

The *waw* Consecutive/*waw* Contrastive and the Perfect

Verb Tense, Context, and Texture in Old Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew,
with Comments on the Deir 'Alla Dialect and Post-Biblical Hebrew

By Victor Sasson

(The City University of New York)

Introduction

In medieval times, Arabic-Spanish speaking Jewish grammarians in Spain termed the *waw* in *wayyiqtol* verbal form *waw*-conversive (*waw-habippukh*). In more recent times in Europe, the term *waw*-consecutive gained currency. This term has come to denote consecutiveness in narration. It has also come to be erroneously considered as a stative grammatical/syntactical form, a form that had had no historical development regarding its use. Further, it has been indiscriminately applied to both prose and poetry composed over half a millennium. In a recent study (Sasson 1997), I drew attention to these erroneous and misleading views. I put forth the thesis that the term *waw* consecutive is not appropriate if used of *wyqtl* form in archaic Hebrew poetry, for there hardly exists real narrative consecutiveness in those texts. More often what prompts the use of the *wyqtl* form in those texts are the durative and contrastive elements that the *wyqtl* form offers *vis-à-vis* the *qtl* form, so that a more appropriate term should be *waw*-contrastive.

As mentioned in my earlier study, the various theses I advanced developed primarily out of my examination of the Tell Dan inscription and the use of the *wyqtl* form there and in the Zakkur inscription. Old Aramaic texts and archaic Biblical Hebrew poetry enabled me to make a new and novel connection, hitherto never made: these compositions were much closer in time to each other, and had similar, comparable themes. Hence, the use of the *waw* consecutive/*waw* contrastive in these texts can be said to be comparable.

New theses inadvertently tend to upset the established scheme of things and so put the guardians of existing knowledge on alert. Thus, Muraoka and Rogland (1998a) hasten to challenge both my analysis and my conclusions. I should emphasize that my study grew independently out of my work on the Tell Dan text. Indeed, I was not at all following the discussion that Muraoka was conducting with other scholars regarding *wyqtl* forms.

It is unfortunate that Muraoka and Rogland do not come to my study with an open mind. They come equipped with grammar textbooks and fixed notions and appear to labour under the delusion that new ideas must conform to their neatly-laid out rules. Some of their comments are pre-conceived; others are rather condescending. Still, other comments seek to trivialize my analysis.

The Conclusion to my study with which Muraoka and Rogland chose to begin their article was necessarily telescopic in nature, compressing and summing up in general terms the issues discussed. A better method would have been to cite and discuss the main analysis I offered in the body of my study. This they did – to some extent – in their footnotes. I shall take them on their own terms, nevertheless.

When I wrote in my Conclusion, »The *waw* consecutive with the imperfect was originally used in Old Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew in war, war-related, epic, and mythic texts«, I was not only referring to the Old Aramaic texts we possess. By »originally« – a key word that Muraoka and Rogland chose to ignore – I meant the time in history, whenever that was, when the *waw* consecutive was first introduced into Old Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew poetry. Our present evidence for the use of *wyqtl* form in Old Aramaic lies in the Zakkur and Tell Dan inscriptions (dated 9th century B.C.E.). Both these inscriptions and archaic biblical Hebrew poetic texts (possibly a century or more earlier) illuminate each other. They are closer in *time* in history and have comparable *themes*.

In my study I used the term *waw* consecutive not in the way Muraoka and Rogland define it, but as a *consonantal* form that appears also in Ugaritic, Moabite, Deir'Alla, and in Old Aramaic texts. We do not know how it was vocalized in the Canaanite dialects, but we may reasonably assume that it was vocalized/pronounced on the analogy of Massoretic Biblical Hebrew. It *could* have been vocalized differently in Old Aramaic – but its apparent *function* is what mattered to my discussion of the use and original purpose of the *waw* consecutive. By *waw* consecutive was meant the conversive *wyqtl* form, irrespective of how it was vocalized. The function of *wyqtl* in Zakkur and Tell Dan texts is to all intents and purposes the same as in the Canaanite dialects – i.e. preterital. The circumstantial evidence for this *wyqtl* being conversive is overwhelming and Muraoka's call (1998a, 76) for precise terminology appears pretentious and unnecessary.

A final word, about methodology. Muraoka and Rogland find it fit to criticise this writer (1998a, 100; 102, n. 4) for not discussing this or that verbal form and not making references to grammar textbooks. But this implies that my aims and methods are the same as theirs. Muraoka, as a professional grammarian, sets out to apply existing grammar rules to texts. This, by itself, is a commendable exercise – up to a point. My method of research is a bit different, because my aims are different. I

seek to tackle primary sources afresh, free of any prior assumptions or misconceptions. Surely this is one good way to explore and come up with new ideas. Otherwise one would end up only marching in the same spot, rehearsing the same rules, as Muraoka appears to be doing. While we all begin by studying textbooks and rehearsing grammar rules, there comes a time when we need to detach ourselves from this salutary habit and re-examine primary sources, particularly in the light of new epigraphic evidence.

In this article I intend to address several matters: 1. Discuss issues raised by Muraoka and Rogland in their Rejoinder to my study, particularly regarding function and morphology of *wyqtl*; 2. Offer further discussion of certain Old Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew texts regarding their durative and contrastive elements; 3. Present a brief, general reassessment of the language of Deir‘Alla texts; 4. Discuss further possible reasons for the demise of the *waw* consecutive in Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew and the emergence of verb tense in Mishnaic Hebrew; 5. Enlarge, at some junctures in the paper, on various points in my earlier study.¹

Function versus Morphology

The precise vocalization of the *wyqtl* form in Old Aramaic is not known. Although Muraoka and Rogland recognise this, they nevertheless claim that the *waw* is copulative, attached to a short imperfect in reference to punctual events in the past (1998a, 101). Once again Muraoka presents us with words detached from their contexts. He offers no continuous translation of, nor commentary on, the Tell Dan text. Thus, we are not able to evaluate more clearly how the verbal forms would function in the *context* of the surviving text, if read according to his prescription.

The suggestion by Muraoka and Rogland of a *waw* copulative with the imperfect cannot face the overwhelming circumstantial evidence we have in Canaanite dialects where the *waw* is clearly and definitely conversive. Would they consider the possibility that the *wyqtl* form in Old Aramaic followed a different morphology but was still understood and used by the Aramaeans as conversive, on the Canaanite model? But, indeed, Muraoka and Rogland contend that the Aramaeans had no conversive *waw*! The Aramaeans – they contend – simply attached a copulative *waw* to a preterital (= past) *yqtl* form. The Aramaeans, in other words, are said to have followed a linguistic route different from Biblical Hebrew.

¹ This article was essentially completed by August 1998. Some minor revisions were made in February 1999, and some stylistic modifications in June of that year.

The *wyqtl* forms in Ugaritic, Moabite, Deir‘Alla texts, and in epigraphic Hebrew are not vocalized. We find it reasonable, nevertheless, to understand them and label them as conversive – i.e. as *waw* consecutive forms. The totality of this Canaanite textual evidence strongly suggests that the conversive *waw* also existed in Old Aramaic – whatever was its phonetic shape and however the Aramaeans themselves understood and pronounced the *wyqtl* form. While it is true that we do not know how the Aramaeans precisely vocalized their conversive *wyqtl* form, we do not know how the Canaanite dialects pronounced/vocalized their *wyqtl* form, either. However, Massoretic vocalization of *wyqtl* must have been based on a very ancient and authentic oral/reading tradition, dating back to biblical times. Muraoka himself does subscribe to this view (1998, 77). We may reasonably, then, assume that Canaanite dialects had their conversive *wyqtl* form, irrespective of how they used it. To claim that the Aramaean had no conversive *waw* identical with or similar/comparable to the Hebrew one – as Muraoka and Rogland contend – appears unwarrantable.

According to Muraoka, »the use of the originally preterital short prefix conjugation with the conjunction *waw* in a special phonetic shape is a feature unique to Classical Hebrew.« (1995a, 20) I would be the first to embrace such a special privilege for Classical Hebrew, but I suspect I would only be engaging in self-delusion. Simply put: I cannot see how the ancient Israelites could have been unique innovators in this linguistic area. For when the *wyqtl* construction is considered alongside the *wqtl*, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that these constructions must have been based on an originally common North-West Semitic usage. Now if the Canaanite dialects employed the *wyqtl* form – and Ugaritic language clearly had an older history and literary tradition – how is it possible to claim that the form »in a special phonetic shape« was unique to Classical Hebrew? If Muraoka concedes that the form is used in the other Canaanite dialects (aside from Classical Hebrew), how would he propose to vocalize it? What kind of phonetic shape would he propose for it? The obvious inference is that he understands the *waw* in those other Canaanite dialects as copulative, on his analogy of the supposed form in Aramaic. Muraoka, however, is open to criticism when on a number of occasions he states that he lacks evidence for the Aramaic vocalization of *wyqtl*, yet he proceeds to assert that the *waw* is copulative, not conversive, even proposing that it was vocalized with a *šewā* (1995, 113)!

Thus, while Muraoka and Rogland claim that the Aramaic phonetic shape is different from that of Biblical Hebrew *wyqtl*, they are in fact assuming and admitting that the function is the same as that of Biblical Hebrew! Now, if the function of the consonantal form is the same, why is the phonetic shape so crucial to their argument? It is crucial – and

superficially so – because once they themselves have given a definition of the *waw* consecutive (1998a, 102, n. 1), they can then claim – as indeed they do – that the Aramaic form does not fall under this definition and, hence, it is not identical with Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*. But could not the consonantal form in Aramaic have been conversive, irrespective of the phonetic shape it actually assumed? The Aramaic phonetic shape, too – nevertheless – could have been identical with or similar/comparable to that in Classical Hebrew and, presumably, to other Canaanite dialects. The best course to take, I suggest, is to leave the phonetic shape of *wyqtl* in Aramaic alone and concentrate on its function.

The issue, thus, is largely a question of terminology, which appears to be of excessive concern to Muraoka (cf. 1998, 76). Muraoka and Rogland claim that since the (alleged) phonetic shape of Old Aramaic *wyqtl* is different from Biblical Hebrew *wayyiqtol*, we should not call it *waw* consecutive, as it does not fit the definition of *waw* consecutive. This is of course a narrow view of the matter. The Aramaeans themselves – unlike our critics – could still have understood and used the conversive *wyqtl* form in a similar, identical, or comparable manner to what present-day scholars conveniently term »*waw* consecutive«. In brief, Muraoka cannot insist on imposing his definition of the phonetic shape of Classical Hebrew *wayyiqtol* on the Aramaeans and their language. Further, in their quite unimaginative *wymt* and *mt* examples that Muraoka and Rogland cited to dismiss my thesis regarding the element of contrast in the language of archaic Hebrew poetry and Old Aramaic texts (1998a, 101), *they evade morphology and context but emphasize function/semantics of the verbal forms. Here – rather strangely – they are dismissing function and emphasizing morphology!*

Examined closely, the definition by Muraoka and Rogland of the *waw* consecutive in Biblical Hebrew is actually a definition of its phonetic shape, not of its function. One wonders, therefore, how they can presume to know the function of *wyqtl* in Old Aramaic. For on the one hand, they claim that its phonetic shape in Old Aramaic is not that of the Biblical Hebrew *waw* consecutive, while on the other hand they claim that its function is apparently the same!

In response to a statement I made in my study (a statement aimed at some scholars who questioned the *waw* in Tell Dan being conversive), Muraoka and Rogland claim (1998a, 103, n. 10) that »several scholars« have shown how the whole surviving text of the Tell Dan inscription operates if read according to their own understanding and prescription of the *wyqtl* there. Further, they claim that this writer »takes no notice of that« – and here again they are mistaken. First, my statement was not aimed at any scholar in particular. Secondly, my study was already completed in 1995 and submitted for publication when I had a look at Muraoka's brief comments (1995a, 19f.). I recall I found his comments enig-

matic. Apart from one inaccuracy of ascribing Muraoka's own opinion of the *wyqtl* forms to the editors of the inscription (an error detected also by John A. Emerton, 1997, 431f. n. 2), Muraoka and Rogland are also erroneous when they claim that my requirement regarding the Tell Dan text has been met by »several scholars«. Muraoka, however, has not shown how the whole surviving text of the Tell Dan inscription operates, if read according to his understanding of the *wyqtl* forms there. The function he ascribes to Old Aramaic *wyqtl* is the same as that he ascribes to Biblical Hebrew converted *wyqtl*! Muraoka and Rogland's reference to E. Y. Kutscher's and J. J. Koopman's »arguments« published in 1979 and 1962, respectively, are not directly relevant to the discussion regarding the Tell Dan inscription, discovered in 1993, and to which I was referring. The Tell Dan text has changed the whole picture! One Old Aramaic inscription (Zakkur) evidencing *wyqtl* forms is one thing. Two inscriptions evidencing *wyqtl* forms is quite another matter! Muraoka and Rogland cannot come to grips with this glaring fact and wish to stick to older assumptions. Moreover, they seem to think that to »argue« is as relevant and effective as to »show«. They need to illustrate their abstract, theoretical concepts; to translate them, so to speak, on the ground, in a continuous translation of the Tell Dan text. They cannot isolate the verbs from their context for grammatical/syntactical, theoretical »argumentation«, as Muraoka does (1995a and 1995b). Muraoka and Rogland cannot vaguely refer to the context without actually discuss the context. What is the context to Muraoka and Rogland? How do the verbal forms fit in and operate? It is not enough to argue but to demonstrate (this is the actual word I used) how the whole surviving text of the Tell Dan (Fragment A was meant at the time) would operate if read according to their purely theoretical prescription. Whereas this writer committed himself and presented a whole translation of the 1993 text, together with a philological, literary, and historical commentary (1995), Muraoka has persisted in his basically abstract, hypothetical and fragmented »rgumentation« regarding the *wyqtl* forms in that text.

*Biblical Hebrew yiqtol and the Case of Semitic *yaqtul and *yaqtulu*

The following are some of the allegations Muraoka and Rogland (1998, 99f.) level against this writer: (a) that he »consistently links the *waw* consecutive in archaic Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic to the durative use of the imperfect in past time«; (b) that he is not »aware of single preterital (i.e. nondurative) use of *yiqtol*«; (c) that he is »confusing the preterital/jussive form **yaqtul* with the **yaqtulu* form«.

These allegations clearly are based on a hypothetical reconstruction of the proto-Semitic verbal system, which claims that the prefix conjugation (= *yiqtol*) originally had two forms, one short and one long,

with two different functions. **Yaqtul* – it is claimed – originally represented the preterital (= past) and the jussive, while **yaqtulu* represented the present-future. Muraoka and Rogland apparently apply this theory to poetic texts invariably and mechanically.

Muraoka and Rogland seem convinced that the durative imperfect in Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic can only be based on proto-Semitic **yaqtulu*. They cannot conceive that if my analysis of the primary sources contradicts their rule of **yaqtulu*, the fault may lie in their rule or in their application of it, not in my analysis.

I am of course aware of a single (non-durative) use of *yiqtol*. Muraoka and Rogland's allegation betrays over-confidence and zeal in defending their grammar books – i.e. the *status quo* of present knowledge. In the texts I have discussed and the examples I have given I concentrated on my thesis and on the durative element of *yqtl* and *wyqtl* in archaic poetic texts. Consequently, it is puzzling that Muraoka and Rogland do not discuss the examples I have cited and examined but divert the discussion to the non-durative function of *yiqtol*. This is a glaring failure on their part.

The terms/concepts ›durative‹ and ›contrast‹ both are important to my thesis. Yet Muraoka and Rogland emphasize the word ›durative‹ but ignore the word ›contrast‹. Their claim that there are ›examples of punctiliar-preterital *yiqtol* in the very passages‹ that I analysed – citing Ex 15 and Deut 32 – is not based on sound analysis and appreciation of poetic texts but on mechanical application of a hypothesis elevated to the status of a rigid grammatical rule. Let me, nevertheless, again take Muraoka and Rogland on their own ground and discuss Ex 15 to which they refer.

Exodus 15

As mentioned earlier, Muraoka and Rogland claim that forms based on **yaqtulu* can be durative, but not forms based on **yaqtul*. This leads them to take יכסימו in Ex 15,5 as non-durative – i.e. a presumably short *yiqtol* form that, according to their ›rule‹, denotes a single, punctual event in the past (1998a, 100). I shall treat this example as a test case and discuss it in detail.

In Ex 15 two verbs of the same root (כסה = כסי) occur. One is יכסימו in v. 5 (imperfect) and the other, כסמו in v. 10 (perfect = a preterite).² This is rather fortunate for our discussion since this will illustrate the underlying *reason* for the use of the same verb twice in two dif-

² The term ›preterite‹ is used in this article in the sense it was used in my VT 47 study, 112, in reference to verbs in the perfect.

ferent grammatical forms and two different functions in the same poem in reference to the same event in the ›past‹. Now suppose for a moment that we take יכסימו as non-durative (as Muraoka and Rogland do), in what way can we account for the use of the two different forms, and in what way can we distinguish the *yiqtol* from the *qatal* form? For the two are definitely not identical in the way they are used in the poem as regards function. Their use, in other words, is not haphazard.

יכסימו in תהמת יכסימו is durative, offering a mobile, continuous action *vis-à-vis* כסמו in כסמו-ים! As a preterite (= perfect), כסמו denotes a completed, irreversible, final action – viz. the submergence of the enemy. The verb יררו (*qatal*, not *yiqtol* as Muraoka and Rogland claim) standing next to כסמו, further underscores the *durative and contrastive* nature of יכסימו. Thus, the successive sea wave after sea wave overtaking and overwhelming the enemy (a durative יכסימו) all result in one final, single, punctual (or as Muraoka would have it, punctiliar) juxtaposed, act – i.e. the irreversible fact of submergence and annihilation of the enemy (כסמו-ים). The English translation offered by Muraoka and Rogland whitewashes and camouflages the Semitic texture of יכסימו and כסמו. Of course, both Hebrew verbs refer to what we call in English ›past tense‹, but the way they function in Biblical Hebrew is completely different. I conclude, therefore, by rejecting their interpretation and classification of יכסימו as a non-durative verb.

Muraoka and Rogland cite another example from Ex 15 and two examples from Deut 32. These can be rejected along similar lines. Whether my conclusions would necessitate a reappraisal of the **yaqtul-yaqtulu* theory, I leave it to others to judge.

As mentioned before, Muraoka and Rogland dismiss the element of contrast in the examples I have analysed and discussed in my study. Surprisingly, they do this by conjuring up an utterly wooden and lifeless dictionary example of *wymt* and *mt*, devoid of any context whatsoever, stating that both these words have the same meaning and contain no contrast! Needless to say, this is nothing but a ›dead‹ example and is an attempt at trivializing, once again. For instead of discussing and proving that the examples I have cited contain no contrast, they resort to this facile and desperate subterfuge. Let me then reiterate that both the durative and the contrastive elements – *within their relevant context* – operate in the examples I cited and discussed in my study. Where Muraoka and Rogland see grammatical, structural, skeletal shapes, I see and read poetic texts pulsating with life, variety, and *contrast*.

The English translations of various Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic verbal forms offered by Muraoka and Rogland can be deceptive. These translations may only mislead the unwary reader, particularly if he is not fully attuned to the subtle nuances of Biblical Hebrew. The Semitic, Near Eastern nature and texture of Biblical Hebrew is very differ-

ent from ›exact‹ English. The tense system is quite different. Muraoka and Rogland seem eager to force Biblical Hebrew texts to conform to their current grammar text-books. This is bound to lead students and others to a lifeless and deadening understanding and ›appreciation‹ of Biblical Hebrew poetry.³

*The Barhadad and Zakkur Inscriptions
and the waw consecutive/contrastive*

Some further comments may be needed to clarify and refine some points connected with the theses presented in my earlier study (1997, 112). There I emphasized that the Barhadad inscription (KAI 201) is a *dedicatory* inscription. It contains, in fact, precious little to tell, and the *waw* consecutive is absent. The stele is offered for services rendered, so to speak: Barhadad had made a vow and the deity Melqart granted the king's wishes. These two reciprocal acts were not encompassed within a narrative framework comparable to what we have in the Zakkur inscription. The king vowed (= *nzr*), and the deity granted (= *šm'*) – both are preterite (= perfect) verbs, underscoring the actuality and *completedness* of the actions. The text makes no mention of what occasioned the vow. Although I expressed the view that the vow might have been occasioned by a national rather than a personal event, this is really *not* crucial to the issue why the *waw* consecutive is absent from the text. The fact is, there is nothing in the text itself about a war, let alone about a major theme comparable to the themes in Zakkur and Tell Dan. Muraoka and Rogland (1998a, 99 and n. 3) seize on the view I expressed regarding the reason for the vow and claim that the absence of the *waw* consecutive weakens my thesis. Here, as elsewhere in their Rejoinder, Muraoka and Rogland do not give my analysis proper, careful consideration, but appear anxious to rush to judgement.

Let me, nevertheless, suppose for a moment that the text of Barhadad was occasioned by some battle. The lack (for whatever reason) of a story framework must have precluded the use of the *waw* consecutive/contrastive. But the truth of the matter is that the Barhadad text is not considered a war/memorial inscription but is very much comparable to a biblical psalm of thanksgiving (cf. Ginsberg 1945).

The absence of the *waw* consecutive/contrastive from the Barhadad stele may be explained somewhat differently. Since Barhadad's wishes are granted, nothing else is suspended or expected. No dramatic, fateful events are awaited. In Zakkur, on the other hand, the imperfect ›con-

³ I am completing a short article on the literary nature of the Tell Dan inscription and the *waw* consecutive.

secutive⁴ is used when Zakkur cries for help and for fulfilment of his prayers – i.e. for survival and victory in massive armed conflict. Thus, in Barhadad (a dedicatory inscription comprising a few words), verbs in the perfect are used simply to tell us the completed *fulfilment* of a vow. In the much longer Zakkur text – in contrast – the prayer to the deity projects a scene into a future in the past, with *expectation* and dramatic, fateful anticipation – hence the converse *wyqtl* form is used.

The durative aspect of the *wyqtl* and its contrastive element *vis-à-vis* the decisive quality of the *qtl* support and reinforce each other.

Regarding *w's'ydy* in Zakkur, I consider *w's'* of durative nature. A relatively proper translation, to fit the context, would be: »And I lifted my hands (in prayer)«, as against Muraoka and Rogland's illustrative, »And I was raising my hand« (1998a, 100). Zakkur's prayer for deliverance implies progressive action. The English past continuous tense used illustratively by Muraoka and Rogland, however, is inappropriate as it does not – and cannot – fit the actual context. Once again Muraoka and Rogland offer English translations (as equivalents of Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic) that are, actually, imprecise. Translations from aspect-centered Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic to tense-centered English in an effort to argue or prove a linguistic point in the former can be quite misleading.

Hadad and Panammu (Kai 214–215)

In my earlier study I wrote: »These texts recount, mainly, dry facts and possible events in the future. They are basically down-to-earth compositions with occasional hackneyed parallel structures« (1997, 113).⁴ These statements may cause some misunderstanding (cf. Tropper, 1997, 644). Granted, numerous activities are narrated by the kings of Samal, but it is hardly possible to view them as imminently fateful as those recorded in Zakkur or Tell Dan. In the Zakkur text we find Zakkur facing an immediate, real danger. In Tell Dan, fateful war events are being narrated where kings and thousands of troops and chariots are involved. In stark contrast, the kings of Samal are either recounting family/court intrigues, or they are worried to distraction about their future or about the permanence of their name in posterity. There is, thus, a basic fundamental difference here which may have played a major role for the absence of the *waw* consecutive in the texts from Zinjirli.

⁴ One of the examples I cited from Panammu (*wbnt muwq' šmš*) in VT 47 was an oversight on my part, as it was not relevant to the discussion.

A reassessment of the Deir 'Alla dialect

I reiterate my view concerning the essentially Canaanite nature of the Deir 'Alla texts. And by that I mean their literary nature (Sasson 1986). Muraoka and Rogland (1998a, 102 n. 2) write: »Sasson rejects an Aramaic classification of the text (p. 112)«. But, then, they do not mention my chronology (on p. 126 of my recent study) where I say »unless the Deir 'Alla texts are classified as a form of Aramaic.« In the early 1980's I did not classify the dialect as Aramaic. I still do not classify it as Aramaic – but now I feel I must make a certain reappraisal of the situation. In view of the existence of *wyqtl* forms in the newly discovered Tell Dan inscription, a general reassessment of the nature of the Deir 'Alla dialect becomes necessary. From the point of view of their *linguistic* features – as distinct from their literary nature – I now can say that the Deir 'Alla texts appear to be hybrid, mixed. We have mixed texts in the Arslan Tash incantations (Phoenician-Aramaic), and the inscription of Achish, Governor of Eqrn (Sasson 1998), attests some hybrid linguistic and literary elements (Phoenician-Philistine-Hebrew). Why, then, may there not be Hebrew-Aramaic mixed dialect in the Book of Balaam? On the other hand, the Book of Balaam exhibits impressive Hebraic literary influence. This is the only literary *prophetic* book we have outside the Hebrew scriptures, and the location of Deir 'Alla across the river Jordan – and geography certainly matters – lends support to my thesis that the writer was at home in the Hebraic literary tradition. My literary analysis of the texts affirms that; in particular, those ideas and imagery that are reminiscent of the Prophet Isaiah. Who could have composed such texts? The book could have been put into written form by an Aramaean scribe versed in the Hebrew literary tradition. Alternatively, he could have been of Hebrew origin equally familiar with the Aramaic language but was of Hebraic literary bent. Most likely the dialect was literary, not a spoken dialect, produced under some special circumstances. Thus, from the point of view of linguistic usage, we cannot at this point in time make a decisive classification. At the same time, the Aramaic linguistic elements in the dialect have assumed greater significance, in my assessment. On the other hand, I do hereby, reaffirm the overall Canaanite/Hebraic literary nature of the texts, and my earlier extensive analysis of the First Combination amply demonstrates this position.

When I was writing in 1982 (and revising later on), the existence of the *waw* consecutive in Aramaic seemed to others and to me to be a linguistic anomaly. We had evidence of the *wyqtl* form in the Zakkur inscription only. The discovery in 1993 of the Tell Dan inscription changed my perception of the situation, drastically. Here, in the Tell Dan text, we have several occurrences of the *wyqtl* form, clearly conver-

sive. Consequently this writer had to re-think, revise, and refine his »previously held« opinion on the subject of the *waw* consecutive in Aramaic. To hold this writer hostage to his early 1980's views about the language of the Deir 'Alla texts – as Muraoka and Rogland do (1998a, 101) – is unfair. In the early 1980's I had not made – nor could I have made – a connection between archaic Hebrew texts and Old Aramaic texts. The years 1993–94 (during which I worked on the Tell Dan text) however, are not 1982–84, and new evidence – contrary to the methodological procedure Muraoka and Rogland employ – makes revisions of »previously held« opinions imperative.

*The demise of the waw consecutive
and the emergence of tense in Mishnaic Hebrew*

To begin with, in the mixed dialect of Deir 'Alla (Canaanite/Hebrew-Aramaic), the Aramaic linguistic elements must henceforth be considered of significant importance, not only because these elements do not »fit« the geographical area in which the texts were found, but also because of the additional evidence of the *wyqtl* form we now have in the Aramaic text from Tell Dan. Both the Deir 'Alla and the Tell Dan texts further strengthen the thesis regarding the use of the *waw* consecutive in Aramaic (cf. Emerton 1994, 258).

One major reason for the more rapid disappearance of this linguistic/literary feature from Aramaic than from Hebrew may be this: since Aramaic had developed into a *lingua franca*, a business and diplomatic vehicle, it had little use or tolerance, for a feature that was fundamentally – and probably in its very origin – literary in nature (Sasson 1997, 121f.). Business and literature, as is well known, do not go together. Written transactions generally tend to dispense with what is considered impractical, lengthy or unnecessary linguistic features. A more precise tense system indicating time unequivocally became necessary. Thus, Aramaic appears to have more quickly adapted itself to practical, day-to-day realities. This is in contrast to Hebrew which faithfully adhered to older linguistic and literary forms in its national and religious literature. Like Arabic, Biblical Hebrew was quite conservative. This conservatism is also manifest to some extent in less literary genres, such as, for example, the Lachish letters, and to a greater extent in the Mešad Hashabyahu ostrakon (for this legal petition – clearly based on an attested biblical parallel – see Sasson 1978, and 1997, 125 n. 28). Aramaic, exposed to linguistic, ethnic, and political currents, cosmopolitan in nature, expansionist in outlook, and lacking strong religious and national cohesion (judging by the extant literary remains), apparently gave in to linguistic change at a much more accelerated pace. Systematically, it underwent linguistic simplifications. The Aramaic missives in

the Book of Ezra – albeit of later date – exemplify this point. They are direct and business-like – and, of course, there are no *waw* consecutives. As far as we know, the Aramaeans preserved no national, *religious* literature which would possibly have acted as a bulwark against linguistic change. Thus, various factors appear to account for the apparently more precipitated disappearance of the converted imperfect from Aramaic. This, in turn, means that Biblical Hebrew simply required more time to adjust and change with the times.

The emergence of late-biblical Hebrew texts (e.g. Koh, Est) which exhibit few or stilted use of the converted *wyqtl* indicates that there may have been a *spoken* Hebrew dialect, stripped of the literary and linguistic features characteristic of mainstream classical Hebrew. Such a spoken, day to day, practical dialect – effective in deliberations and discussions – must have eventually assumed written form in the Mishnah. Indeed, the probability is that there was no other practical alternative for the students and teachers of the Mishnah – the Tannaim – than what we now call Mishnaic Hebrew.

As is well known, there are major lexical, grammatical and syntactical differences between mainstream classical Hebrew and post-biblical/Mishnaic Hebrew. Anyone whose staple reading diet is texts from the heyday of classical Hebrew prose and poetry will probably experience a linguistic tremor upon turning to read the Book of Ecclesiastes, for example. When I myself first turned to the Books of Chronicles, I almost experienced a linguistic shock: I found myself reading a decidedly different kind of Hebrew. Such a written language could not have arisen overnight, nor could it have been the artificial invention of some literary genius or geniuses. It could only have developed out of natural, linguistic evolution (taking into account social and cultural factors) over the course of time – time more probably in terms of centuries than in terms of decades. Those who boldly claim that the Hebrew Bible was *composed* within a short span of time in the Hasmonaean period, in more or less the same language, seem unaware of linguistic development, evolution, and change displayed within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible. For if they were correct in their view, there would hardly be any *waw* consecutives, and Biblical *l'dāwid* psalms would be as imitative and uninspiring as Qumran psalm 11QPs, *hal'lūyāh l'dāwid*, for example. But of course there are other major factors – aside from the linguistic – that make their position unrealistic and untenable.

The strength and charm of Mishnaic Hebrew lies in its plain simplicity. It is straightforward, terse, clear language, designed to relay information. It does not recount war-related, national, epic events, but delves into matters regarding daily, sabbath, and festival religious observance. The tractate Aboth is somewhat different in that it deals with moral/ethical matters. And even here the main objective is applied re-

ligion, not theoretical, speculative. And so, Mishnaic Hebrew may be considered the antithesis of Classical Hebrew. Not only the vast majority of the subject matters are significantly different (with the exception of biblical texts that deal with ritual), but the verbal and syntactical structures are different. Whereas Biblical Hebrew prose delights one with its various acrobatic verbal and syntactical forms – and particularly with perfect, imperfect, and *waw* consecutives – Mishnaic Hebrew prose keeps us down here on our feet, on solid ground. There are no flights of the imagination. With the waning and disappearance of mainstream biblical verbal and syntactical forms – and certainly with the discontinuance of the *waw* consecutive/contrastive – Hebrew lost poetry. The spirit that moves the language of the Hebrew Bible was sucked out of it. But the expiration of Classical Hebrew was a natural one, not artificially induced. It died a slow, but peaceful, death by what appears to have been perfectly natural causes. Its lovers (particularly in some Dead Sea scrolls) clung to it to the last minute and beyond. Mishnaic Hebrew, therefore, was the linguistic vehicle of those who looked forward to the future, in terms of religious practice. We should remember, however, that for those that nowadays read Mishnaic Hebrew texts for religious guidance, they find a different kind of ›poetry‹ there – practical, religious guidance and spirituality, clothed in simple language. The ›poetry‹ emerges out of the knowledge of religious instruction – out of content, not out of linguistic or literary style. Thus, from the point of view of expression, Mishnaic language is plain, bare, unadorned – but solid, clear-headed. Past, present, and future – in the act of writing – are brought into greater focus. It is not that past, present, and future did not exist in the mind of the ancient Israelite and he had no idea when he last milked his cow, or when he had to milk it again. We are discussing literary expression, and Classical Hebrew had to answer a curtain call and exit more or less gracefully. Living realities in later biblical times; exilic and post-exilic realities; various linguistic and cultural currents, all had a hand, we may surmise, in the shaping of Mishnaic Hebrew. In the matter of linguistic influence, the wide diffusion of the Aramaic language and its prestige must have played a major role in its shaping. This is so, even if we posit some degree of independently parallel linguistic development in both Hebrew and Aramaic (*pace* Kutscher, in: Smith 1991, 31).

Conclusion

Let me now refer back to Muraoka and Rogland (1998a, 101). They conclude their critique thus: »... yet for the moment we find ourselves in agreement with the opinion previously held by Sasson: ›It is hardly possible for anyone to claim that the *waw* consecutive is charac-

teristic of Aramaic«». If Muraoka and Rogland – in the face of new epigraphic evidence and some 15 years later – insist on sticking to my previously held opinion regarding the *waw* consecutive in Aramaic, I am powerless to change their minds, albeit I confess I am somewhat flattered. I hope and trust, however, they will reconsider, relinquish my previously held opinion, and find themselves eventually *converted* to the new ideas I now advance. New evidence demands new thinking, and hypotheses and grammatical rules enshrined in grammar textbooks certainly require periodic re-examination and fine tuning. To accomplish this, an open mind is a prerequisite.

In responding to T. Muraoka's and M. Rogland's criticisms of his new theses regarding the *Waw*- Consecutive/Contrastive in Biblical Hebrew and Old Aramaic, the writer examines the major criticisms and rejects them either as faulty or as untenable. He elaborates further on some old Aramaic inscriptions that he had discussed earlier and on the *yaqtul/yaqtulu* hypothesis, using *ksb* (perfect and imperfect) in Ex 15 as a test case. Then a brief reassessment of the Deir 'Alla dialect is offered in the light of the Tell Dan inscription. He suggests that the Aramaic *linguistic* elements in the Deir 'Alla texts now gain more significance. There follows further analysis of the reasons for the decline and demise of the *Waw*- Consecutive in post-biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew. The present article, thus, reaffirms and strengthens the theses presented in the writer's earlier study.

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