, dating from the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries CE (see Ginsburg 1926a: 329, ad 1 Kgs 15:16, 1926b: 182, ad Jer. 41:9, 1926c: 855, ad 2 Chron. 16:1). The mainstream Masoretic spelling is clearly *Baššā'*.⁴⁶ And second, regarding the cuneiform spelling ^m*Ba-a'-sa*, it is not clear whether the element *ba-* (or *bi-*), appearing in Neo-Assyrian spellings of West Semitic proper names, represents a shortened form of the noun 'son'.⁴⁷

⁴² Zadok 1988: 62, n. 13. This point was recognized by Lipiński 1999: 275, who nevertheless ventured to suggest that the name *Baššā'* is derived from the root *bḡš* (Arabic *baḡša* = 'light rain shower') — evidently because there is no possibility of derivation from the unattested root *bš or *bš.

⁴³ Reports about Arabic words derived from the root *bš* (which would correspond to Proto-Semitic *bš) are doubtful (Cohen 1976: 75b). The spelling *bš* in some Jewish Palestinian Aramaic sources is, in all likelihood, a corruption of *bš* = 'to be bad, sick' (Sokoloff 1990: 83b).

⁴⁴ It should be noted that the name *Baššēyāh* is somewhat suspect, since in its sole attestation in the Hebrew Bible, Codex Vaticanus and the Lucianic recension of the LXX, the Peshitta and a few Masoretic manuscripts support the reading *Maššēyāh* (see BHS ad 1 Chron. 6:25a; Ginsburg 1926c: 764, ad 1 Chron. 6:25). Yet, it is likely that the latter versions were influenced by the far more common personal name *Maššēyāh* (Jer. 21:1, etc.; total 16 occurrences) or *Maššēyāhū* (Jer. 35:4, etc.; total 7 occurrences). Hence, the version *Baššēyāh* is probably more original.

⁴⁵ The cuneiform spelling ^m*Ba-a'-sa* may denote, in principle, the phoneme /s/ at the beginning of the last syllable — cf., in the Kurkh inscription of Shalmaneser III, ^m*A-ha-ab-bu* ^{kur}*Sir'-a-la-a-a* = 'Ahab the Israelite (Biblical Hebrew *Yisrē'ēlī*)' (Grayson 1996: 23, lines 91–2).

⁴⁶ This spelling is attested, among other sources, in the two manuscripts considered the most reliable witnesses of the Tiberian Masoretic text: the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex B19a. Likewise, the Cairo Codex of Prophets, written, according to its colophon, by Moses ben Asher in 895 CE, also features uniformly the spelling *Baššā'*. The above-mentioned manuscripts have been checked independently by the present author through the facsimile editions of Goshen-Gottstein 1976; Freedman et al. 1998; Lowinger 1971.

⁴⁷ Cf. Streck 1999: 343, *pace* Zadok 1977: 108.

Therefore, it seems better to derive the name *Baššā'* from the Proto-Semitic root *b't*, which is attested in free use in Classical Arabic, with the meaning 'to send', but also 'to rouse, to excite' (Lane 1863–93: 222c–23c). The verb *b't*, attested in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic in the causative stem with the meaning 'to rouse someone up', is probably derived from the Proto-Semitic *b't*, with the expected merger of the original /t/ with /t/ (Brockelmann 1928: 85b). It is also likely that the Akkadian verb *bēšu* = 'to go away, to withdraw', derives from the Proto-Semitic *b't* (Cohen 1976: 75b). Personal names derived from the root *b't* are attested in Epigraphic North and South Arabian (Liḥyanite and Sabaic): *b't*, *b'tt*, *b'tm*,⁴⁸ and in the work of the late eighth-century CE Arab historian and genealogist Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī: *Ba' īt*.⁴⁹ The final *-ā'* in the name *Baššā'* is evidently the suffix common for hypocoristic names in Northwest Semitic languages (see Zadok 1988: 154–6).

If the interpretation proposed here is correct, then it has to be concluded that the name *Baššā'* in the Hebrew Bible reflects the merger of the original /t/ with /š/. And since the cuneiform spelling ^m*Ba-a'-sa* renders the opening consonant of the last syllable as the West Semitic /š/ rather than /t/, it must then also reflect the same merger — which can only mean that the name of the adversary of Shalmaneser III is Canaanite rather than Aramaic. Hence, the interpretation of the name *Baššā'*/^m*Ba-a'-sa* as derived from the Proto-Semitic root *b't* would further tip the scales in favour of identifying ^m*Ba-a'-sa mār Ru-ḥu-bi* ^{kur}*A-ma-na-a-a* as the ruler of the Canaanite-speaking Ammon rather than of the Aramaic-speaking area of Mount Amana. And as a corollary, this interpretation would also support the notion that the Proto-Semitic /t/ had merged with /š/ in Ammonite at least by the ninth century BCE.

However, even if the above interpretation be disputed, the spelling ^{uru}*As-tar-tu* in the relief caption of Tiglath-Pileser III proves with reasonable certainty that at least in the northernmost part of Transjordan, the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /š/ took place in a local Canaanite dialect the same way as it did in the Canaanite dialects of Cisjordan. And given the unsubstantiated nature of Rendsburg's arguments for the retention of the Proto-Semitic /t/ in the Canaanite dialects of Gilead and Ammon, his proposal in this

⁴⁸ Ryckmans 1934: I, 54; Harding 1971: 109–10. Note, however, that Ryckmans 1934: I, 220 interprets the name *b'tt* as an apocopated form of *b'ttr*, 'By *attar*'.

⁴⁹ Attested for a number of personalities (see Caskel 1966: II, 221).

regard is unacceptable regardless of the interpretation of the name and the domain of rule of ^m*Ba-a'-sa mār Ru-ḥu-bi* ^{kur}*A-ma-na-a-a*.

II

The second alleged phonological development of the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ in Iron Age Canaanite dialects to be discussed in this article has also been proposed by Rendsburg. In his monograph on northern ('Israelian') Hebrew linguistic features in the book of Psalms, Rendsburg suggested that in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan, the Proto-Semitic /t/ had merged with /t/ rather than with /š/, just as it did in Aramaic (Rendsburg 1990: 64).⁵⁰ Like the proposal about the retention of the phoneme /t/ in Transjordanian Canaanite dialects, the theory of the merger of /t/ with /t/ in northern Cisjordanian Hebrew was not original with Rendsburg.⁵¹ However, in a more recent discussion Rendsburg has introduced a significant reservation into this theory, which can be fully appreciated only after the background of the relevant discussion is taken into consideration.

The discussion in question centered on the issue of those linguistic features in the Hebrew Bible which had been defined by different scholars as resulting from the influence of Aramaic on Hebrew — influence that is often claimed to be symptomatic of a late date of composition of the Hebrew texts, in which it is discovered. The main line with which Rendsburg countered such claims was to suggest that the supposedly Aramaic linguistic features are not at all Aramaic but rather belonged to the northern dialect of Hebrew, which would have had a significant number of shared linguistic features (isoglosses) with Aramaic (Rendsburg 2003).⁵²

⁵⁰ The term 'Israelian' refers to the kingdom of Israel, which emerged after the partition of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom and which had initially included northern Cisjordan (to the north of Judah) and Transjordan (Rendsburg 1990: 4). Technically, Rendsburg's allusion to 'Israelian Hebrew' does not indicate whether a given linguistic feature was thought by him to be characteristic of the Hebrew of northern Cisjordan or of Transjordan. However, since elsewhere Rendsburg has suggested that the phoneme /t/ was retained in Transjordanian Hebrew, the proposal of its merger with /t/ must perforce apply to the Hebrew of northern Cisjordan. In any event, the term 'Israelian Hebrew' is too inclusive to be adopted in a discussion that centres on the possibility of *different* developments of the Proto-Semitic /t/ in the Hebrew dialects of northern Cisjordan and of Transjordan.

⁵¹ It had been proposed before, e.g., by Rabin 1973: 27.

⁵² This is not the place to review in detail Rendsburg's general methodology in reconstructing linguistic features of northern Hebrew (which has been most fully

Among the studies claiming for a late dating of various biblical sources, with which Rendsburg took issue, was a study by Michael Waltisberg on the Song of Deborah (Judges 5);⁵³ and one of the arguments used by Waltisberg to support a late dating of that song was the form *yētannû* = ‘they will praise’ in Judg. 5:11.⁵⁴ Since this verbal form is evidently derived from the Proto-Semitic root *tny* and exhibits the merger of the original /t/ with /t/, as in Aramaic, Waltisberg saw this form as evidence of Aramaic influence on the language of the Song of Deborah. And since the spelling of the etymological /t/ with the letter *t* is not attested in Aramaic sources prior to the seventh century BCE, Waltisberg concluded that the form *yētannû* testifies to the Song of Deborah having been composed not earlier than the seventh century BCE (Waltisberg 1999: 221–2, 229).⁵⁵

In response to Waltisberg’s argument, Rendsburg noted that the Song of Deborah was evidently composed in the northern part of Cisjordan and evoked once again the possibility of the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /t/ in the northern dialect of Hebrew (Rendsburg 2003: 122–4). This time, however, Rendsburg suggested also a different way to account for the spelling *yētannû* in Judg. 5:11 — viz., that at the time of composition of the Song of Deborah, the phoneme /t/ was still retained in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan and denoted by the letter *t* as an orthographic convention, since the 22-letter alphabet did not have a separate letter for denoting this phoneme (Rendsburg 2003: 124, n. 22). The more nuanced

exposed in Rendsburg 1990: 3–17). It has to be noted, however, that the main reason for Rendsburg to consider a given linguistic feature in the Hebrew Bible as characteristic of northern Hebrew was the attestation of that feature in Northwest Semitic languages that were spoken and written in areas adjacent to the territory of Israelite settlement in northern Cisjordan and in Transjordan: Phoenician, Aramaic, Ammonite, etc. This approach, which can be aptly characterized as creating dialects from maps, has been already criticized enough to make any further discussion superfluous (see Pardee 1992; Zevit, 1992; Fredericks 1996; Young 1997; Schniedewind and Sivan 1996–7: 305–13).

⁵³ Waltisberg 1999.

⁵⁴ The translation ‘to praise’ (‘besingen’) is the one given by Waltisberg 1999: 219. As will be argued below (n. 65), this translation is problematic, and a better translation is ‘they will tell, narrate’.

⁵⁵ It has to be noted that in the Aramaic treaty inscriptions from Sefire, dating from the mid-eighth century BCE. (*KAF* 222–4), there are possible cases of spelling of the etymological /t/ with the letter *t*, but none of these cases is clear enough. The reading *yrt* = ‘he will inherit’ (*KAF* 222C.24) has been disputed by Garr 1985: 29, 119. Regarding the name of *mt’l*, king of Arpad (*KAF* 222A.1, 3, etc.), some scholars suggested that it derives from the root *yrt* > *yrt* = ‘to save’ (see, e.g., Gibson 1975: 34; Millard 1983: 104); but derivation from the root *mt* = ‘to benefit, to enjoy’ is more likely (see Zadok 1977: 109, 297, n. 23).

view, expressed by Rendsburg in his discussion of the Song of Deborah, was due to his perception of this song as one of the earliest pieces of Biblical Hebrew poetry, dating from *c.* 1100 BCE, and to a hesitation to postulate the merger of /t/ with /t/ in northern Hebrew centuries earlier than it can be postulated for Aramaic (although such an early merger of /t/ with /t/ in northern Hebrew was finally admitted by Rendsburg as an option).⁵⁶

However, one of the first principles in the study of biblical literature is the recognition that this literature has reached us detached completely from its original historical, and indeed also geographical, context, so that any claim about the date and the geographical provenance of a given biblical source rests necessarily on conjecture. Such conjectures may be more or less founded, but are — at least in principle — always open to doubt.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Iron Age Hebrew inscriptions from northern Cisjordan, although frustratingly few in number, have been for the most part found in known localities and in archaeological contexts securely dated to within quite a narrow range of time. Hence, these inscriptions should be utilized as primary sources in any attempt to reconstruct the linguistic features of northern Cisjordanian Hebrew in the Iron Age, and the supposedly northern dialectal features in the Hebrew Bible are to be judged, wherever possible, by their correspondence to the epigraphic evidence.⁵⁸

Now, if there existed an orthographic convention in northern Cisjordan which rendered the still surviving phoneme /t/ in the local dialect of Hebrew with the letter *t*, and all the more so if an actual merger of the phoneme /t/ with /t/ had taken place in that dialect,

⁵⁶ Rendsburg 2003: 124, n. 22.

⁵⁷ Thus, concerning the Song of Deborah, the extremely early dating adopted by Rendsburg was generally agreed upon in twentieth-century biblical scholarship, but has been disputed, on linguistic, literary and historical grounds, by a number of scholars in the last generation (in addition to Waltisberg's study, see Sparks 1998, 111–12, and the earlier literature cited there; Levin 2003: 124–41). The notion that the Song of Deborah was composed in northern Cisjordan has been accepted almost universally (but cf. Diebner 1995: 123–4, who suggested that the Song of Deborah was composed in Hasmonean Judah!). However, the precise geographical context of the song is by no means clear. Thus, the song's main protagonists, Deborah and Barak, are associated in Judg. 5:15 with the tribe of Issachar, but the prose account of the activities of Deborah and Barak locates the former in the hill country of Ephraim and the latter in the town Kedesh of the tribe of Naphtali (Judg. 4:5–6).

⁵⁸ Rendsburg's failure to utilize the epigraphic evidence and his tendency to raise proposals, which are directly contradicted by this evidence, has been already criticized by Pardee 1992: 704; Seow 1993: 335.

one would expect the Hebrew inscriptions from northern Cisjordan to render the etymological /t/ with the letter *t*. Yet, such is not the case.

In the eighth-century BCE inscriptions from Samaria, the etymological /t/ is rendered uniformly by the letter š: in the personal names *ʾlyš*⁵⁹ and *ywyš*⁶⁰ in the Samaria Ostraca, and probably also in the word *šr* in a fragment of monumental inscription, which is commonly understood as the relative pronoun (Biblical Hebrew *ʾāšer*).⁵⁹ The same orthographic norm persists in the inscriptions dating from c. 800 BCE found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud — a site which, although located in eastern Sinai, was probably inhabited by people who came from northern Cisjordan (Meshel 1992: 108–9). The evidence for the spelling of the etymological /t/ with the letter š in the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud consists of the relative pronoun *šr* (here the reading and the interpretation are certain) and of the noun *šrth* (with the 3 m. sg. possessive pronominal suffix), regardless of whether this noun refers to the goddess Asherah or to a cultic object.⁶⁰ And finally, the eighth-century BCE inscription from Tell el-'Orēme, on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which reads *kd hšr*, is evidently to be translated 'the jar of the gate', which means that the letter š is used here as well to render the Proto-Semitic /t/ (Eph'al and Naveh 1993). No inscription from northern Cisjordan or from Kuntillet 'Ajrud renders the etymological /t/ with the letter *t*.

In addition to the Hebrew epigraphic evidence, one should mention the spelling of the name of Hosea (*Hôšēa*), the last king of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 15:30, etc.), in a cuneiform inscription of Tiglath-Pileser III: *ṁA-ú-si-i*' (Tadmor 1994: 140, line 17'). Since this name derives from the root *yṯ* > *yš*,⁶¹ the Assyrian spelling with the cuneiform sign *si* proves that by c. 730 BCE, the Proto-Semitic /t/ had merged in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan with /š/.

In the light of the above evidence, Rendsburg's proposal concerning the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /t/ in the Hebrew dialect

⁵⁹ Renz 1995a: 89–90, 135, 139. The names *ʾlyš* and *ywyš* include an element derived from the root *yṯ* > *yš*. For derivation of the relative pronoun *ʾāšer* from the Proto-Semitic root *ʾtr*, see *JM* §38, n. 2.

⁶⁰ Renz 1995a: 61–4. For discussion of the word *šrth*, see Renz 1995b: 91–3, who understands this word as referring to a goddess (Ugaritic *atrt*); and cf. Emerton 1999, who prefers to interpret this word as referring to a cultic symbol, whose name derives, however, from the name of the goddess Asherah (and must therefore include an etymological /t/).

⁶¹ For the vowel *ô* in the form *Hôšēa*, cf. above, n. 21.

of northern Cisjordan is untenable. On the other hand, it could be argued, in principle, that the Hebrew inscriptions of c. 800 BCE and later reflect the merger of the Proto-Semitic /t/ with /š/, but this merger had not yet taken place in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan at c. 1100 BCE, and the phoneme /t/, still retained at that time in that dialect, was spelled in the verbal form *yētannû* in Judg. 5:11 with the letter *t* as an orthographic convention.

However, the existence of such a convention can be hardly expected, given the fact that the only Northwest Semitic dialects of the Iron Age which had certainly retained, for the most part, the phoneme /t/ — namely, the Aramaic dialects — spell this phoneme almost uniformly with the letter š, evidently under the influence of Phoenician, where the merger of /t/ with /š/ was one of the factors that led to the emergence of the 22-letter alphabet (Kaufman 1982: 147). The only exception is the Aramaic dialect of Tell Fekheriye, but there the spelling of the phoneme /t/ with the letter *s* was probably due to the influence of the Assyrian dialect of Akkadian.⁶² For the area of Israelite settlement in northern Cisjordan, adjacent to the territory of Phoenician city-states on the Mediterranean coast, one should expect the phoneme /t/, even if it were retained for some time in the local Hebrew dialect, to be spelled with the letter š.

Thus, Waltisberg's claim that the form *yētannû* in Judg. 5:11 is an example of Aramaic influence on the language of the Song of Deborah appears the most reasonable solution. However, such influence need not have taken place in the seventh century BCE at the earliest. It is, after all, quite possible that the merger of the original phoneme /t/ with /š/ in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan took place already in the beginning of the Iron Age, in the late second millennium BCE. In such case, the northern Israelites, hearing from their Aramaic interlocutors the verbal form **yētannû*,⁶³ would have encountered the consonant [t], which did not exist in their own dialect. And if they borrowed the verb in question into their own dialect, they would have to render this consonant by some phoneme existing in their dialect, which would seem to them closest to the Aramaic original. In such case, the voiceless dental plosive /t/ could be a valid option.⁶⁴ Thus, the transition from Aramaic **yētannû* to

⁶² 'Of course, in Akkadian *t* had become *š*, but this later became (or always was) *s* in Assyrian as evidenced by alphabetic transcriptions and loanwords' (Kaufman 1982: 147, n. 24).

⁶³ The precise vocalization is unimportant for the issue considered here.

⁶⁴ Compare the situation in the Quebec dialect of French, where the voiced and

Hebrew *yētannû* need not presuppose the merger of /t/ with /t/ in Aramaic.⁶⁵

Given the probably northern Cisjordanian origin of the Song of Deborah, and the fact that the northernmost part of northern Cisjordan was adjacent to the Aramaic-speaking area of southwestern Syria, a borrowing of the verb *tny* from Aramaic into the local dialect of Hebrew could have taken place throughout the Iron Age; and the same can be said of almost all other cases adduced by Waltisberg as Aramaisms in the Song of Deborah.⁶⁶ Historical considerations

the voiceless *th* (that is, [ð] and [θ]) in English loanwords are realized as [d] and [t], respectively (Paradis and Lebel 1994: 85).

⁶⁵ The reason for borrowing the Aramaic verb *tny* into Iron Age Hebrew can only be conjectured. However, it should be noted that the normal Hebrew reflex of the Proto-Semitic *tny*, the verb *šnh*, is used in Biblical Hebrew, in the *qal* stem, with the meaning 'to repeat, to do once again' (BDB, 1040b; HALOT, 1598b–99a; the lexeme with this meaning must be distinguished from the lexeme *šnh* = 'to change', derived from the Proto-Semitic *šny* [for which see BDB, 1039b–40a; HALOT, 1597b–98b]). In Rabbinic Hebrew, the verb *šnh* is used with the meaning 'to repeat, to do once again', in both the *qal* and the *pi'el* stems, and in the *qal* stem it is also used with the meaning 'to study/teach a traditional source', but the latter meaning is probably denominative, from *mišnâ* — literally, 'repetition', but also a term for traditional rabbinic law or statement (see Jastrow 1903: 1605a–b). In any event, neither Biblical nor Rabbinic Hebrew uses the verb *šnh* with the generic meaning 'to tell, to narrate' (applying to any possible topic of narration). On the other hand, the verb *tny* is used with this meaning in Aramaic, generally in the *pa'el* stem, but in Syriac also in the *pe'al* (Brockelmann 1928: 828b–29a; Sokoloff 1990: 585b; Sokoloff 2002: 1221a; Tal 2000: 956b–57a). Now, the meaning 'to tell, to narrate' fits the verbal form *yētannû* in Judg. 5:11, in the *pi'el* stem and with the direct object *šidqôt YHWH* = 'the righteous acts of YHWH', better than the meaning 'to repeat'. It would be reasonable to suppose, then, that the meaning 'to tell, to narrate', available for the Aramaic verb *tny* (later *tny*), but not for the Hebrew verb *šnh*, facilitated the borrowing of the Aramaic verb, with this meaning, into Hebrew. (Some scholars translate *yētannû* in Judg. 5:11 as 'to praise' [cf. above, n. 54], but such a usage would have no parallel in either Aramaic or Hebrew. Since phonological analysis supports the identification of the Hebrew verb *tnh* as a loan from Aramaic, it would be better to understand it with the meaning 'to tell, to narrate'. Whether a particular occurrence of this verb would refer to a joyous or to a mournful narration, would depend on the specific event narrated; for the mournful context of the inf. cstr. *lētannôt* in Judg. 11:40, cf. Moore 1895: 303–4.) Support for the above hypothesis comes from the fact that in Rabbinic Hebrew, the verb *tnh* — but not *šnh*! — is used with the generic meaning 'to tell, to narrate', in the *pi'el* stem (see Jastrow 1903: 1681a). An especially apt parallel to the meaning suggested here for Judg. 5:11 comes from the homily in Bereshit Rabbah, chapter 6, on Ps. 50:6: *l'tyd lb' šmym mtnym šdqh š'šb hqb"b 'm 'wlmw* = 'In the future-to-come, the heavens will be telling about the righteous thing, which the Holy One, blessed be he, did to his world' (the Biblical Hebrew original employs the form *wayyaggîdû* = 'they tell').

⁶⁶ The only Aramaism, beside *yētannû*, claimed by Waltisberg to be indicative

might narrow the scope of what can be considered a reasonable range of dates for Aramaic influence on northern Cisjordanian Hebrew, but such considerations fall outside the scope of the present article.

III

To sum up, Rendsburg's claim that the Proto-Semitic phoneme /t/ was retained in the Canaanite dialects of Transjordan in the Iron Age is based on a faulty handling of selected evidence (the shibboleth story and the name of the Ammonite king b'lyš/Ba'ālīs), and is in fact contradicted by explicit evidence of cuneiform spellings (^{uru}Astar-tu and likely also ^mBa-a'-sa, if the interpretation of the latter name as derived from the Proto-Semitic root b't is correct). Rendsburg's proposal about the merger of the original /t/ with /t/ in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan is untenable in view of Hebrew inscriptions and of cuneiform evidence (the spelling ^mA-ú-si-i' for the name of Hosea king of Israel); the possibility that the phoneme /t/ was retained in the Hebrew dialect of northern Cisjordan at c. 1100 BCE and rendered in spelling by the letter t is also unlikely. Thus, the traditional Semiticist view of the merger of /t/ with /š/ as

of a particular *terminus post quem* for the composition of the Song of Deborah, is the use of the pattern qVtal (+ -īm) in plural formations of monosyllabic nouns derived from roots *mediae geminatae*: 'āmāmēkā (Judg. 5:14), ḥiqēqē (Judg. 5:15). As Waltisberg pointed out, in Aramaic such plural formations of this group of nouns are not attested before the fifth century BCE (Waltisberg 1999: 220–1, 229). However, it is not clear whether the plural formations in question resulted indeed from Aramaic linguistic influence. As Waltisberg himself admitted, the pattern qVtal (+ -īm) is regular in Hebrew for plural formations of monosyllabic (segholate) nouns derived from regular triconsonantal roots, such as *malk (Masoretic *melek*) > mēlākīm, *šibṭ (Masoretic *šebet*) > šēbāṭīm (Waltisberg 1999: 220). It would be only reasonable that plural formations of monosyllabic nouns derived from regular triconsonantal roots would occasionally influence the plural formations of much less common monosyllabic nouns derived from roots *mediae geminatae*. In this regard, it is important to note that similar plural formations of monosyllabic nouns derived from roots *mediae geminatae* are attested in biblical sources, which are commonly assumed by scholars to date from the eighth–seventh centuries BCE and to have been composed in Judah: ḥārārēhā (Deut. 8:9), ḥiqēqē (Isa. 10:1). Of course, both the Iron Age date and the Judean provenance (which undermines the claim that the plural formations in question were a specifically northern dialectal trait) of the relevant fragments from Deuteronomy and First Isaiah may be doubted; but clear evidence for a late dating of these fragments would be needed before one could confidently treat the plural formations of the kind discussed above as Aramaisms.

characteristic of all Canaanite dialects of the Iron Age⁶⁷ stands out as the most reasonable conclusion on the basis of the available data.

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⁶⁷ For this view see, e.g., Brockelmann 1908: 133, §46m; Goetze 1941: 128–9, n. 15.

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