

725 New Words Beginning with Mem or Nun

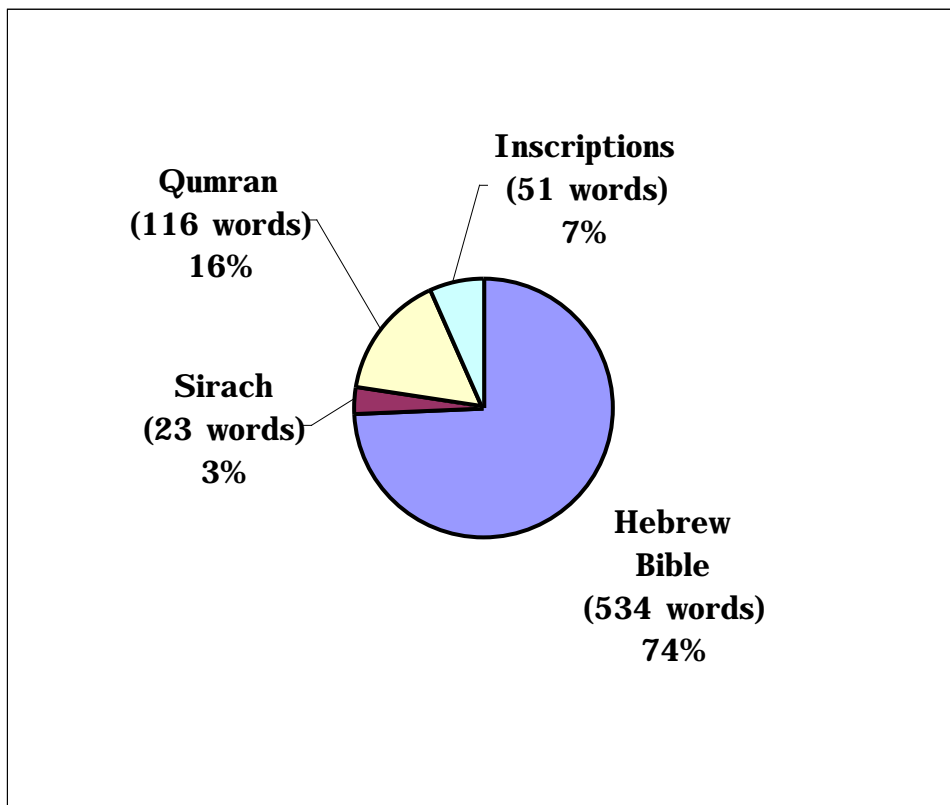
David J.A. Clines
University of Sheffield

Last month (July 2001), we finished Volume 5 of the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. In it were included 725 words that are not found in the lexicon of Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB), completed in 1907—which is how we define a ‘new’ word. For the most part, they have not subsequently appeared in any Hebrew dictionary either.¹

1. Textual Locations of the New Words

This is where the new words came from:

Figure 1
New Words in Classical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), by Corpus



As you will know already, and will see here also, the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, unlike every previous Hebrew dictionary, is a dictionary of the language as a whole and not just of the literature that is preserved in the Bible. For convenience, the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* divides the texts in Classical Hebrew into four corpora: the Bible, Ben Sira, Qumran and related texts, and Inscriptions. The graph shows that about three-quarters of the new words are in Biblical Hebrew, while Qumran texts, the Inscriptions

¹ I reckon that only 15% of these ‘new words’ have appeared in any Hebrew dictionary. See further below.

and Sirach contribute among them a quarter of the words.²

There is an important difference between new words within the Hebrew Bible and new words in other texts. In the other texts, the words are (for the most part) indisputably present, and even if there may be some uncertainty about what they mean, there is no denying their existence. In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, in every case proposals for new words, however plausible, can be no more than proposals, and in all cases alternative explanations already exists. In some cases the proposal for a new word depends on an emendation of the text.

To put these figures in a wider context, we could say that—if the letters Mem and Nun are typical of the Hebrew vocabulary, and there is no reason to doubt it—we may expect that overall Qumran will offer us c. 775 new words for the Hebrew lexicon, Ben Sira 150, and the Inscriptions 340 (mostly proper names). For the Hebrew Bible we may expect to identify at least 3500 new words, perhaps many more depending on the diligence of the researcher in uncovering the data in the periodical literature of the twentieth century. This figure may be compared with the total of 334 words James Barr was able to list in his *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*,³ hitherto the most extensive compilation of proposals for new words.

2. Other Lexica

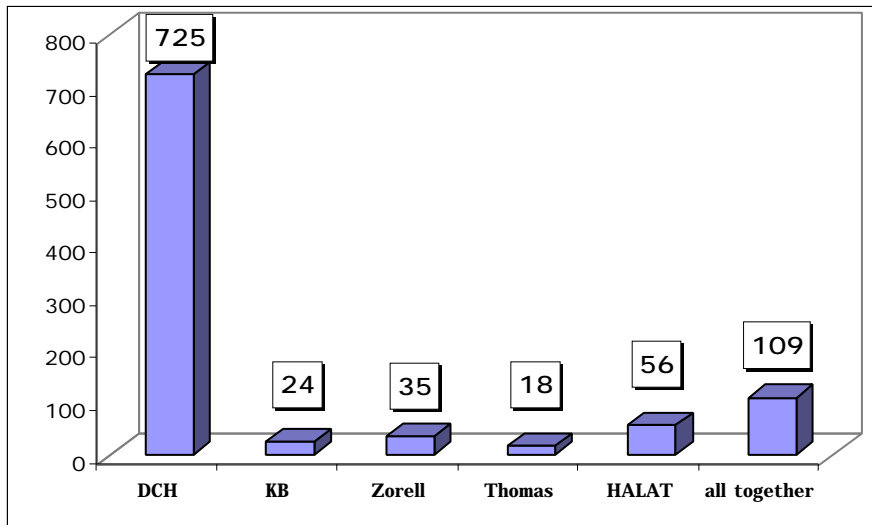
It has been difficult for scholars, especially those who are not themselves philologists, to make themselves aware of these new words, and even to appreciate the quantity of proposals that are now on the table. Previous Hebrew dictionaries have not made it their responsibility to report the proposals that have been made, and, though several dictionaries adopt a certain number of proposals, they give little information about proposals they do not themselves adopt. For example, HALAT sometimes reports that a particular scholar offers a different interpretation of a word, but does not always say what the alternative view is. The guiding principle of such dictionaries has been, I believe, a determinate one: to offer one preferred meaning for each Hebrew word. The consequence of such a principle has been that alternative meanings have been marginalized or suppressed.

As against the 725 new words in the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, no other Hebrew lexicon has more than 56 new words (HALAT), and all the twentieth-century lexica together contain no more than 109 new words, as the following Figure will show.

² The graph does not show that there are also 4 words common to Ben Sira and Qumran, and one common to Qumran and Inscriptions.

³ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, especially pp. 320-37. Barr says that this list is 'only a selection from the total number of philological treatments known to me' (p. 320), but he has unfortunately not published his complete list.

Figure 2
New Words (Mem and Nun), as Shown in Lexica



(I should note that Winton Thomas's unpublished lexicon cannot be properly represented in such a table since he did not complete it beyond the letter Kaph; all his new Mem words that figure in the above table were located in the pages devoted to Aleph to Kaph, since he was arranging words by root, like BDB, and not strictly alphabetically. In Zorell's lexicon, 14 of his 35 new words were from Ben Sira; he has been the only lexicographer of the century to include Ben Sira systematically.)

3. The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language

If such is the extent of the enterprise to identify new words for the Hebrew lexicon, and if it is bound to transform our standard Hebrew dictionaries, as I believe it is, we should not regard it as a random collection of proposals by a number of individual scholars, but as a joint undertaking that deserves a title of its own. Fortunately, there is a name already in existence.

On 30 January 1939, David Winton Thomas gave his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge entitled 'The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language'.⁴ That title referred to the project of himself and his teacher, G.R. Driver of Oxford, to restore to the Hebrew lexicon words that had been forgotten by Masoretic times and remained unknown to Hebrew lexicography, but that could nevertheless be inferred, mainly on the basis of cognates in other Semitic languages. It was an issue, he said, that 'above all others is claiming the attention of Hebraists at the present time'.⁵ I am not sure that claim was true at the time, and it certainly has not been true of the course of Hebrew scholarship throughout the last century. Nevertheless, I am suggesting that his title be adopted as a name for this philological enterprise that has been pursued throughout the twentieth century.

This paper aims to describe this project, and especially to refute the complex of myths about it that have been put around by its detractors. The myth is that some few, incautious scholars have attempted to add, unnecessarily, scores of words to the Hebrew lexicon on the basis of supposed cognates mainly in Arabic and Ugaritic. I will

⁴ David Winton Thomas, *The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 43 pp.

⁵ Thomas, *The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language*, p. 5.

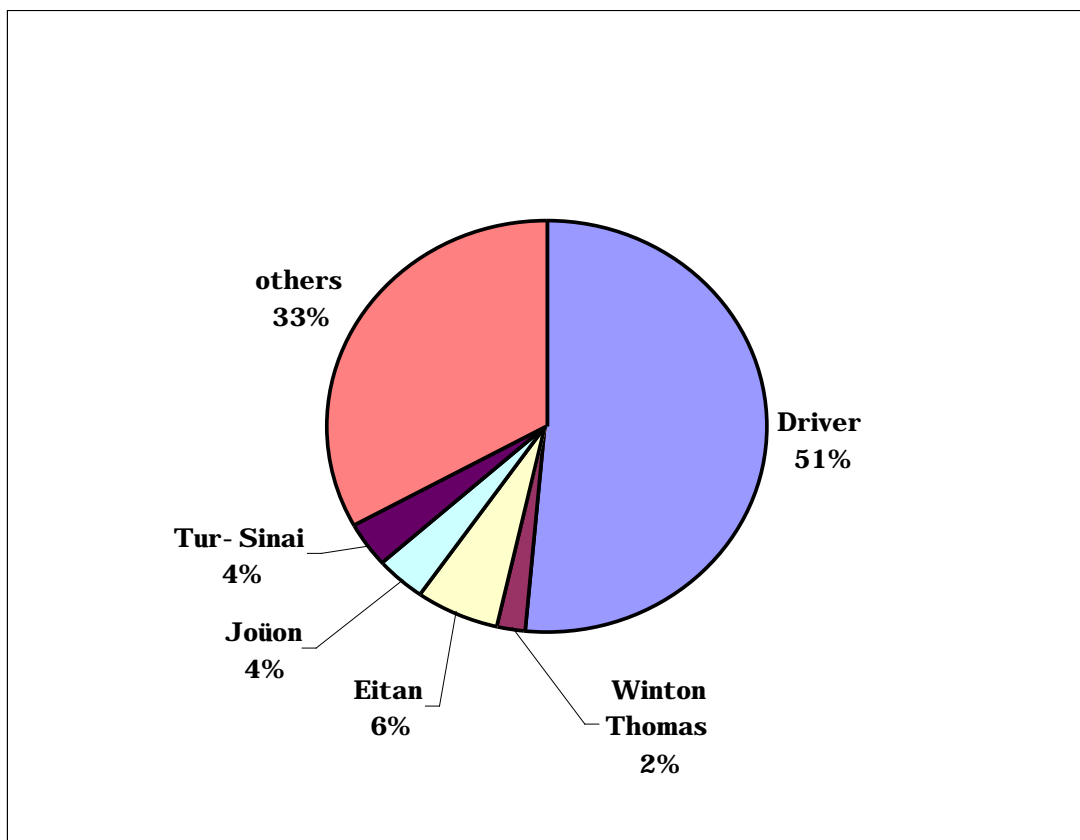
show that such a view is in error on at least four points.

4. Authors

Let us stop for a moment to consider the state of the Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language Project at the time Winton Thomas gave his inaugural lecture in 1939. Between the publication of BDB and that lecture, I reckon that there had been about 100 such proposals (they are all that are known to me, but there are no doubt others that I have not come across).

Who were the authors of these proposals for new words? More than half of the proposals, you may be interested to know, had been made by Driver, and just two by Winton Thomas himself, who was still a fledgling scholar at that time.

Figure 3
New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun) between 1908 and 1938



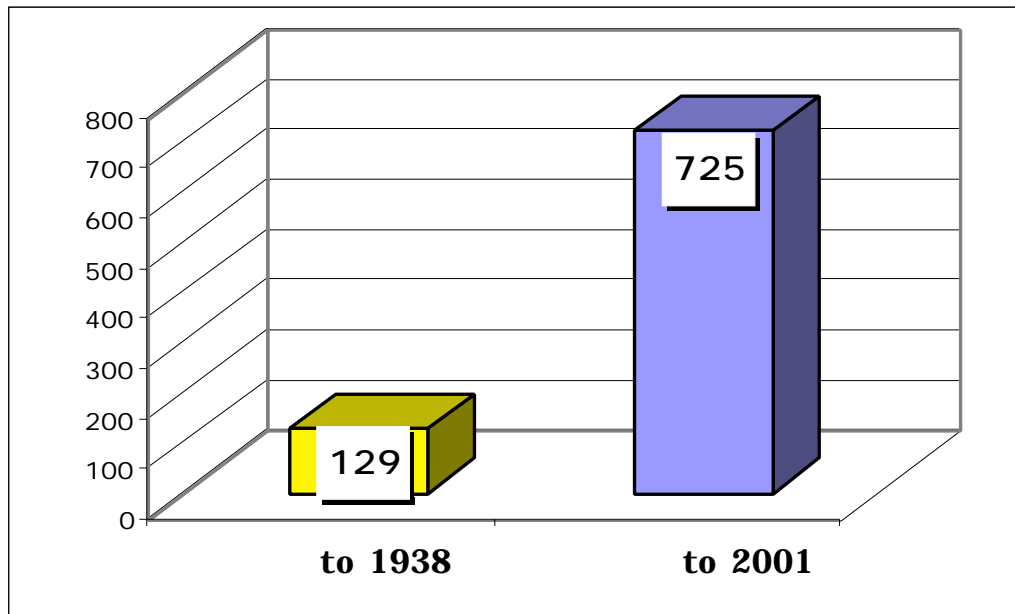
As you see, Driver was not the only scholar who had been active in this area, but he was clearly the leading figure, and the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language was already an industry—if we can extrapolate from the data for Mem and Nun, there must have been more than 600 such proposals for Biblical Hebrew by the time of Winton Thomas’s inaugural. But neither he nor Driver can have imagined what the situation would be like by the end of the century.

5. New Words Today Compared with 1939

To take just the case of words beginning with Mem and Nun again—adding now to the

earlier figure of 100 words those from Ben Sira and extending our scope to include all words in the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* that were not in BDB even if proposed earlier than BDB—the remarkable fact is that by the end of the century there were five times as many proposals for new words as Winton Thomas could have known about in 1938.

Figure 4
NEW WORDS (MEM AND NUN) TO 1938 AND TO 2001



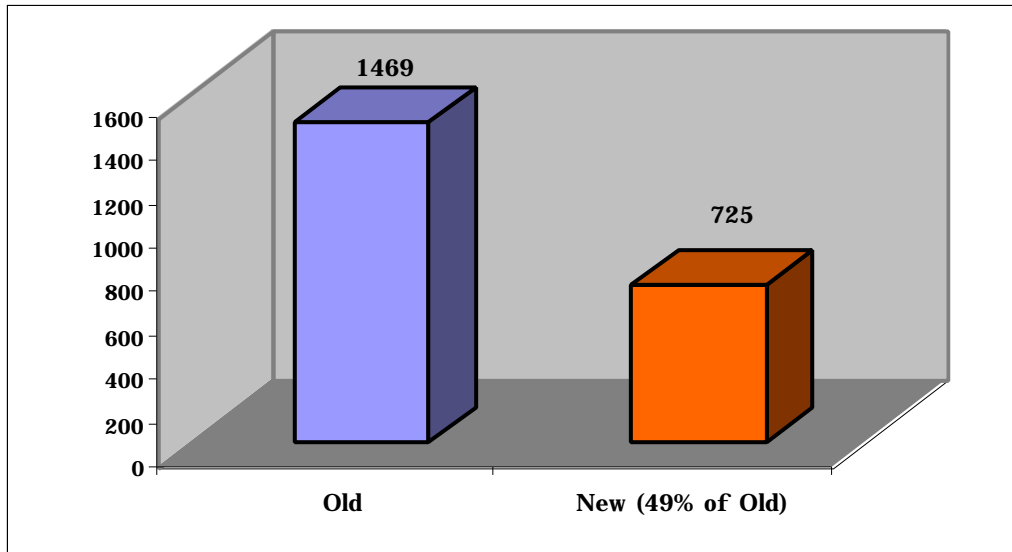
The figures are: 129 to 1938, 725 to 2001. If we extrapolate them to the whole of the Hebrew alphabet, we can suppose that some 5000 proposals for new Hebrew words have been made in the course of the twentieth century. Set this figure against the total number of hitherto recognized words in Biblical Hebrew, somewhat above 8000,⁶ and we find that the philological work of the century purports to add something like 60% to the Hebrew vocabulary. Clearly the project Winton Thomas called the ‘recovery of the ancient Hebrew language’ has not been a marginal activity in Hebrew scholarship but has cumulatively undertaken to redraw the map of the Hebrew language.

6. Old and New Words (Mem and Nun) in Classical Hebrew

Let us look for a moment at the impact on the letters Mem and Nun (and thus on Volume 5 of the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*). What we find is that the new words extend the vocabulary by half:

⁶ Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), list 8253 words (including proper names). I count 8621 on the basis of the words listed in the Accordance programme (I searched for *a, and so on through the alphabet, and noted the number of lemmas listed). See also R.-Ferdinand Poswick and Jean Bajard, ‘COMPUCORD de Mikrah: une base de données en accès interactif sur micro-ordinateur pour tout le texte massorétique (B.H.S.) et ses équivalents lexicaux dans la Bible anglaise (R.S.V.)’, in *Actes du Second Colloque Internationale Bible et Informatique: Méthodes, Outils, Résultats* (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1989), pp. 87-133.

Figure 5
OLD AND NEW WORDS IN CLASSICAL HEBREW (MEM AND NUN)

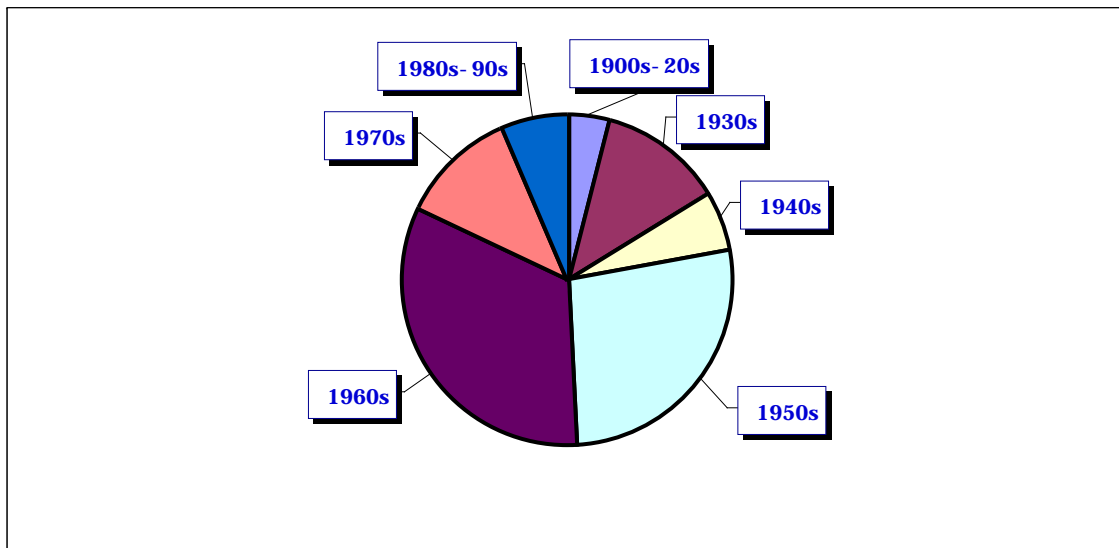


I can only suppose that the situation is the same for other letters.

7. The Decades

I thought it would be interesting to see when, in the course of the twentieth century, these new words had been proposed. This was the result:

Figure 6
NEW WORDS IN BIBLICAL HEBREW (MEM AND NUN), BY DECADE

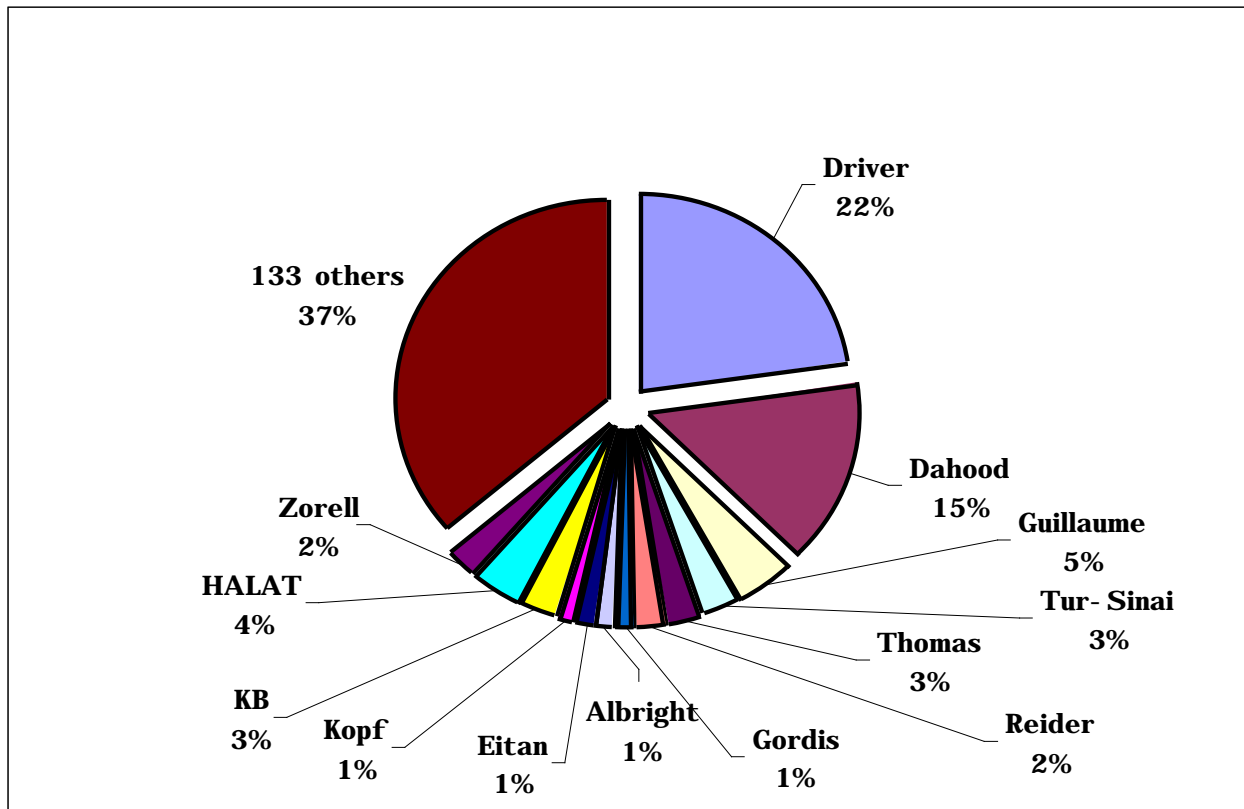


The 1950s and 60s were obviously the key decades, with almost two-thirds of proposals being made in those years. Why that was so is a question I will defer at the moment.

8. The Scholars

One of the myths about new philological proposals is that there are mostly the creation of a few scholars with a comparative Semitic bee in their bonnet (everyone thinks first of G.R. Driver and Mitchell Dahood). My database of information about all these new words would give the lie to such a suggestion. Here is an analysis of the proposers of the 534 new words for Mem and Nun in Biblical Hebrew:

Figure 7
Authors of New Words Proposals



It is true that Driver and Dahood between them are responsible for more than a third of the proposals for words beginning with Mem and Nun, and the importance of their contribution must be acknowledged. But we should also recognize that no fewer than 140 other scholars have been involved in this enterprise—just for the letters Mem and Nun—, which cannot therefore be written off as a marginal undertaking.

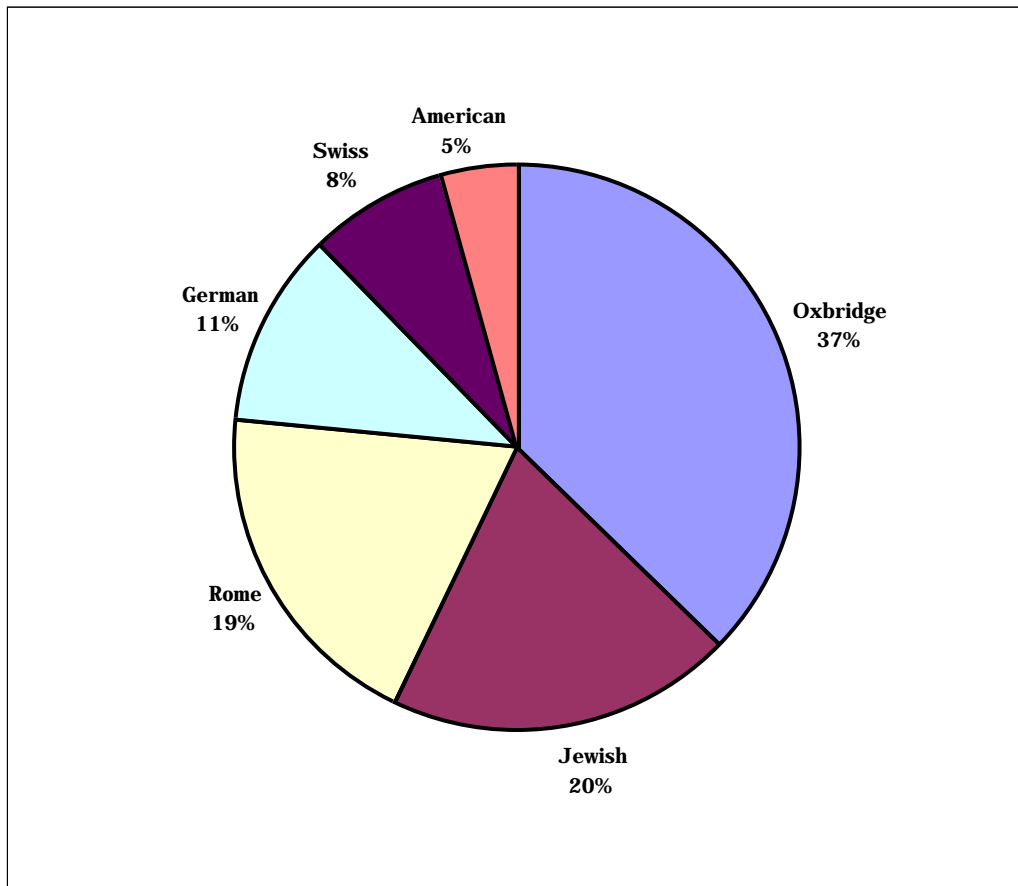
9. Schools

Perhaps we should look, not just at the authors of proposals, but at the philological school they belong to. In an earlier paper, I had proposed that we identify four main schools: the Oxbridge, the Rome, the American, and the Jewish.⁷ Each of the first three schools had a founder or leader (Driver, Dahood and Albright respectively), while the fourth was of more loose association. Now that I have analysed all the data for Mem

⁷ 'Philology and Power', in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998*, II (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 613-30.

and Nun, I have realized that I should add two more schools, the German (a loose collection of scholars like the Jewish) and the Swiss, of which the leaders were clearly Koehler and Baumgartner, their proposals being mostly put forward in their lexica.

Figure 8
Schools as Origin of the 534 New Words in BH (Mem & Nun)



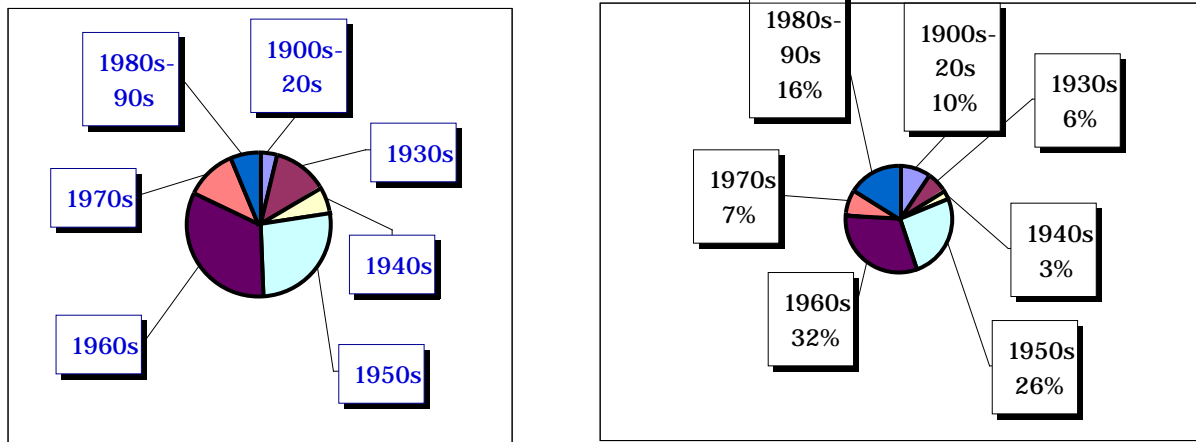
This chart shows the overwhelming importance of schools in the project I am calling the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language. Only 18% of the proposals for Mem and Nun have been made by scholars outside the six schools I have identified, and the proportion may well be even smaller than that, since there will be names among the 18% that I have simply failed to recognize as a member of one school or another. This is not the place to expand upon the significance of schools in promoting, authorizing and authenticating the views of their members, but the existence of such schools has obviously been extremely influential in the course of Hebrew philology in the twentieth century.

10. Decades without the Most Prolific Scholars

At this point we can return to the question why the 50s and 60s of the last century were the most fertile in generating proposals for new words. Originally I thought it would have been largely due to the fecundity of the two leading scholars, Driver and Dahood; but if we look at the pattern of proposals across the decades leaving Driver and Dahood out of account we have a surprising result:

Figure 9
New Words in Biblical Hebrew by Decade

Excluding Driver and Dahood

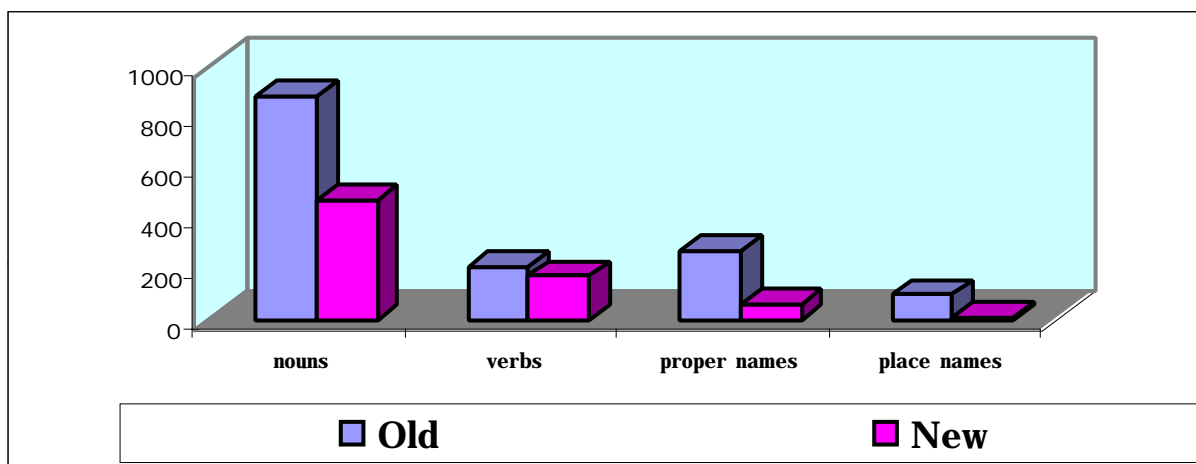


It appears that the concentration of their work in those decades did not affect the overall pattern to any marked degree. Without their contributions, the 50s and the 60s would still account for somewhat over 50% of the proposals, while the first 50 years and the last 30 years would still show much the same proportion of proposals as they did when Driver and Dahood were included. I can only conclude that there was more of a philological fashion in the 50s and 60s, influenced no doubt by the many contributions of those two scholars.

11. Morphology

What can we discover about these new words in terms of their part of speech? Here is the evidence, though I must say that I am at something of a loss to understand it:

Figure 10
Old and New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), by Form



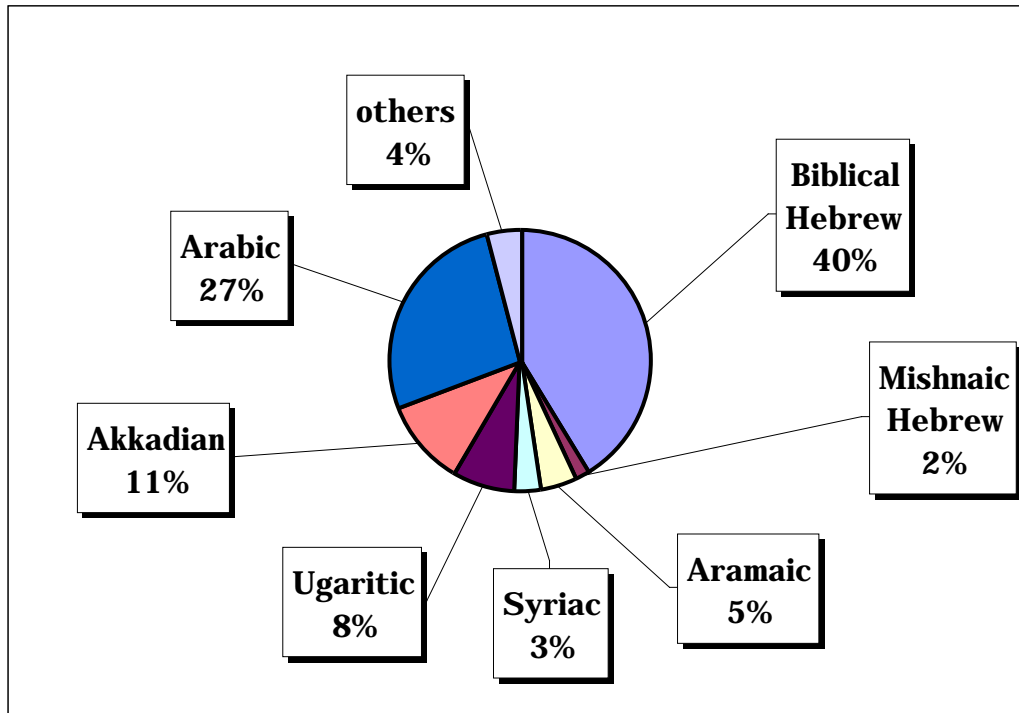
Why are there almost as many new verbs as old verbs among this collection when there are only half as many new nouns as old nouns? I do not know. Perhaps someone else

can suggest an explanation.

12. Cognates

Another myth about the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language project is that it has been carried out simply by looking up the Arabic dictionaries for roots resembling the Hebrew or by plundering the Ugaritic lexicon. If we actually look at the new words proposed for Mem and Nun, however, we find a quite different picture.

Figure 11
New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), by Cognates



The graph is to be read in this way: 40% of the proposed new words depend upon the existence of another, already-recognized word in Biblical Hebrew, 8% on a cognate Ugaritic word, 27% on a cognate Arabic word, and so on. For the sake of the analysis, I have arranged cognate languages in an order of probable significance for the Hebrew language: Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Arabic, and others (in which are included, for Mem and Nun, Ethiopic, Phoenician, Old South Arabic, Egyptian, Hittite, Luwian and Tamil, loanwords being treated as cognates for the present purposes). Regardless of how the proposer of a new Hebrew word has presented the evidence, I have, for each word, identified just one cognate as the principal cognate; thus although the proposer may have suggested we compare the Akkadian and the Syriac cognates, I will have registered the cognate as being the Syriac because Syriac is higher up my list of probable significance. This system of accounting is open to debate, of course, but the reader will understand that some standardization of the evidence was needed in order to make meaningful comparisons.

What emerges from this graph is that a very high proportion of 'new' words are proposals for words derived from or comparable with already known Biblical Hebrew words. Most of the new words found in Ben Sira or the Qumran texts are of this type, including new noun formations from known verbs, byforms of verbs, feminine forms of

nouns known previously in the masculine and so on. In other words, something like half of the project we are calling the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language does not depend on Semitic cognates at all, but is carried out within the context of the Hebrew language itself.

13. Use of Cognates in the Work of Driver and Dahood

We have seen that some 40% of proposals for new words have been made on the basis of the Hebrew language itself. I will now present the evidence of the cognate languages Driver and Dahood drew upon.

Figure 12
New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), Driver's Cognates

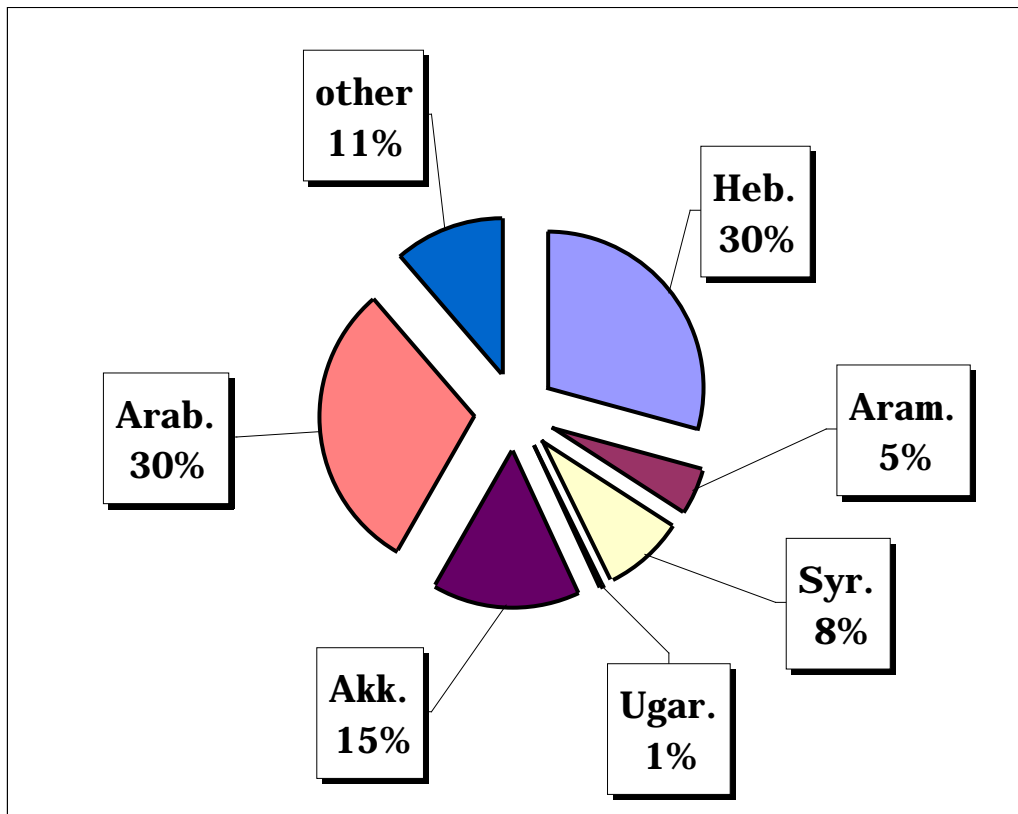
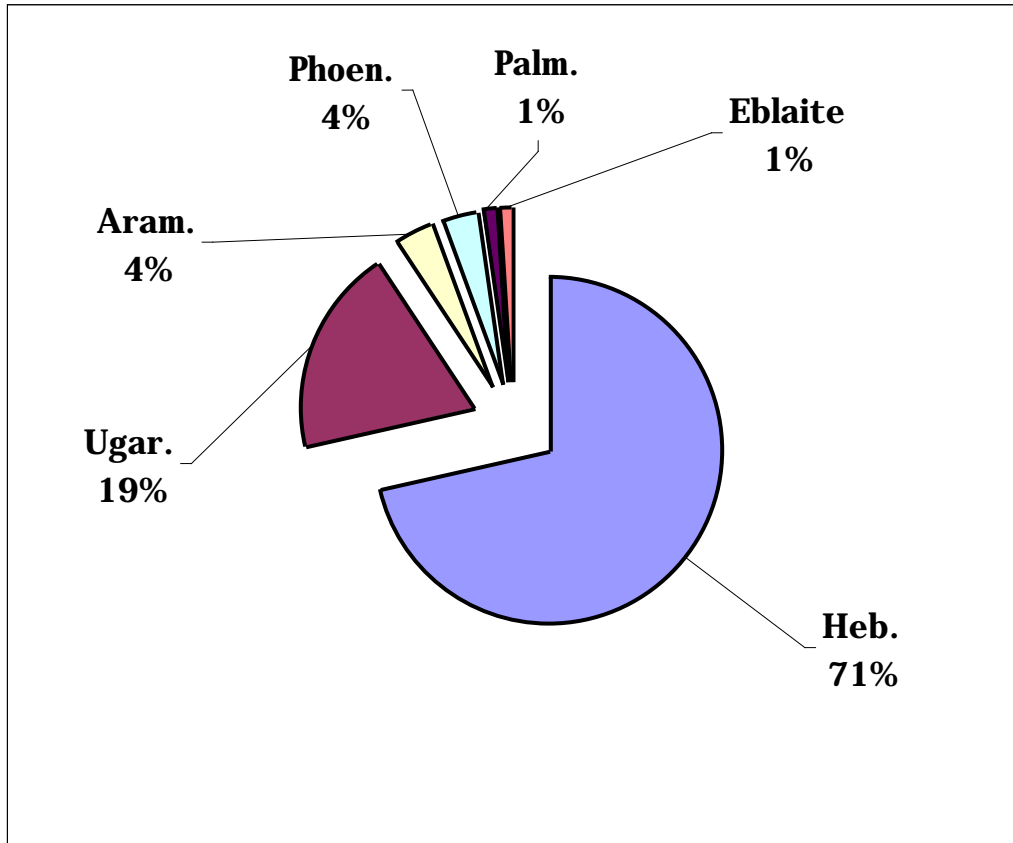


Figure 13
New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), Dahood's Cognates

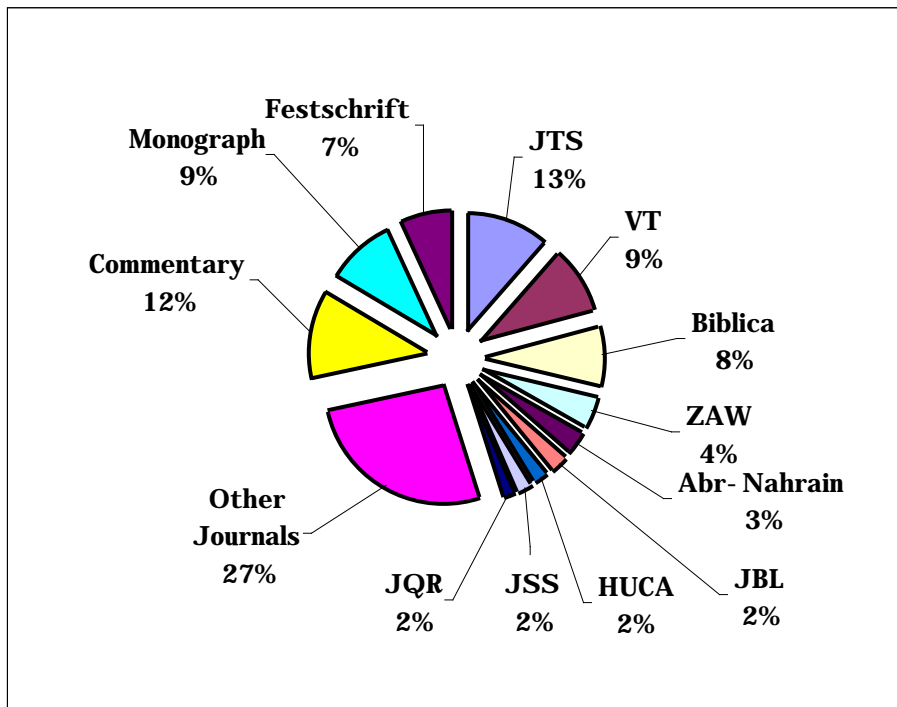


It will be seen that despite the myths surrounding the work of comparative philologists, both these leading scholars were discriminating in their use of other Semitic languages in suggesting additions for Biblical Hebrew. Of Driver's proposals, some 30% depended on already known words in Biblical Hebrew, while of Dahood's proposals, more than 70% did so, and his use of Ugaritic, for which of course he became a byword, was quite moderate, at least in terms of quantity.

14. Avenues of Publication

It may be of some interest to review the means by which proposers of new words in Biblical Hebrew have published their views.

Figure 14
New Words in Biblical Hebrew (Mem and Nun), by Avenue of Publication



The above graph shows that about two-thirds of the proposals have been first published in refereed journals, and a smaller percentage in works not subject to the same degree of peer review, such as the author's commentary on a biblical book or an invited article in a Festschrift. It is sometimes made a point of criticism of contributors of philological proposals that their work has been published in the form of 'small and disparate notes, which are scattered throughout the technical journals', as Barr puts it.⁸ On the contrary, it may be suggested that, however slight the degree of editorial control in some of the journals mentioned above, such forums have been the appropriate place of publication, in that some standards of plausibility have presumably been operated by the editors of journals, and a ready avenue for responses to new proposals has existed in their pages. It is at least interesting, incidentally, that in fact very few critiques of new philological proposals have been published, other scholars apparently being content either to adopt or to ignore such proposals.

15. General Observations

1. At no point in this paper have I suggested any evaluation of these 725 proposals, and this is not the place to begin. If in the course of the last century someone had done the preliminary work of gathering together the proposals, perhaps I could have spent my time on more evaluative work. But I judged that what we needed at the present moment were not premature evaluations and adoptions of proposals that happened to take my own fancy, but a systematic collection and presentation of all the data.

I am in any case disinclined to believe that philologists are the best people to make decisions on the value of new philological proposals; it is the exegete, who has

⁸ Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, p. 8.

deep familiarity with a given text, its predilections, its opinions, and its language as a whole, who is in the best position to determine whether a given proposal is to be accepted for a given text or not. In my view, philologists propose, exegetes dispose, and I would rather leave the evaluation of the 725 new words to an army of biblical commentators than to attempt the task myself.

2. People still want to know how many of the proposals I would accept myself. It really does not matter very much what I or any individual scholar happens to accept or not accept, so I do not accede to the invitation. But I will say that the proposals cannot all be right, for quite a few of them are mutually exclusive. For example, $\mu\gamma\tau\epsilon\beta\lambda\eta$ may mean *fireplaces, saddle-bags, divided sheepfolds, double wall, or grazing places*—or perhaps something else altogether different—but it cannot mean more than one of those things, and so at least 4 out of the 5 proposals in the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* for this word are wrong. Which is to say, for purely logical reasons, even before one considered the merits of any given proposal, no one could possibly accept all of the proposals. That fact is not a weakness in the project for the recovery of the ancient Hebrew language, nor an argument against including all the proposed meanings in a dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Perhaps, now that we have the evidence in front of us, gathered together in one place, we will be able to adjudicate better among the five suggested meanings, adding even further proposals if they are made, and settling ultimately on one preferred meaning. Or perhaps not; perhaps we shall never know which is the best meaning, and we may have to live with five or even more possibilities. Either way, we need to know what our agenda is, and what our choices are. That is what I have hoped to provide in the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*.

3. I have been impressed in reading the philological literature by the overwhelming extent to which new proposals are made in response to perceived difficulties in the Hebrew text. Contrary to some accounts that are given of the practice of comparative Semitic philology, it has by no means been a matter of trawling through the Arabic dictionary and others to see how many alternative renderings one can come up with for the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the philologist has typically fastened on some oddity or problem in the Hebrew text, and has gone looking for a solution in the range of Semitic languages (including, as we have seen, elsewhere in Hebrew itself). We may differ over whether the difficulty perceived is a real difficulty or not, or whether there may be other or better ways of dealing with it, but there is no doubt in my mind that the procedure adopted by the great majority of those who have proposed new words has been a responsible one. This has been a area of scholarly study where the rhetoric of abuse has been very prevalent,⁹ and charges that comparative philologists have been reckless, incautious and undisciplined abound. I have seen no special reason to conclude that philologists are more prone to such faults than other scholars, and I can only suppose that

4. The project for recovery of the ancient Hebrew language has very often had an expressed goal of saving the text of the Hebrew Bible from emendation.¹⁰ Its proponents

⁹ Driver's review of Dahood's ?? was a particularly virulent example. Dahood was more inclined to bewail the blindness of those who did not see things his way than to question their scholarship.

¹⁰ Winton Thomas already wrote in 1939: '[W]hat effect ... is the recovery of Hebrew having upon our attitude towards the value of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament? Its effect is very clear. We are moving in the direction of a more conservative frame of mind' (*The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language*, p. 35). In 1938 he had written: 'It must be regarded as the first business of the Old Testament linguist to explain by comparative philology the forms he find in Hebrew, and not, save in the last resort, to emend. ... This revolt against emendation has restored the reputation of the MT' (in *Record and Revelation* [ed. H.W. Robinson; Oxford, 1938], p. 401). This statement is qualified by his equally clear insistence that 'Old Testament scholarship has nothing to gain from conjectural emendation when it is

have not infrequently congratulated themselves at having made sense of the text, especially the consonantal text, not by ‘correcting’ it, but by postulating a homonym of the word the text appears to contain. I do not deny that it has been a legitimate undertaking to make sense of the text that we have by whatever means are open to us. But I have my doubts about the wisdom of a prior belief that our consonantal text is in good shape or that emendation is to be avoided at all costs. I am not at all happy with a fundamentalism of the (consonantal) Masoretic text. For my part, as I hope to show in a forthcoming paper, I believe that the text of the Hebrew Bible (consonantal as well as vocalized) is seriously compromised, to the extent that that perhaps one in every three or four words may well be corrupt. Unfortunately, we do not know which one out of every three or four is the faulty one, and we may need to recognize that any word may be under suspicion. Another project, for the recovery of the ancient Hebrew text—as distinct from the ancient Hebrew language—, will have different aims and objectives from that of the project discussed in this paper.

Appendix

In the abstract for this paper, I undertook to offer a personal selection of the ten best twentieth-century proposals for new Hebrew words. This was a harder task than I imagined at the time, and when I settled to it I found myself incapable of weighing up all the competing claims. My list below is in the end nothing more than ten suggestions I find among the most interesting.

yl inel	[BSQ 21]	interpreter	Canney, <i>AJSL</i> 40 (1923–24) 135-37
hm/qm]	[B 1]	opposition	Driver, <i>JTS</i> 36 (1935) 300-301
rm' II	[B 9]	strong	Dahood, <i>Fs Gruenthaner</i> (1962) 59
°vm II	[B 8]	seize	Tur-Sinai, <i>Fs Marti</i> (1925) 280
dnQIII	[B 1]	wineskin	Wolters, <i>CBQ</i> 52 (1990) 235
rhq: II	[B 1]	oil	Chajes, <i>GSAI</i> (1906) 181-82
rynl V	[B 3]	dominion	Hanson, <i>HTR</i> 61 (1968) 310-13
[sn II	[BQ 143]	travel	Driver, <i>JBL</i> 55 (1936) 115
pl [j] II	[BSQ 6]	bribe	Gordis, <i>JNES</i> 9 (1950) (44-46)
r[n III	[BS 12]	strip	Wolfers, <i>Dor leDor</i> 18 (1989-90) 27-31

Associated Resources

1. The handout for this paper, listing all 725 new words in the categories Hebrew Bible, Sirach, Qumran and Inscriptions, in the format used above, may be found at www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurrres/PublicationsHome.html.
2. A revision of the Bibliography that appears in *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Volume 5, pp. 820-922, may be found in a number of files at www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurrres/PublicationsHome.html, with a request that errors

undisciplined and uncontrolled. There is, and must be, a place for it, however, if it is regulated in according with recognized canons ... We are not blind to the fact that corrupt passages exist; it would be strange indeed if they did not ... Some of [the difficulties] may be for ever beyond our power to restore' (*The Recovery of the Ancient Hebrew Language*, p. 36).

G.R. Driver had put forward a more radical view in 1927: '[T]he time has come to lay down the rule that NO WORD, and ESPECIALLY NO VERB, IN THE HEBREW BIBLE, IF ONLY IT PRESENTS A TRULY SEMITIC FORM, MAY BE EMENDED. Many, if not most, such words will find an explanation some day in the cognate languages, while there will generally be no reason to suppose that those that cannot be so explained have been incorrectly handed down, although their meaning remains hidden to us' ('Two Forgotten Words in the Hebrew Language', *JTS* 28 (1927), pp. 285-87 [287]). The capital letters, and the talk of laying down rules, are very suggestive.

and omissions should be communicated to the Editor of the Dictionary. Future revisions are intended to be posted at this site. These files replace those bibliographical files posted on 22 February 2001 and 19 March 2001.

3. Much of the detailed evidence supporting the graphs in this paper may also be located at www.shef.ac.uk/bibs/DJACcurrres/PublicationsHome.html.