

Abstract

Due to the inherent ambiguity of Northwest Semitic syntax with certain morphological collocations, it is often difficult to discern between apposition and a genitive construction. One such construction, marked by the intermittent usage of the generic word for “man” (’īš) before both occupational and gentilic terms is especially difficult to categorize syntactically. The Northwest Semitic evidence does not correlate with traditional appositional categories and engenders awkward readings that defy superficial explication. Since no comprehensive study of these pleonastic syntactical constructions has yet appeared, this essay surveys the Northwest Semitic evidence, highlighting their conceptual and grammatical affinities, before positing an overarching explanation for their idiosyncrasy grounded in a phenomenon of linguistic convergence known from Canaanite Akkadian.

1. Introduction

The grammatical phenomenon known as apposition appears regularly in the

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Semitic languages.¹ According to Joüon and Muraoka (2009:448), apposition is

“the simple juxtaposition of a noun to a preceding noun [i.e. the leadword].

Whereas the noun in the genitive or in the attributive accusative is subordinated to

the preceding noun, the noun in apposition is coordinate to the first noun; it is

therefore in the same case as the first noun. There is indicated a relationship of

identity or equation between the two components, which can be transformed into a

nominal clause, ‘A is B.’”² Albeit a standard grammatical feature, apposition

exhibits different variations with distinct semantic nuances.³ Arnold and Choi

delineate the following appositional categories: species (e.g. Ex 24:5), attributive

(e.g. Prov 22:21), material (e.g. Ex 39:17), measure (e.g. 2 K 7:1), and explicative

(e.g. 1 Chron 5:9).

This essay focuses on a rare form of pleonastic apposition, which juxtaposes

¹ I wish to thank Samuel A. Meier, Joe Price, Alan Lenzi, and Kyle Greenwood for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay. I alone, however, bear responsibility for the ideas and arguments contained herein.

² Cf. Arnold and Choi (2005:196). All subsequent discussion of apposition, in its various reflexes, will utilize this definition. The overwhelming tendency is for the noun in apposition to modify the leadword, although exceptions do occur (cf. Kautzsch [1910:§131g]).

³ For thorough discussion on appositional variations, cf. Waltke and O’Connor (1990:226-34).

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the leadword **אִישׁ** (“man”)⁴ with a subsequent occupational or gentilic noun.⁵

Grammarians have traditionally defined this unusual form of apposition in descriptive terms only, situating it within the *species* category,⁶ despite its

⁴ **אִישׁ** most frequently designates a male human being (“man”), though it may also refer to a male animal (e.g. Gen 7:2). Secondly, it can refer to a male spouse (e.g. Gen 3:6; Lev 21:7), an abstract reference to “mankind,” an impersonal “somebody” (e.g. Gen 13:16; cf. the ESV’s translation of Lev 21:9 “the daughter of any priest”), and a distributive “each” (Ex 16:29).

⁵ Waltke and O’Connor (1990:230) instead call this “sortal” and note that it “is found with the broadest possible generic terms for people.” Cf. Joüon and Muraoka (2009:449); Arnold and Choi (2005:22).

⁶ A noteworthy example of *species* apposition derives from the phrase **זְבָחִים שְׁלָמִים** “peace offerings,” which literally means “offerings, peace offerings.” The more conventional way to construct this meaning in Semitic is to employ the genitive (i.e. construct), as seen in **זְבַחִי שְׁלָמִים** (The appositional usage occurs in the Hebrew Bible [hereafter HB] twice [viz. Ex 24:5 and 1 Sam 11:15], while the construct usage occurs twenty times [the initial noun is in the singular nine times]). Both of these constructions can obtain the same semantic result. The noun in apposition modifies the head noun just like the *nomen rectum* modifies the *nomen regens*. To clarify the role of the apposition, consider the basic adjectival phrase in Neh 12:43: **זְבָחִים גְּדֹלִים** “great sacrifices.” *Species* apposition achieves comparable results, but with two nouns. Both apposition and genitival relationship, therefore, are acceptable grammatical constructions in the HB (and Northwest Semitic languages, in general).

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equivocal fit.⁷ Waltke and O’Connor descriptively identify such constructions

under a variation of apposition where “the leadword is a common noun [and] the

appositive often provides further information about the subclass to which the

leadword belongs,” leaving little to debate grammatically.⁸ Unanswered questions,

however, still surround the source of this particular example of anomalous syntax.

Since occupational nouns and gentilics elsewhere stand alone, what was the

purpose of this redundant formation? From where did it come? To this end, there

are, unfortunately, no easy answers. The ancient Near Eastern linguistic and

historical contexts may, however, provide a more productive explanation.

The chief aim of this essay is thus to identify these pleonastic syntactical constructions, highlight their conceptual and grammatical affinities, and posit an overarching explanation for their idiosyncrasy grounded in a phenomenon of linguistic convergence known from Canaanite Akkadian during the Amarna Period.

⁷ What sets this apart is the lack of any overt relationship between the words. See Waltke and O’Connor (1990:226-29) for discussion on the referent distinctions between adjectival constructions and apposition. In general, a binding characteristic of apposition is a semantic relationship between the referents of both nouns. While נָבִיא is formally a masculine position, this relationship is quite loose (cf. זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים, which both refer to “offering”).

⁸ Waltke and O’Connor (1990:230).

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I will first address the appositional evidence from Northwest Semitic languages, surveying both occupational and gentilic forms, before situating this feature within the context of 14th century BCE Canaan. What follows enumerates and analyzes these not only to demonstrate their anomaly within the Northwest Semitic sphere, but to postulate the hybridization of Canaanite Akkadian as their conceptual source. This essay culls data from the HB, Old and Imperial Aramaic, as well as Qumran Hebrew, organizing it according to semantic domain.⁹

2. Occupational Apposition

Scholars have long noted this peculiar syntactic collocation where a generic noun, אִישׁ “man” (and less frequently, אִשָּׁה “woman”), precedes an occupational term.¹⁰ Despite this awareness, they have only provided descriptive analyses. Although אִישׁ governs a host of different occupational referents, including cultic, prophetic, royal, martial, and workman roles, it does so superfluously, adding no apparent semantic nuance.

⁹ I have consulted the *Dictionary of Northwest Semitic Inscriptions, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, and *Accordance* software for the Northwest Semitic data employed above.

¹⁰ Cf. Waltke and O’Connor (1990:230); Koehler and Baumgartner (2001:43).

The following analysis demands grammatical distinction be made between *’lš* in the construct state (or: bound form) and *איש* as a leadword in apposition.

Inherent ambiguity surrounds this endeavor due to the fact that masculine singular

nouns show no morphological difference in the construct and absolute state. For

example, the phrase *איש מלחמה* (cf. 2 Sam 17:8; Is 3:2; 42:13; Ezek 39:20, etc.)

may resemble apposition *prima facie*, but it is the meaning of the latter term that

establishes meaning for the phrase, thus rendering “a man of war” > “warrior”

instead of “a man, a war.” Another interpretive obstacle lies with a *qātil*-class noun

in second position. There is a tacit, yet palpable, semantic differentiation between

איש + *qātil* verbal adjective (“a man *who does X*”) and *איש* + occupational noun (“a

man, an X”).¹¹ Nevertheless, certain *qātil*-class nouns (*חַצֵּב* < *חָצַב* “hewer”)

developed technical, frozen meanings and thus fit comfortably within our

¹¹ Only in the former example is *איש* semantically necessary. For example, cf. 2 Chron 7:18 *לֹא*

יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מוֹשֵׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל “There shall not be cut off to you a man, *one who (would) rule* over

you in Israel.” In this context, *מוֹשֵׁל* is not a specialized reference to a “governor,” even though it

can denote this (cf. 2 Chron 23:20; cf. note 26 below). For an extended treatment of the complex

development of the **qātil* noun class and participle, see Kedar-Kopfstein (1977:155-76).

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morphological purview. Notwithstanding various impediments, a handful of clear, yet idiosyncratic, examples remain.

2.1 *Prophet(ess)*

Three of the more unambiguous references convey semantic affinities despite their different provenances. In Judges 4:4 the construction refers to Deborah (אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה “a woman, a prophetess”), but to an anonymous prophet in Judges 6:8 (אִישׁ נְבִיא “a man, a prophet”). Out of a combined 326 attestations in the Hebrew Bible, a generic noun precedes these two terms just twice. What obtains on those two occasions is an unusual, yet intelligible, appositional relationship.¹² To dismiss this simply as rare or stylistic would, at best, only describe the issue. At worst, it would severely oversimplify the construction, for this is neither an isolated example nor one devoid of morphological and conceptual precedents in the ancient Near East.

Across the Jordan River, the first line of the late 9th century BCE Balaam inscription from Deir ‘Allā reads: ספר [בלעם.בר.בעז].ר.איש.חזה.אלהין[.]הא “a scroll

¹² Judges 4:7-10 is absent in 4QJudg^a (for which, see Barrera (1992:315-24)). Whether MT Judg 6:8 is secondary does not affect the syntactical distinctiveness of this construction.

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of [Bil‘am, son of Bi‘o]r, a man, a seer of (the) gods (was) he.”¹³ The prophetic

positions of “seer” and “prophet” evinced overlapping semantic domains in

discrete chronological periods (cf. 1 Sam 9:9). While חֹזֶה “seer” and נְבִיא

“prophet” differ lexically, they coalesce semantically, and in at least two places

(Judg 6:8; Deir ‘Alla i:1), the anarthrous head noun אִישׁ precedes them both. The

noun in apposition does not necessarily modify the leadword. Furthermore, the

lexical inventory often accounted for gender exclusivity, as seen in the grammatical

bifurcation of נְבִיא “prophet” and נְבִיאָה “prophetess.”¹⁴

2.2 Priest

¹³ Hackett (1980:31) posits a relative pronoun with prosthetic *alef*, attested elsewhere in Phoenician (cf. Heb. *še-*), as a second potential realization for אִישׁ (cf. van den Branden [1969:§168]). The fact that אִישׁ elsewhere precedes occupational terms in the Northwest Semitic languages (as enumerated above in the Judges 4:4 and 6:8 analogues) relieves pressure to account for a prosthetic *alef* on a relative (so Hoftijzer and van der Kooij [1976:183]).

¹⁴ The inflection of occupational nouns in both genders is conventional in BH (e.g. מֶלֶךְ “king” and מַלְכָּה “queen”).

Another such construction, וּבֵת אִישׁ כֹּהֵן “a daughter of a man, a priest,” occurs in Lev 21:9.¹⁵ A close examination precludes identifying אִישׁ as a bound form within a construct chain, for “a daughter of a man of a priest” is unintelligible in context. To highlight the anomaly of וּבֵת אִישׁ כֹּהֵן in Lev 21:9, however, consider the similar construction commencing both Lev 22:12 and 13, וּבֵת־כֹּהֵן “and a daughter of a priest.” Both readings obtain the same meaning, although the former is syntactically unwieldy in Hebrew. כֹּהֵן occurs over 750 times in the Hebrew Bible, yet only once (Lev 21:9) is it juxtaposed with אִישׁ.

This same construction resurfaces thrice at Qumran, in the Damascus Document (Col 13, 1. 2), the Community Rule (Col. 6, ll. 3-4), and 4QTohorotB^b (Frg. 1, Col. 2, 1. 6).¹⁶ It is of considerable importance that each of these references occurs in sectarian documents, thus demonstrating no scribal compulsion to replicate a particular reading. Qumran scribes manifested an awareness of this rare construction and yet, despite its inherent awkwardness, displayed little reluctance to preserve it.

¹⁵ This example mirrors the aforementioned examples, despite the fact that the final two words follow a construct noun (בֵּת “daughter of”).

¹⁶ Three times out of 262 attestations (personal count from Abegg, Bowley and Cook [2003]).

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Another ubiquitous cultic term in the HB, לֵוִי “Levite,” developed both an ethnic and a cultic value, each morphologically indistinguishable in Hebrew.¹⁷ Out of 354 attestations in the HB, only in Judg 19:1, however, does אִישׁ לֵוִי “a man, a Levite” occur. Some modern versions (e.g. ESV, NASB), evidently troubled by the construction, read אִישׁ with a particularizing force, “a certain Levite.” The aforementioned לֵוִי/כֹהֵן + אִישׁ examples indubitably represent a permutation of apposition, but one uncharacteristic of the Northwest Semitic syntactical systems. In any case, the evidence extends farther.

2.3 Martial, Royal, and Other Sundry Designations

The Hebrew term רֶגֶלִי, which occurs 12 times in the HB, denotes a specialized term for the “footsoldier.” Outside of one non-martial usage (viz. Jer 12:5), רֶגֶלִי appears with two different variations: seven times as a collective after a number (typically אֶלֶף “thousand”) and four times in apposition to the leadword אִישׁ (Judg 20:2; 2 Sam 8:4; 1 Chron 18.4; 19:18).

Another martial term, Hebrew הַבַּיִת, occurs only twice in the HB, both times modifying Goliath. This rare, always articular, dual noun, which may relate

¹⁷ Biblical Aramaic makes the gentilic connotation distinctive with the spelling לְוִי *lēwāy*.

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to Ug. *bnny* (*bēnanāyā*) “intermediary,” literally means “(one who is) between two (places).”¹⁸ HALOT provides the translation “champion, single-fighter.”¹⁹

Whatever the precise meaning of this enigmatic term,²⁰ it correlates with the evidence above *only* if it is a specialized martial position.²¹

Several royal terms surface in apposition with an anarthrous אִישׁ in the HB. The specialized Akkadian loanword סָרִיס “eunuch, high official” occurs only once out of 45 attestations with a preceding אִישׁ (viz. Jer 38:7).²² Despite cumbersome

¹⁸ Cf. Albright (1958:38).

¹⁹ Cf. Koehler and Baumgartner (2001:140).

²⁰ A similarly tenuous construction is the tripartite אִישׁ שֶׁלֹּחַ חֶרֶב “the one who draws the sword.”

Seven out of fourteen references occur with אִישׁ (Judg 8:10; 20:15, 17, 46; 2 K 3:26; 1 Chron 21:5 [2x]), but this agglutinative construction, marked by a participle שֹׁלֵחַ and an accusative adjunct חֶרֶב, make this problematic. Perhaps the best way to translate this is simply “a man who draws the sword,” which eventually comes to mean “soldier, swordsman.” The phrase אִישׁ בְּחֹרֶר “a man, a choice one [or: firstborn]” (cf. Judg 20:15-16, 34; 1 Sam 24:3; 26:2; Chron 13:3, 17) also shows up in military passages.

²¹ The War Scroll refers to Goliath not as a גִּבּוֹרִים, but אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חֵלֵל “a man, a warrior of strength” (11:1).

²² CAD R, 292-96. It was used in royal parlance for a “chief eunuch” ([*rab*] ša rēšī; LÚ.SAG).

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syntax, the meaning remains clear.²³ The Hebrew terms שַׂר “royal official, military commander” and שֹׁטֵף “judge” occur in apposition with אִישׁ in Ex 2:14 (וַיֹּאמֶר מִי) “And he said, ‘Who placed you (as) a man, a prince, and a judge over us?’.”²⁴

The phrase הָאִישׁ מְבַקֵּר “bursar” occurs four times (in only two documents) out of thirty total attestations of מְבַקֵּר at Qumran (1QS VI, 12, 20; 4Q265 4ii6, 8) at Qumran. The two documents which employ the leadword הָאִישׁ do so exclusively, thereby suggesting a range of scribal methods within these Qumran materials (i.e. the author[s] of the documents with leadword הָאִישׁ differed from the twenty-six occurrences of independent מְבַקֵּר). Since מְבַקֵּר demands no qualifying leadword, where might such a construction have arisen and for what reason?

The use of the collocation אִישׁ + occupational noun occurs for a host of different social positions, from prophet and priest to subservient laborers. The

²³ The phrase אִישׁ מוֹשִׁל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל in 2 Chron 7:18 may either represent “one who rules in Israel” or “a man, a ruler in Israel.” If the participle מוֹשִׁל denotes a technical term here, and this is unlikely given the emphasis simply on (non-specific) leadership, the example may fit.

²⁴ The participle from שֹׁטֵף “to judge” functions substantivally for the technical occupation “judge” in this immediate context.

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Imperial Aramaic “Story of Aḥiqar,” known from a 6th/5th century BCE text from

Elephantine, although undoubtedly reflective of a much older tradition, contains

the construction אִישׁ גִּנֵּב “man, a thief” (l. 125).²⁵ A similar phrase for an adversary

shows up in both an Old Aramaic inscription from Zinçirli (אֲנָשֵׁי צָרִי “men,

enemies”) and Esth 7:6 (אִישׁ צָרִי “a man, an enemy”).²⁶

Out of 55 references in the HB, the feminine אִשָּׁה precedes אֶלְמָנָה (“a woman, a widow”) on only 5 occasions (viz. 2 Sam 14:5; 1 K 7:14; 11:26; 17:9-10). Furthermore, אִשָּׁה precedes eight out of the thirty-four total appearances of זִנָּה “prostitute” in the HB (Lev 21:7; Josh 2:1; Judg 11.1; 16:1; Jer 3:3; Ezek 16:30; 23:44; Prov 6:26).²⁷

The final two occupational items under consideration, here professional workman terms, both appear in 2 Chron 2.1: וַיִּסְפֹּר שְׁלֹמֹה שְׁבַעִים אֶלְף אִישׁ סָבָל

²⁵ Lindenberger (1983:114); cf. Weigl (2010). The manuscript reveals an effaced relative pronoun (וִי) written by mistake after כֹּאִישׁ. Akkadian also used the determinative for the thief (Cf. LÚ.NÍ.ZU or *šarrāqu*). 11Q19 56, 15 attests the phrase אִישׁ נֹכְרִי “a man, a foreigner.”

²⁶ Cf. KAI 214, l. 30. The phrase אִישׁ זָר “a man, a stranger” may occur in l. 34 (the appositional noun is unclear).

²⁷ See also 1 K 3:16 for this collocation in the plural (נָשִׁים זָנוֹת “women, prostitutes”).

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וְשִׁמּוֹנִים אִישׁ חִצָּב בָּהֶר “And Solomon counted 70,000 burden bearers (lit. “70,000 a

man, a burden bearer”) and 80,000 hewers (lit. 80,000 a man, a hewer) on the

mountain.” Out of 13 total attestations between the two terms, סָבַל and חִצָּב, only

in this verse does אִישׁ front them. Strikingly, both appear *independently* (i.e.

without אִישׁ) in a nearly identical context in 2 Chron 2:17: וַיַּעַם מִהֶם שְׁבִים אֶלֶף סָבַל

וְשִׁמּוֹנִים אֶלֶף חִצָּב בָּהֶר “And he made from them 70,000 burden bearers and 80,000

hewers on the mountain.” The HB employs a profusion of different literary devices

for various reasons, but the preservation of two distinct, and hitherto unexplained,

syntactical formations all the way up to the common era suggests an entrenched

tradition.²⁸

Since most of the terms examined above occurred regularly in BH, any potential, and thus secondary, addition of אִישׁ for the purpose of clarification lacks

²⁸ A similar phenomenon occurred in Lev 21:9 and 22:12-13, as discussed above, with לָוִי. The phrase אִישׁ שֶׁלֶף חֶרֶב “a man who draws the sword,” which occurs 10 times in the HB (viz. Judg 8:10; 20:2, 15, 17, 25, 35, 46; 2 K 3:26; 1 Chron 21:15 [2x]; 2 Sam 24:9), is pertinent *only* if the participial phrase “one who draws the sword” denotes a technical martial term by this time (i.e. “a man, a swordsman”). K. Greenwood (2010:474) suggests an alternative designation for this phrase rooted in age rather than profession.

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overt syntactic or semantic motivation. The *lectio difficilior*, here underscored by pleonasm, nonetheless achieved the same sense as the *lectio facilior*.

3. Gentilic Apposition²⁹

The HB employs a gentilic formation with two basic variations: 1) the construct relationship (e.g. אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל “a man of Israel” [2 Sam 16:15]); and 2) a gentilic suffix on a geographical or familial name (e.g. עִבְרִי “Hebrew” [Jon 1:9] or בְּנֵימִינִי “Benjaminite” [1 Chron 27:12]). On several occasions, however, the latter formation appears in apposition, following the generic term אִישׁ. Instead of מִצְרִי “Egyptian,” which occurs thirty times in the HB, one finds אִישׁ מִצְרִי “a man, an Egyptian” just seven times (viz. Gen 39:1; Ex 2:11, 19; Lev 24:10; 1 Sam 30:11; 2 Sam 23:21; 1 Chron 11:23 [articular]). The pleonastic אִישׁ עִבְרִי “a man, a Hebrew”

²⁹ The preposing אִישׁ does precede a personal name on several occasions, but these are explicable on literary grounds. In Ex 11:3 and Num 12:3, the phrase הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה “the man Moses” occurs in parenthetical contexts adding personal information about the individual in view. Furthermore, Dan. 9:21 attests the phrase הָאִישׁ גַּבְרִיאֵל “the man Gabriel,” but this usage stems from the enigmatic identity of the person in view. Though Akkadian used a masculine determinative (a vertical stroke, often transliterated as “m”) before male personal names, this phenomenon should not be confused with the biblical examples just mentioned.

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appears thrice in the HB (viz. Gen 39:14; Ex 2:11, 13 [pl.]), out of thirty-four total occurrences. On two other occasions, in 1 K 7:14 and 2 Chron 2:13, the collocation *איש צרי* “a man, a Tyrian” occurs.

As with the constructions above denoting male occupations, these unwonted forms present little semantic confusion. They obtain an equivalent semantic value, despite their syntactic anomaly. The diffusion of examples across linguistic and chronological boundaries precludes the connecting of variants with a particular dialect, location, or period. In spite of the fact that neither a male occupation nor a gentilic in BH require any further clarification, such as from a classifying leadword, this phenomenon nonetheless occurs.³⁰ But why? It does not take place in a vacuum or devoid of precedent, for it evinces a general syntactical resemblance to the use of the determinative in languages that employ a syllabic script as well as a specific affinity with Canaanite Akkadian.

4. Recontextualizing in light of Canaanite Akkadian

This rare syntactical relationship in Northwest Semitic replicates the

³⁰ Paul’s address to the Areopagus in Acts 17:22 (*ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι* “O men, O Athenians”), a common construction in classical Greek, demonstrates formal equivalence, but lacks contextual affinity due to the vocative usage within direct discourse.

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orthographic conventions of languages written with a syllabic script (e.g.

Akkadian, Hittite, and Egyptian), which use a determinative marker before certain classes of nouns as a classifier. The determinative technically functioned outside of the syntactical structure and, thus, as a rule, was not read. The LÚ determinative (Akk. awîlu) “human; free man” preceded both male occupational and gentilic terms, the same two class nouns found after שׂי in Northwest Semitic. For example, Akkadian used LÚ before the occupational positions of the prophet, such as nābî “prophet,”³¹ āpilu “answerer,” raggimu (LÚ.ra-ag-gi-mu) “shouter,” and maḥḥu (LÚ.GUB.BA) “ecstatic.”³² The determinative thus streamlined logographic

³¹ ARM 26 216:5. For further discussion of Akkadian *nābî*, which only shows up twice in the ancient records (once at Mari and once at 13th century BCE Emar), and its potential etymological relationship to Hebrew נָבִיא, cf. Stökl (2012:63-4, 157-91, 199-200).

³² Cf. ARM 3 40:9; Parpola and Watanbe (1988:6:117). Even female occupations, such as *raggimtu* “prophetess” (SAL.ra-ag-gi-mat-a-tu) exhibited this feature (Parpola [1993:10:9]). Cf. the Hittite term LÚ DINGIR^{lim}-ni-an-za-ma (*antuḥšaš šiuniyanz*) “man of god,” which bears prophetic connotations.

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and syllabic transcription for the purpose of classifying certain nouns.³³ An

alphabetic analogue like אִישׁ נְבִיא nevertheless attests a conspicuous resemblance.³⁴

The international correspondence, discovered at Tell el-Amarna, between Egypt and her neighbors during the 14th century BCE sheds light on the development and implementation of this very issue. The literary evidence affords a unique glimpse into the status of peripheral forms of Akkadian, such as that used between Canaanite scribes, for which no other comparable linguistic evidence has yet appeared. Regardless of whether this hybridized language was a Canaanized form of Akkadian, and thus a mixed dialect, or simply Canaanite encoded in cuneiform, the convergence of Akkadian and Canaanite engendered a certain level of hybridization and compromise.

The evolving status of the determinative in Canaanite Akkadian makes this especially clear. To that end, Rainey proposes a multifaceted situation where its

³³ Unlike the HB evidence in which אִישׁ rarely precedes כֹּהֵן and לֵוִי, Akkadian regularly uses a determinative before the various terms for cultic officials, including šangû (LÚ.sanga) “priest,” kiništu (Sum. LÚ.ukkin; Akk. LÚ.ki-ni-iš-tu) “lower class priests,” šanga(m)māhu (LÚ.sánga.mah) “exorcist,” and kalû (LÚ.gala) “lamentation-priest.”

³⁴ Whereas אִשָּׁה rarely precedes אִלְמַנָּה, the cognate Akkadian term, *almattu* “widow,” regularly follows a feminine determinative (SAL.NU.KÚS.Û).

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“function and value...can be interpreted in various ways.”³⁵ Although this

classifying word was traditionally non-syntactical and, thus not read, the Amarna

evidence demonstrates a context where it entered syntax and pronunciation (e.g.

LÚ.MEŠ GAZ “men, ‘Apiru’; LÚ.MEŠ ḥu-up-ši-ia “men, my yeoman workers”).³⁶ For

example, LÚ maintains its chief function as a classifying marker, but also exhibits

unorthodox scribal characteristics, such as adding a plural marker (MEŠ) to an

unmarked plural noun (i.e. without the plural marker), demonstrating either

confusion over a rudimentary linguistic principle in Akkadian or the adoption of

³⁵ Rainey (1996:28).

³⁶ For the full range of evidence, see *ibid*, 28-31.

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Canaanite syntax.³⁷ Similar anomalous writing occurs with the determinatives KUR, GEMÉ (e.g. MUNUS GEMÉ am-ti-[ki] “daughter of your maidservant”), URU, which likely stands for *ālu* when preceding a GN, and ÉRIN (e.g. ERÍN.MEŠ ša-bi pí-tá-te ša LUGAL “the archers of the king” [166:4-5]).³⁸ If Rainey is correct, the determinative marker, was, indeed, pronounced by the Canaanite scribes crafting this graphically hybridized “interlanguage.”

Although Babylonian scribes did not read the determinative, but wrote it only as a scribal convention adopted from Sumerian, the evidence from 14th century BCE Canaan represents a deviation from the norm, an unsurprising

³⁷ Ibid, 30. Cf. LÚ.MEŠ.MAŠKIM “supervisors” (EA 83:17; 89:60) and LÚ.MEŠ.İR “slaves” (EA 164:9-10; 166:10), etc. Von Dassow (2004:642) provides a general summary of the evidence for this “interlanguage”: “sentences composed of Akkadian words are arranged in Canaanite syntax; Akkadian words are made to function according to the rules of Canaanite grammar; Akkadian words are provided with Canaanite affixes; Akkadian words and morphemes are recombined to produce otherwise nonexistent forms; and Canaanite words, besides being deployed as glosses, are used alongside Akkadian ones.” She further argues that Canaanite, not Akkadian, was the *lingua franca* shared by the scribes of Canaan and their counterparts in Egypt. According to this perspective, Akkadian was thus the a vehicle or “means of writing,” a principle Gershevitch calls alloglottography (1979:138, 154, n. 65). Shlomo Izre’el, however, disagrees, arguing forcefully that Canaanite-Akkadian was a mixed, spoken language.

³⁸ The Jerusalem scribe says this in still another way: LÚ.MEŠ.ERÍN *pi-ta-ti* (286:54).

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aberration in light of the linguistic and historical contexts.³⁹ This innovative phenomenon, whereby what was previously unpronounced suddenly became pronounced ultimately produced one potential context for the anomalous form of pleonastic apposition in Northwest Semitic. So while the peculiar Northwest Semitic phenomenon of $\psi\text{א}$ before certain occupational nouns and gentilics finds an analogy in the standard determinative usage in syllabic languages, it finds a potential source for its literary genesis in the particular scribal conventions of 14th BCE Canaan.

There is no ambiguity pertaining to the pronunciation of $\psi\text{א}$ in Northwest Semitic. To suggest this term was not read (and thus, non-syntactical) presents an untenable position in light of the history of the Northwest Semitic tradition (i.e. all that was written was read). Rather than a postulate of syntactic transfer from Akkadian to Canaanite (as if Canaanite inherited Akkadian syntax), this innovative phenomenon is a byproduct of a “mixed language written by Canaanite cuneiform

³⁹ In specifying the semantic domain of the following (and less often, preceding) substantive, determinatives “can be proven not to have been pronounced” (Edzard [2003:9]). Furthermore, evidence from Akkadian loans from Sumerian, which do not customarily transfer the determinative, although Edzard points out that rare exceptions may exist, demonstrates its non-phonetic character.

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scribes.”⁴⁰ The anomalous phenomenon in view is thus more of a “Canaanism”

than a “Akkadianism.”⁴¹

5. Conclusion

Given that what was read was also syntactically pleonastic and semantically conditioned (i.e. largely confined to a leadword **איש** followed by occupational or gentilic noun, mirroring the customary Akkadian usage) the evidence from Amarna relates to the current discussion in at least two ways: 1) It contextualizes the peculiar preservation of a rare collocation like BH **איש נביא** “a man, a prophet”; and 2) It posits a potential origin for its inception into Northwest Semitic scribal

⁴⁰ von Dassow (2003:217). Elsewhere von Dassow refers to this *mischsprache* as a “code used for writing in cuneiform, not really a dialect of Akkadian, nor, indeed, really a dialect at all....One might almost characterise the Canaanites scribes’ use of cuneiform as Akkadographic, and the texts they wrote as tablet-length Akkadograms, punctuated by occasional Canaanite words and explanatory glosses” (Ibid, 216). Her hypothesis has not garnered much support. As shown below, the argument here complies with Canaanite Akkadian as both a mixed language (so Izre’el and Rainey) and Canaanite encoded in Akkadian cuneiform (so von Dassow). If von Dassow is correct that Canaanite Akkadian represents an encoded (or: alloglottographic) language, what was traditionally an unread determinative, like LÚ, may stand in for **איש** within the Canaanite correspondence.

⁴¹ Cf. von Dassow (2004:673-4).

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tradition.⁴² While the precise mechanism of transfer and preservation through scribal tradition remains largely elusive, these examples of counterintuitive and pleonastic apposition did not arise *ex nihilo*. They are diachronic reflexes that manifest the widespread linguistic, cultural, and historical contact shared between ancient Israel and her Near Eastern neighbors.

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⁴² Rainey (1996:31). For the preference for a genitive construction over a determinative already at Mari, cf. *māt* KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI “the land of Babylon” (ARM 2 84:24) and *ana māt Aḥāzīm* (ARM 1 69:7).

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