

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ISRAEL EXPLORATION SOCIETY

ERETZ-ISRAEL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

VOLUME 34

ADA YARDENI

VOLUME

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ERETZ-ISRAEL

Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies

VOLUME THIRTY-FOUR



Published by
THE ISRAEL EXPLORATION SOCIETY

in cooperation with
THE INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

JERUSALEM 2021



PUBLICATION OF THIS VOLUME WAS MADE POSSIBLE
THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF
DAVID AND JEMIMA JESELSON

ISBN 978-965-221-127-9

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Layout: A. Pladot

Typesetting: Irit Nahum

Printed by: Old City Press, Jerusalem

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NOTES ON THE SEMANTIC FIELDS OF PAPYRUS AND SERVICE IN SEMITIC AND EGYPTIAN

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Few plants—other than those widely used for food, clothing, or shelter—have contributed as much to the advancement of civilization as *Cyperus papyrus*. Even in purely economic terms, its impact was enormous. According to the papyrologist Naphtali Lewis, the mammoth Egyptian papyrus industry produced “millions of rolls per annum” in Ptolemaic and Roman times, and “must have been one of the biggest employers of manpower in Egypt, perhaps second only to food production.”¹

The *cultural* impact of *Cyperus papyrus* was even more profound. Already during the First Dynasty, this plant had become the source of lightweight, flexible, and durable writing sheets. This development immediately enhanced the ability of humans to transmit and preserve information and ideas, and it continued to do so in much later times. Take, for example, the evolution of Greek culture:

Besides being responsible for the transmission and preservation of Greek thought when once written down, the use of papyrus also encouraged the creation of new literary works, and the nature and size of papyrus books influenced the extent and form of literary compositions.... [N]o one to-day will deny that without it Greek spiritual life would have been much poorer and more primitive.”²

Georg Schweinfurth had this history in mind when he encountered *Cyperus papyrus* in equatorial Africa, during an expedition up the Nile from Khartoum in 1869–1871:

On this day [after leaving the last Nile villages behind], we came upon the first papyrus bushes; for me, the botanist, this meeting proved to be a real holiday. Here, then, at 9° 30' north latitude, we finally reencounter this *father of immortalized thoughts*. Centuries ago it was as abundant in Egypt as it is presently at the gates of the innermost wilderness of Africa. I was lost in devotional contemplation of this magnificent painting of water flora, with the sacred papyrus of antiquity as staffage.... Days and weeks passed in intimate communion with this most wonderful apparition of the Nile flora, but my eyes could not get enough of the divine forms.³

Ada Yardeni א"ד devoted her life to deciphering ancient Northwest Semitic texts of every type, many of them “immortalized” on sheets cut from rolls⁴ that were manufactured in Egypt from the pith of papyrus reeds. Most of the Semitic words discussed in this study are associated with papyrus reeds (among other marsh reeds), papyrus pith, papyrus sheets, and/or papyrus rolls; and all of them are arguably connected in some way with one or more Egyptian terms, either directly or indirectly.

1. עֲרוֹת and נִיִּיר

Many traditional commentators and modern scholars follow Rashi in taking MH and Jewish Aramaic נִיִּיר to mean “papyrus.”⁵ This interpretation makes good sense when נִיִּיר is a *mass* noun, as in “(made/make) out of נִיִּיר or עוֹר” (m. Kelim 10:4, 17:15). However, when נִיִּיר is a *count* noun (e.g., in the plural), it usually appears to denote a sheet of writing material—perhaps only one that (1) is made of papyrus and/or (2) can (still) be used for writing (because it is new, erased, or only partially covered with writing), although both of these restrictions are controversial and may have varied between Eretz-Israel and Babylonia or even between MH and Aramaic.⁶

The word נִיִּיר may occur in the fragmentary first column of the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script (line 5), as well. There we find the phrase *ʿl nyrk*, seemingly as part of a royal command to a Demotic scribe in ca. 300 BCE to record a long Aramaic text on his new papyrus roll, now known as Papyrus Amherst 63.⁷ If so, נִיִּיר, when used as a count noun, may have denoted a *roll* of writing sheets before it came to denote—by synecdoche—a *single* writing sheet.

As recognized already a century ago, נִיִּיר is derived from Akk. *niāru* (*nijāru*, *najāru*),⁸ first attested at Nuzi in the mid-2nd millennium BCE. In *CAD* (11:200) and *AHw* (2:784), two meanings are given: (1) “papyrus”; (2) “parchment.” Careful examination of the contexts reveals that the word has a mass/count ambiguity somewhat similar to that of נִיִּיר,⁹ not to mention that of Greek *χάρτης* “papyrus, or a roll made thereof.”¹⁰ As a mass noun, *niāru* can refer to papyrus reeds, e.g., “boats (made) of *niāru*” (*CAD* 11:200).¹¹ The fragmentary Nuzi attestation may belong here, as well, if it refers to baskets made of papyrus reeds (*CAD* 11:200). So far as I know, there is no evidence at present that, as a mass noun, it can also refer to parchment. As a count noun, the word refers to some unit of flexible writing material (i.e., papyrus or parchment).¹² In contexts dealing with queries to a deity written on/in a *niāru*,

we seem to be dealing with a relatively small unit: a piece, a sheet, or a document.¹³ The unit is probably larger in contexts dealing with the purchase of such writing material, e.g., “one (silver) shekel given for (skin-hide-leather determinative) *najārū* (plural)” (*CAD* 11:201). There the unit appears to have been a roll.¹⁴ That is presumably the basis for the assertion of A.L. Oppenheim, editor-in-charge of *CAD*, that “the imported rolls [of writing material] were called *niaru*, the inscribed ones *magallatu*.”¹⁵

Akk. *niāru* is not the *ultimate* etymon of נִיִּיר; it is itself a loanword, albeit of controversial origin. It is reasonable to expect the Semitic name of an Egyptian invention to be derived from an Egyptian term. It is not surprising, therefore, that various phrases containing *itrw* > יִאֵר “Nile” have been proposed as the etymon of נִיִּיר/*niāru*.¹⁶ However, since none of the proposed phrases bears any resemblance to the dozen or so papyrus words recorded in *TLA*, those who have rejected or ignored such etymologies¹⁷ appear to be on solid ground.

My own proposal, mentioned briefly in print four years ago,¹⁸ is that נִיִּיר/*niāru* is a borrowing of Eg. *nʾ r.w* “the scrolls (of papyrus or leather),” the definite plural of a noun first attested in the Middle Kingdom.¹⁹ The semantic aspect of my proposed etymology is reasonably clear. Both Eg. *nʾ r.w* and Akk. *niāru* refer—always or sometimes, respectively—to rolls of flexible writing material (papyrus or leather/parchment).²⁰ The phonological aspect of my proposed etymology is even simpler. The /ʿ/ of Eg. *nʾ r.w* is reflected in the cuneiform spelling *ni-ʾ-a-rv*,²¹ attested twice in *CAD* (11:201). The spelling *na-a-a-rv*, also attested twice in *CAD* (ibid.), exhibits a different rendering of the vowel of the Eg. plural definite article *nʾ*, Coptic *ne*; cf. the two cuneiform renderings of the same Eg. particle immediately below.

It is not uncommon for Semitic to borrow Egyptian nouns together with their definite articles.²² What is unusual here is that the Eg. definite article is *plural*. In addition to being rare, the borrowing of the Eg. plural definite article is incongruous here, because the loanword is

singular in Semitic. The only close parallel that I know of is the Akkadian word for “crocodile (singular!),” *namsuḫu* ~ *nimšahu*, derived from Eg. *nʾ msh.w* (Coptic *ne-msooh*) “the crocodiles.”²³ One might tentatively attribute this anomaly to the fact that the Semites of Mesopotamia were less familiar with Egyptian than were their cousins in the Levant.

If this etymology of *niāru* is correct, the failure of scholars to recognize it must be attributed partly to the early loss of /r/ in Akkadian.²⁴ A similar—and possibly related—Egyptian word borrowed *directly* into Hebrew (or Canaanite) has not suffered from that problem: ʾr “rush, reed” > עָרוֹת (Isa 19:7). The Egyptian origin of עָרוֹת was noted long ago²⁵ and is generally accepted today, presumably because the meaning “rush, reed” fits vv. 6–7 (קָנְהוּ וְסוּף קָמְלוֹ: עָרוֹת עַל-יְאֹר) so well. As for the fem. plur. ending of עָרוֹת, one of the explanations suggested by Yoshiyuki Muchiki is that “Eg. ʾr became a feminine noun when entering Hebrew.”²⁶ However, Demotic ʾr.t “rush, reed,”²⁷ ignored by the scholars who have discussed עָרוֹת, may make that suggestion superfluous. It is true that ʾr.t is not attested in earlier texts, but that does not prove that the form is late. It may have been a colloquial form, deemed inappropriate for use in formal texts.

2. גָּמָא: Meaning and Etymology

Another noun associated with papyrus is גָּמָא, attested four times in BH and twice in Egyptian Aramaic (Elephantine). It is translated *πάπυρος* by (1) Aquila and Symmachus in Exod 2:3; (2) Theodotion in Isa 18:2; and (3) LXX in Job 8:11. R. Saadia Gaon renders גָּמָא with Judeo-Arabic בַּרְדִּי “papyrus” in those three verses and in Isa 35:7, as well.²⁸ *HALAT*, too, gives the meaning of this noun as “papyrus.” As evidence for this view, one might point to the phrase כָּלִי גָּמָא עַל מִים (Isa 18:2), since boats made from papyrus reeds have been used in Egypt, Sudan, etc. from prehistoric times down to the present day.²⁹

Others take גָּמָא to mean “sedge(s)” or “reed(s).”³⁰ These are more general meanings, which include *Cyperus papyrus* but are not

limited to it. Evidence for this view comes from Egyptian, where a word that resembles גָּמָא means “reed, rush.”³¹

A plausible intermediate position is adopted by BDB, where the meaning is given as “rush, reed, papyrus.”³² Similarly, for Michael Zohary, it is possible that the term גָּמָא, while “serv[ing] also to denote other marsh plants, such as various species of the genera *Scirpus* and *Juncus* ... refers especially to the papyrus, the biggest and most important of them all.”³³ If so, this is a case of *autohyponymy*, with גָּמָא referring to both (1) marsh reeds and rushes in general and (2) *Cyperus papyrus* in particular.

The etymology of גָּמָא is not as clear as some scholars assume. Certainly, an Egyptian origin would fit two of its four biblical contexts (Exod 2:3 and Isa 18:2). It would also fit the Egyptian provenance (Elephantine) of its earliest Aramaic attestation. Thus, it is not surprising that *HALAT* takes it as a borrowing of Egyptian *qmʾ* (Demotic *qm*; Coptic *kam*) “reed, rush.” Lambdin and Muchiki, however, note that there are phonological problems with this etymology.³⁴ As a result, Muchiki prefers a derivation from *gmy*, which he takes to be a synonym and possible bi-form of *qmʾ*.³⁵ The fact that Egyptian *qmʾ* and *gmy* are not attested before the New Kingdom (with only two attestations for *gmy* given in *TLA*) raises further questions about the Egyptian etymology of גָּמָא.

Such questions are sufficient reason to revisit the neglected view of Zohary that the direction of borrowing was *to* Egyptian rather than *from* Egyptian.³⁶ In support of that view, we may note that the earliest attestation of *qmʾ* (as opposed to *gmy*) cited in *TLA* is inscribed on an Egyptian monument erected in Canaan, the Beth-Shean Stele of Ramesses II (year 18). This would not be the only the Semitic loanword borrowed by Egyptian around that time. Indeed, “in the Ramesside period, Semitic words occur in ... stories, accounts, administrative documents, royal inscriptions, legal texts, letters, love poems, religious, medical, and magical texts.”³⁷ In the well-known “Satirical Letter,” dated to the reign of Ramesses II, a military scribe flaunts his

impressive knowledge of Semitic vocabulary.³⁸ If it is permissible to extrapolate from somewhat later evidence (supplemented by much earlier evidence), the Egyptian administrative center at Beth-Shean (a town mentioned in the “Satirical Letter”) would have been an excellent place for such a scribe to learn a Canaanite word for “reed,” because reeds were commonly used there in construction and crafts during the Iron Age (and probably during the later Chalcolithic period, as well).³⁹ Thus, based on the evidence known to me, Zohary’s theory deserves serious consideration, alongside the conventional one.

3. גמי

BH III² (ל"א) roots regularly become IIIy (ל"ה) in MH, at least according to reliable manuscripts. To mention only one example, BH טָנָא becomes טָנִי in MH.⁴⁰ This example is particularly relevant because טָנָא is believed to be an Egyptian loanword.⁴¹

The BH root *g-m-*³ is no exception to this rule. It has long been recognized that גמי is the postbiblical counterpart of גמא. The Mishnah commentary attributed to R. Hai Gaon glosses both גמא and גמי with ברדי “papyrus.”⁴² In commenting on Exod 2:3, Rashi uses the MH form to gloss the BH form: גמא - גמי בלשון משנה; ובלעז יונ"ק גמא there that he uses for גמי in his commentary on the Talmud (Sukkah 16a, 20a, AZ 75a).

At first glance, גמי and גמא look different. In Codex Kaufmann and other manuscripts, the former is normally vocalized גְּמִי. However, other vocalizations are attested: גְּמִי in a Genizah fragment,⁴³ and גּוּמִי in Codex Kaufmann (1x).⁴⁴ These exceptional vocalizations bridge the gap somewhat between the post-biblical and biblical forms, especially since the three-fold MH variation גְּמִי ~ גְּמִי ~ גּוּמִי closely resembles the three-fold BH variation צָרִי (Gen 37:25) ~ צָרִי (Gen 43:11) ~ צָרִי (Ezek 27:17). Targumic Aramaic helps to bridge the gap even further. Targ. Neofiti to Exod 2:3 has תִּבּוֹ דגמי for תִּבּוֹת גמא. A Genizah fragment of the Palestinian Targum to Gen 41:18 has גּוּמִיָּה בגוא גּוּמִיָּה

(with the stem-vowel of גּוּמִיָּה represented by Palestinian pointing).⁴⁵ The targum to Job 8:11 has האִפְשֵׁר דאתגא גומיא בלא כסבא בְּלֵא בְּצָה. All of this evidence supports the view of Israel Yeivin that גְּמִי is derived from **gumy* < **gum*.⁴⁶ If so, the form גְּמִי, found in vocalized editions of the Mishnah printed in Italy,⁴⁷ not to mention Israeli lexica of Hebrew (Ma’agarim, Even Shoshan, etc.), must be viewed as the product of a late reanalysis based on parallels like פְּרִי ~ פְּרִי and כְּלִי ~ כְּלִי.

4. הגמִיאִינִי (Gen 24:17)

The meaning of הגמִיאִינִי, as increasingly recognized today, is “cause/allow me to sip.”⁴⁸ It appears that Rashi, too, understood the verb that way.⁴⁹ This understanding is also implicit in a Rabbinic interpretation of a literary parallel between הגמִיאִינִי נָא מְעַט־מִים מִכַּדָּךְ and הִלְעִיטִנִי נָא מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה (Gen 25:30). These clauses exhibit a number of similarities. Both use singular *hif'il* imperatives of rare verbs, with first-person singular suffixed pronouns, to request very specific types of ingestion. According to the Rabbis, these similarities are markers of a *contrastive allusion*:

The righteous consume (only enough) to sustain life (lit., for the satisfaction of the soul) (Prov 13:25). This refers to Eliezer, the servant of our father Abraham, who said: “Allow me to sip a little water from your pitcher” (Gen 24:17)—one sip. But the belly of the wicked always feels lacking (Prov 13:25). This refers to the wicked Esau who said to our father Jacob: “Cram/Pour this red stuff into (the back of) my mouth” (Gen. 25:30). R. Isaac b. R. Ze’era said: That wicked man opened his mouth wide, like a camel, and said, “I’ll keep my mouth open, and you keep it coming”; as we learned in the Mishnah there (Shabbat 24:3): “(On the Sabbath) one may not cause a camel’s stomach to become distended, nor cram food into its gullet, but one may cram/pour food into (the back of) its mouth (מלעיטין).”⁵⁰

Eliezer's request—made next to a well—to sip a little water is unusually modest and refined. Esau's request, by contrast, is remarkably brazen and crude, employing a verb used in the Mishnah of cramming or pouring food into (the back of) the mouth of an animal to fatten it.⁵¹ In my view, this is a remarkable literary insight—one that modern scholarship is much the poorer for having ignored.

5. The Relationship between גָּמָא and הַגְּמִיאֵינִי

Are גָּמָא and הַגְּמִיאֵינִי etymologically related? The first to deal with this question is Judah Ibn Quraysh, who asserts that הַגְּמִיאֵינִי is not related (לֹא יִנְסֵב) to תְּבַת גָּמָא, where גָּמָא denotes papyrus (בְּרָדִי).⁵² Similarly, Löw and Muchiki argue, based on their assumption that גָּמָא is a loanword, that it is not derived from the root *g-m-ʔ*.⁵³

Menahem b. Solomon gives a different answer:

Why is it called גָּמָא? Because it constantly sips (גּוֹמָא) and drinks water, similar to “Let me sip a little water.” And so it says, “Can papyrus (גָּמָא) thrive without a marsh? Can rushes grow without water?”⁵⁴

Gesenius gives the same etymology for גָּמָא in his *Thesaurus*: “so called, because it sucks up and drinks (*sorbet et bibit*) moisture.”⁵⁵ In support of this etymology, he cites the poetic phrase “freely drinking papyrus” (*bibula papyrus*) used by Lucanus in his *Pharsalia* (4.136). This etymology is still accepted in the *Encyclopedia Miqra'it*: “The noun is apparently derived from the root גָּמָא, whose meaning is ‘draw up (water) and absorb’ (שׂאב וּסְפַג): the plant draws up water in great quantity (שׂוֹאֵב מִיִּם לְרֹב).”⁵⁶

A certain amount of support for this etymology can be adduced from tannaitic literature: רַבִּי יוֹסֵי מִטְמֵא בְּגִמִּי מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָרֹפֵא נוֹתֵנוּ עַל גְּבֵי הַמַּכָּה שֶׁהוּא (נ”א שִׁיחָא) מוֹצֵץ אֶת הַלִּיחָה papyrus pith (susceptible to becoming) unclean because doctors place it on a wound to absorb

(lit., suck up) the (serosanguineous) fluid” (t. Kelim 6:19); cf. כֹּהֵן שֶׁלָּקָה בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ כּוֹרֵךְ עָלָיָה גְּוִמִּי בְּמִקְדָּשׁ אֲבָל לֹא בְּמִדְּיָנָה “A priest who gets a wound on his finger may wrap papyrus pith around it (on the Sabbath) in the Temple but not outside” (m. Eruvin 10:14). The papyrus stem was apparently cut open (m. Kelim 9:4), and its highly absorbent pith was extracted and placed over the wound as a bandage.⁵⁷ However, the toseftan proof-text cuts both ways, pointing up a problem with the etymology. The word מוֹצֵץ is a participle, and, according to this etymology, we would expect גָּמָא, too, to be pointed as a participle, viz., גָּמָא (oxytone) rather than גְּמָא (paroxytone). The word יוֹנֵקֶת “shoot (lit., sucker)” is a good example of a botanical term that has a participial form, one that is particularly relevant because the root *y-n-q* belongs to the same semantic field as *g-m-ʔ* and *m-s-s*. Another problem is the fact that “the plant draws up water in great quantity” thanks to its cell structure,⁵⁸ whereas *g-m-ʔ* and *g-m-y*, as we have seen, refer to sipping a *small* quantity of liquid.

None of the scholars cited above raises the possibility that the verb may be denominal, i.e., derived from the noun rather than vice versa. To the best of my knowledge, this possibility was first mentioned in the 19th century by Shadal, in his commentary on Exod 2:3. There, after citing the view of Gesenius, he presents the opposite view, attributing it to a student of his:

My student, Isaac Judah Kalenberg, says that first they called the plant גּוֹמָא and afterwards it happened that they drank water through a reed straw (קִנְיָה שֶׁל גּוֹמָא), e.g., when a person needed to drink water from a stream but did not have a vessel, and so he took a reed (גָּמָא) growing next to the stream and made a straw (קִנְיָה) from it and drank a little at a time from the water of the stream; and that kind of drinking, done a little at a time, they named גְּמִיעָה or גְּמִיחָה after the גָּמָא.⁵⁹

At least part of Kalenberg's conjecture has been confirmed by research on Sumerian



Fig. 1: Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

drinking straws: “Originally, the straws were nothing more than reeds. Ur was founded in a marsh ... and so reeds were very common.”⁶⁰ Such straws are frequently depicted in Sumerian art, on cylinder seals and elsewhere:

The banquet scene showing people drinking with long straws is relatively common on seals of the third millennium BCE, and there is some evidence of it in seal impressions a thousand years earlier.⁶¹

Figs. 1–3 contain examples of such scenes, in modern impressions of cylinder seals from the 3rd millennium BCE.⁶² In many respects, they are strikingly similar to the countless modern images online of friends and couples using straws to share a drink.

The ability of the straw to filter out solids, especially in beer, is believed to have been an important reason for its popularity in Sumer:

Straws filtered out the barley husks and stalks, most of which would float on the drink’s surface. The use of straws reduced the amount of insects that might enter one’s mouth, especially if the drinking took place at night.⁶³

For added filtering, a strainer made of bone or metal was often attached to the bottom tip of the straw.⁶⁴ Strainers discovered in the Levant show that the use of drinking straws had spread there by the 2nd millennium BCE:

Most straws were composed of organic reeds, which rarely survive in the material record; yet, many metal ones have survived, though none have thus far been discovered



Fig. 2: Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image #152079, object #30-12-2



Fig. 3: C. Leonard Woolley, *Ur Excavations II: The Royal Cemetery* (London 1934), pl. 200, no. 102 [BM 121545]



Fig. 5: Permission to use this image has been granted by the Dept. of Antiquities, Cyprus

in m. Shabbat 8:1: „... חלב כדי גְּמִייהָ ... המוציא ... שֶׁמֶן כדי לְסוּךְ אֶבֶר קֶטֶן “one who takes out (of the house on the Sabbath)... enough milk⁷³ for a sip ..., enough oil to anoint a small body part.” The second is a discussion of a common home remedy for an abscessed tooth in m. Shabbat 14:4: החושש בשניו לא יגְּמֵהוּ בְּהֵן חוּמֵץ אֲבֵל מְטַבֵּל “one who feels (pain in) his teeth (on the Sabbath) may not sip⁷⁴ vinegar through them, but he may dip (his bread in vinegar) in his usual way.”

Others take כְּדֵי גְּמִייהָ/גְּמִיעָה to mean “enough for a swallow,” but this interpretation of *g-m-y/g-m-^c* does not fit the second context well, and it is excluded by a third context, t. Terumot 9:11: החושש בשניו לא יגְּמֵעוּ אֶת הַחוּמֵץ וּפּוֹלֵט אֲבֵל מִגְּמֵעַ וּבוֹלֵעַ “one who feels (pain) in his teeth (on the Sabbath) may not sip vinegar and spit (it) out but he may sip and swallow (it)” (cf. b. Shabbat 111a: תִּנְיָא לֹא יגְּמֵעוּ וּפּוֹלֵט אֲבֵל מִגְּמֵעַ וּבוֹלֵעַ). This context is decisive because it contrasts *g-m-^c* with *b-l-^c* “swallow.”

In concluding sections 1–6 of this study, we may note that, in m. Shabbat 8:1–2, the noun גְּמִייהָ is followed almost immediately by גְּמֵי

and נִייר. This could perhaps be viewed as a hint that ancient speakers of Hebrew perceived a connection between these three nouns.

7. יִשְׁמְשׁוּנָה (Dan 7:10)

Many scholars have suggested (or, at least, hinted) that Northwest Semitic (Aramaic, Hebrew, and Punic) שָׁמַשׁ “serve” may be a loanword from Egyptian; others have ignored this suggestion.⁷⁵ In my opinion, there is no reason to doubt this etymology. The Egyptian etymon is *šms* “follow, accompany, serve,”⁷⁶ attested from the Pyramid Texts down to Coptic *šmše* “serve, worship.”⁷⁷

The Coptic and Aramaic verbs are indirect translation equivalents in Bible versions, appearing in correspondences with a Hebrew verb as the focal point, e.g., Coptic *šmše* = Greek λειτουργεῖν = Hebrew שָׁרַת = Aramaic שָׁמַשׁ. Such correspondences confirm their *semantic* equivalence. Their *formal* equivalence is the product of assimilation at a distance: *š...s* > *š...š*.⁷⁸ It is tempting to assume that Aramaic borrowed the word after the assimilation occurred in Egyptian instead of assuming that

the change occurred independently in Semitic. One could make a similar assumption about the borrowing of Northwest Semitic (ה) שושנה “lily” from Eg. *sšn* “lotus flower” > Coptic *šōšēn* “id.”⁷⁹ Lambdin, however, assumes that the assimilation in this second example took place independently in Egyptian and Semitic,⁸⁰ and his assumption finds some support in a third example: Eg. *šs* “linen” > Coptic *šēs* “id.”⁸¹ appearing as שש “linen” in Northwest Semitic. In that case, it seems clear that *š...s* > *š...š* occurred within Semitic since we have no evidence that it took place in Egyptian. Be that as it may, the Semitist should keep in mind that Coptic frequently reflects phonological developments from earlier periods that are concealed by the conservatism of the native Egyptian scripts.

In a classic article, published in another volume of the *Eretz-Israel* series by Ada and two other unforgettable scholars, we find a detailed discussion of the meaning of the verb שמש in a legal context.⁸² In other contexts, too, Ada taught us the meaning of that verb by living a life of selfless service to others.

8. Conclusions

It has long been accepted that Jewish Aramaic and MH נִיר “papyrus” is derived from Akk. *niāru*, but the latter has no accepted etymology. Semitists have composed a number of Egyptian phrases containing *itrw* > יאר “Nile” and presented them as the etymon of Akk. *niāru*, but none of those phrases bears any resemblance to the dozen or so papyrus words attested in Egyptian. In all likelihood, *niāru* derives from Eg. *n’ r:w* “the scrolls (of papyrus or leather).” The latter is the definite plural of a noun first attested in the Middle Kingdom, whose form matches an Akk. spelling (*ni-²-a-ru*) attested twice. Moreover, as a *count* noun, Akk. *niāru* sometimes refers to a roll of flexible writing material (papyrus or parchment), a referent very similar to that of Eg. *n’ r:w*. Another Egyptian loanword in Akkadian containing the Egyptian *plural* definite article is the word for “crocodile(s).”

Hebrew ערוֹת (Isa 19:7) is widely believed to be a borrowing of Egyptian *r* “rush, reed,” but it is closer in form to Demotic *r.t.t* “id.” If the latter was a colloquial form, its late attestation would not disqualify it from being the etymon.

The noun גָּמָא in Hebrew and Egyptian Aramaic is often taken as denoting papyrus alone, but it seems more likely that it refers to both (1) marsh reeds and rushes in general and (2) the papyrus plant in particular. It is usually assumed to be a borrowing from Egyptian, and that assumption is plausible for several reasons. Nevertheless, Zohary’s neglected theory, positing a borrowing in the opposite direction, is supported by enough evidence to deserve serious consideration, as well.

Hebrew גָּמִי is the post-biblical counterpart of גָּמָא, just as Hebrew טָנִי is the post-biblical counterpart of טָנָא. The MH vocalizations גָּמִי, גָּמִי, and גָּרְמִי—all attested in reliable manuscripts—correspond reasonably well to the vocalization of Targumic Aramaic גָּרְמִיָּה, and they parallel the BH vocalizations צָרִי (Gen 37:25), צָרִי (Gen 43:11), and צָרִי (Ezek 27:17), respectively. The vocalization גָּמִי—found in editions of the Mishnah printed in Italy, not to mention Israeli lexica of Hebrew (Ma’agarim, Even Shoshan, etc.)—is later.

The meaning of *g-m-y* in tannaitic sources is “sip”—not “swallow” or “gulp down.” BH *g-m-²*, the etymon of MH *g-m-y*, also means “sip,” as recognized by Rashi and numerous modern scholars. This understanding is also implicit in a Rabbinic interpretation of a literary parallel between הַגְּמִיָּיִנִי נָא מְעַט־מִיָּם מִכַּבֶּדֶךָ (Gen 24:17) and הֲלֹעֵיטְנִי נָא מִן הָאֲדָם הָאֲדָם הַזֶּה (25:30). The former is a refined request to *sip* a little water; the latter, a crude request to have food crammed or poured into (the back of) one’s mouth. This is a remarkable literary insight, worthy of serious attention from Bible scholars.

The relationship between גָּמָא and הַגְּמִיָּיִנִי is controversial. Some believe that גָּמָא is a loanword with no connection to the root *g-m-²*. Others claim that the noun was derived from the verb—that גָּמָא denotes a marsh plant that “draws up water in great quantity.” A third

suggestion is that the derivation went in the opposite direction—that the verb for “sip” was derived from the noun for “reed” because straws, originally fashioned from long, hollow reeds, were used to sip inaccessible drinking water. This last suggestion, offered in the 19th century, has been made quite plausible by research on ancient drinking straws. Such straws are depicted in Sumerian art—on cylinder seals and elsewhere. There is also a great deal of evidence for the use of drinking straws in the Levant, especially in the 2nd millennium BCE.

Despite the silence of some reference works,

there is no reason to doubt that Northwest Semitic (Aramaic, Hebrew, and Punic) שמש “serve” is a loanword from Egyptian. The Egyptian etymon is *šms* “follow, accompany, serve,” attested from the Pyramid Texts down to Coptic *šmše* “serve, worship.” The semantic equivalence of the Coptic and Aramaic verbs is confirmed by their appearance as indirect translation equivalents in Bible versions, e.g., Coptic *šmše* = Greek λειτουργεῖν = Hebrew שרת = Aramaic שמש. Their formal equivalence is the product of assimilation at a distance (*š...s* > *š...š*), attested in two other examples.

Notes

- 1 Naphtali Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 1974), 102. For the many other uses of *Cyperus papyrus*—including those in the realm of food, clothing, and shelter—see Rosemarie Drenkhahn, “Papyrus, -herstellung” *LÄ* 4, cols. 667; and Theodore Larsson, “A Visit to the Mat Makers of Huleh,” *PEQ* 68 (1936): 225–229.
- 2 Jaroslav Černý, *Paper & Books in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1952), 3–4.
- 3 Georg Schweinfurth, *Im Herzen von Afrika: Reisen und Entdeckungen im Centralen Aequatorial-Afrika während der Jahre 1868 bis 1871* (Leipzig, 1874), 1:111 (italics added). All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
- 4 Scribes purchased papyrus writing sheets pasted together into rolls by the manufacturer, and they cut individual sheets from them as needed, with a knife called תער הספר. For the use of that knife in Jer 36:23 to cut sheets from a scroll and for the debate over whether the sheets in question were made of papyrus, see J. Philip Hyatt, “The Writing of an Old Testament Book,” *BA* 6 (1943): 72–74, 79; Menahem Haran, “מלאכת הסופר בתקופת המקרא: מגילות הספרים ואביזרי הכתיבה,” *Tarbiz* 50 (1980/81): 68; R. Lansing Hicks, “Delet and M^gillah: A Fresh Approach to Jeremiah XXXVI,” *VT* 33 (1983): 46–66. In the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, sheets that were cut from a blank roll and used for the drafting of legal documents could end up being pasted again, this time to different neighbors. This would occur when legal documents deemed to be related were pasted together to form a roll for archiving, called a טומוס של שטרות “a (secondary) papyrus roll of legal documents” in Hebrew and, more generally, a τῶμος συγκαλλήσιμος “a pasted together (secondary) papyrus roll” in Greek. For the latter, see Willy Clarysse, “Tomoi Synkollēsimoī,” in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (ed. M. Brosius; Oxford, 2003), 344–59; cf. Harold Idris Bell, “The Custody of Records in Roman Egypt,” *Indian Archives* 4 (1950): 119.
- 5 In his commentary on b. Soṭah 17a, Rashi (born 1040 CE) informs us that the manufacture of נייר from plants involved beating and pasting. Both of these were steps in the manufacture of papyrus sheets and/or rolls (Černý, *Paper & Books*, 6, 8–10; Lewis, *Papyrus*, 51, 56–57; 64–65). For that reason, scholars have long recognized that Rashi took נייר as referring to papyrus; see most recently Shlomo Naeh, “קריינא דאיגרתא: הערות לדיפלומטיקה התלמודית” *Sha’arei Lashon: Studies in Hebrew, Aramaic and Jewish Languages Presented to Moshe Bar-Asher*, (ed. A. Maman, S. E. Fassberg, and Y. Breuer; Jerusalem, 2007), 2:231 n. 15; and Malachi Beit-Arié, *Hebrew Codicology* (preprint internet English version 0.2+, November 2018), 212 with n. 5; academia.edu/38203717. Old papyrus was still being reused in Paris in the late 11th century, and a limited amount of new papyrus was still being manufactured then in Egypt (Lewis, *Papyrus*, 92, 94 with n. 10). For a dissenting view—that נייר refers exclusively to cheap papyrus substitutes—see Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie* (Leipzig, 1910–1912), 3:146–47. Krauss’s view, based in part on the price of imported papyrus, assumes that papyrus was not manufactured in Roman Palestine, but see S. Klein, “הנייר ותעשיתו בארץ ישראל” in *המסחר, התעשייה והמלאכה בארץ ישראל בימי קדם* (ed. S. Yeivin; Jerusalem, 1937), 61–74.

- 6 See Jacob Levy, *Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Leipzig, 1876–89), 3:390; Jastrow, 904; Eliezer Ben Yehuda, *מלון הלשון העברית הישנה והחדשה* (New York, 1959), 4:3653; *DJBA*, 750; Nach, "קריינא דאיגרתא", 230–31 n. 15; *DJPA*³ 388a. This is not the place to deal with other words that— according to some, at least— may refer to writing sheets, such as גְּלִיּוֹן (Isa 8:1), דְּלִתוֹת (Jer 36:23), פָּצ, יריעה, רף, etc.
- 7 Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims, "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: Text, Translation, and Notes" (published online, 2017), 4; <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12202/51> or academia.edu/44014332.
- 8 Heinrich Zimmern, *Akkadische Fremdwörter als Beweis für babylonischen Kultureinfluss* (Leipzig, 1917), 19. Contrast Stephen A. Kaufman, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago, 1974), where the word does not appear.
- 9 See at nn. 5–7 above. For mass/count ambiguity, see Otto Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar* (London, 1924), 198–201.
- 10 Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968), 1980b. See also Lewis, *Papyrus*, 70–77, arguing that "in addition to having a generic sense, γάρτης was also the technical designation of a standard unit," which was "not ... a single sheet but ... an entire roll of papyrus" (p. 70). For כרטיס and קרטיס, derived from γάρτης, see Daniel Sperber, *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan, 1984), 194–95 with the literature cited there; and Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Etymology of γάρτης 'Papyrus Roll,'" *Scripta Classica Israelica* 36 (2017): 164–67. Latin *charta* > *carta* (the etymon of English *chart*, *card*, etc.) is also derived from γάρτης.
- 11 The reference is to papyrus-reed boats, commonly used in Egypt, Sudan, etc.; see section 2 below.
- 12 The idea that Akk. *niāru* denoted "any flexible writing material" is from Alan Millard, "Words for Writing in Aramaic," in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka* (ed. M.F.J. Baasten and W.T. van Peursen; Leuven, 2003), 351.
- 13 Zimmern, *Akkadische Fremdwörter*, 19 (document); Raymond P. Dougherty, "Writing upon Parchment and Papyrus among the Babylonians and the Assyrians," *JAOS* 48 (1928): 131–32 (document); Yigal Bloch, *Alphabet Scribes in the Land of Cuneiform* (Piscataway, 2018), 10 (piece). I am indebted to Paul-Alain Beaulieu for the last reference. Cf. E. Ebeling, "Die Rüstung eines babylonischen Panzerreiters nach einem Verträge aus der Zeit Darius II.," *ZA* 50 (1952): 212–13.
- 14 For scribes purchasing parchment by the roll, see Philippe Clancier, "Les scribes sur parchemin du temple d'Anu," *RA* 99 (2005): 91 n. 23: "the undated texts VS 6 313, 317 and 319 make reference to sums designated for the purchase of parchment rolls." See also the Neo-Assyrian phrase "two rolls of papyrus (*kirkī niāri*) for the palace scribe" (*CAD* 8:408, 11:201); if *CAD*'s normalization of the second word as a singular is correct, *niāru* is a mass noun in this phrase. *Kirku* is an Aram. loanword, used elsewhere of textile rolls.
- 15 A.L. Oppenheim, "The Babylonian Evidence of Achaemenian Rule in Mesopotamia," in *CHI* (ed. Ilya Gershevitch; Cambridge, 1985), 2:571 n. 1.
- 16 J.H. Bondi, "Ägyptologisches aus der rabbinischen Literatur," *ZAS* 33 (1895): 67; Robert Eisler, "The Introduction of the Cadmeian Alphabet into the Aegean World in the Light of Ancient Traditions and Recent Discoveries," *JRAS* 55 (1923): 70 ("from the river"); N.H. Tur-Sinai in Ben Yehuda, *מלון*, 4:3653–54 ("sheet of the Nile"); Millard, "Words for Writing," 351 ("of the river[s]"; alternatively: "of the reeds"); and Bloch, *Alphabet Scribes*, 11 ("those [things] of the Nile").
- 17 Immanuel Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* (Vienna, 1928), 1:562: "unacceptable"; M. Petuchowski and Simon Schlesinger, *Mischnajot ... Ordnung Naschim* (Wiesbaden, 1933), 314 n. 41: "etymology ... unclear"; *AHW* 2:784: "unknown origin"; Nach, "קריינא דאיגרתא", 230 n. 15: "derivation ... unclear"; *DJPA*³ 388a and *DJBA* 750b, both deriving נִייר־ from Akk. *niāru* and leaving it at that.
- 18 See n. 7 above.
- 19 *Wörterbuch*, 1:208; *TLA*; etc.
- 20 As noted above, the Akk. term has that referent in contexts dealing with the purchase of such material. That is potentially significant because it is the purchaser of an imported commodity who is most likely to know the original meaning of its name.
- 21 For the rendering of Egyptian intervocalic /ʕ/ with an explicitly written Akkadian /ʕ/, cf. the rendering of Egyptian *Nb-m(ʕ)(t)-r* "Reʕ is the lord of truth" with [*ni-ib-m*]u-ʕ-wa-ri-ia (alongside *ʕni-ib-mu-a-ri-ia*, etc.) in Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (Atlanta, 1999), 294. For the rendering of Northwest Semitic /ʕ/ with Akkadian /ʕ/, see Richard C. Steiner, "A-coloring Consonants and Furtive *Pataḥ* in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic According to the Tiberian Masorah," in *Zaphenath-Paneah: Linguistic Studies Presented to Elisha Qimron on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Daniel Sivan, et al.; Beersheba, 2009), *151 n. 40. The rendering makes perfect sense since /ʕ/ is, phonologically, /ʕ/ with pharyngeal constriction; see *ibid.*, *146–47 n. 16. It appears that, in our word,

- the glottal stop was frequently elided, yielding *nī'āru* > *niāru* > *nijāru*. All three of these forms are attested in the cuneiform orthography, but only *nijāru* was borrowed into Northwest Semitic.
- 22 See Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 170–71, 174–76, 177–78, 300–301.
- 23 See C.J. Gadd, “Two Assyrian Observations,” *Iraq* 10 (1948): 21 n. 3: “It ... appears, strangely enough, that the Assyrian, Greek, and Arabic renderings all took over the Egyptian word for ‘crocodile’ with an article attached, but with a different form in each instance”; Thomas O. Lambdin, “Another Cuneiform Transcription of Egyptian *msh*, ‘Crocodile,’” *JNES* 12 (1953): 284–85; and Carsten Peust, *Egyptian Phonology* (Göttingen, 1999), 225. We may also mention cuneiform *nabnasu* = *nī bnš.w* “the door posts” on a tablet from Amarna. Muchiki (*Egyptian*, 300) deals with this form in a section entitled “Loan Words,” but this is misleading. The tablet is believed to be a bilingual word list, probably written by an Assyrian or Mitanni scribe studying Egyptian; see Sidney Smith and C.J. Gadd, “A Cuneiform Vocabulary of Egyptian Words,” *JEA* 11 (1925): 230–31; W.F. Albright, “The New Cuneiform Vocabulary of Egyptian Words,” *JEA* 12 (1926): 186–190; and Wilfred van Soldt, “De internationale betrekkingen in de Amarna-Periode,” *Phoenix* 47 (2001): 68. Nevertheless, it is significant that, in the list of wooden objects containing *nabnasu* = *nī bnš.w*, “those on the Egyptian side almost all begin with the article, *pī*, *tī*, or *nī*” (ibid.). For a group of singular nouns in Swedish borrowed from English plural forms (e.g., *bebis* “baby” < *babies*), see https://www.sprakinstitutet.fi/sv/publikationer/sprakspalter/reuters_rutor_1986_2013/1986/valtajmad_baby.
- 24 In Akkadian, the loss of /*ʿ*/ took place before the Old Babylonian period. In Egyptian, by contrast, it did not occur until the Roman period according to Peust, *Egyptian Phonology*, 102.
- 25 T.W. Thacker, “A Note on עָרוֹת (Is. xix 7),” *JTS* (1933): 163–65 (ʿ “rush, reed”); cf. N. Herz, “Isaiah 19, 7,” *OLZ* 15 (1912): 496 (ʿ*t* “stalk”); Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 252–53; and many commentaries on Isaiah. For a suggestion that עָרוֹת means “papyrus,” see Johann Gottfried Unger, *De עָרוֹת, hoc est, de papyro frutice, von der Papier-Staude* (Leipzig, 1731).
- 26 See Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 253. The fem. noun ʿ*t* cited by Muchiki is less relevant because it has the meaning “stalk”; see *Wörterbuch*, 1:208.
- 27 Wolja Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen, 1954), 67.
- 28 See *Oeuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyūmī* (ed. J. Derenbourg; 5 vols; Paris, 1893–99), 1:82; 3:26, 52; 5:29.
- 29 Waltraud Guglielmi, “Papyrusboot,” *LÄ* 4, cols. 670–71. See also ספר הנבחר באמונות וברעות לרבנו סעדיה בן יוסף פיומי (ed. Yosef Qafih; Jerusalem, 1970), 250, where R. Saadia Gaon (who grew up in Egypt) explains that in Ethiopia they use “tarred papyrus boats (אלקוארב אלברדי אלמקירה) [which] bend but don’t break” because “in the upper reaches of the Nile, there are rocky ridges protruding from the water” that break ordinary boats.
- 30 For “sedge(s),” see G. E. Post, “Reed,” in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. James Hastings; Edinburgh, 1902), 4:212–13; and Lewis, *Papyrus*, 25 n. 8. For “reed(s),” see Thomas O. Lambdin, “Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament,” *JAOS* 73 (1953): 149; and *DNWSI*, 225. Cf. perhaps Rashi, who glosses גמא with יונ”ק = OFr *jonc* “reed, rush” (< *juncus*) in his commentary on Exod 2:3. For OFr *jonc*, see Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, and Brian J. Levy, *Old French-English Dictionary* (Cambridge, U.K., 2000), 378 (“reed, rush”); see also *Tobler-Lommatzsch: altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1969), 1757 (*Binse* “rush”).
- 31 See below.
- 32 Cf. Jerome, who renders גמא with Latin *scirpus* “rush or reed” (Job 8:11); *scirpeus* “made/consisting of rushes or reeds (Exod 2:3); *juncus* “rush” (Isa 35:7); but also *papyrus* (Isa 18:2).
- 33 Michael Zohary, גמא, *Encyclopedia Miqra’it*, 2:517. Cf. Harold N. Moldenke and Alma L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (New York, 1952), 93.
- 34 Lambdin, “Egyptian,” 149; Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 241–42.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Zohary, גמא, 517. Cf. Leopold Löw, *Graphische Requisiten und Erzeugnisse bei den Juden* (Leipzig, 1870–1871), 1:97: “גמא has a decidedly Semitic origin” (but see also n. 53 below).
- 37 James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), 5. Cf. already Heinrich Brugsch, *Geschichte Aegypten’s unter den Pharaonen* (Leipzig, 1877), 197–98.
- 38 James P. Allen, “The Craft of the Scribe,” *COS* 3:9–14.
- 39 For the use of reeds at Beth-Shean, see Amihai Mazar, *Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989–1996* (Jerusalem, 2006), 1:185, 190, 192, 216, 378 (Iron Age); and R.W. Hamilton, “Beth-shan,” *IDB* 1:398b (the later Chalcolithic period).
- 40 HALAT, 361a; Moshe Bar-Asher, תורת הצורות של לשון פרקי מבווא ותצורת שם העצם המשנה: פרקי מבווא ותצורת שם העצם (Jerusalem, 2015), 1:614–5.
- 41 See Lambdin, “Egyptian,” 151; Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 247; and the literature cited there. Aaron Koller correctly notes, in an email communication, that this

- example is *particularly* relevant only if גָּמָא is an Egyptian loanword, contra Zohary.
- 42 J.N. Epstein, פירוש הגאונים על סדר טהרות מיוחס לרבי, 12 line 5; and 13 line 6 (pp. 18, 19 in the Jerusalem reprint).
- 43 Israel Yeivin, מסורת הלשון העברית המשתקפת בניקוד, 877 n. 168.
- 44 Cf. HALAT s.v. גָּמָא, where E.Y. Kutscher cites the MH forms גָּמִי and גוּמִי. For the double pointing of גָּמִי compared with the double pointing of אֶקְלִים, both in Codex Kaufmann, see Bar-Asher, תורת הצורות, 1:73. This apt comparison suggests that the original stem-vowel of גָּמִי, like that of אֶקְלִים, was *u.
- 45 Michael L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Cincinnati, 1986), 1:109, MS E line 3. Prior to the publication of this Genizah fragment, some scholars vocalized גוּמִיא in the Fragment-Targum (Gen 41:18) as an emphatic plural. For גוּמִיא “papyrus” rendering אָחוּ, cf. Eg. ḡ(y) “papyrus thicket” (TLA).
- 46 Yeivin, מסורת הלשון, 877 §39. For a different view, see Bar-Asher, תורת הצורות, 1:613.
- 47 Bar-Asher (ibid.) cites this form from the editions of Livorno, 1919 and 1929. S.Z. Leiman informs me (email communication) that גָּמִי is found also in the editions of Venice, 1737 and Pisa, 1810 at m. Kilayim 6:9 and m. Shabbat 8:2.
- 48 See DBY, ISV, NJPS, NRSV; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, New York, 1964), 175, 180; Jack M. Sasson, “The Servant’s Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse,” *JNES* 65 (2006): 253; etc. According to this understanding of הַגְּמִיאִינִי, we should perhaps take יִגְמָא־אָרֶץ (Job 39:24) as referring to a horse *sniffing* the earth rather than *swallowing* it (in a figurative sense).
- 49 Rashi writes: הגמייני נא - לשון גמיעה הומי”ר בלעז. OFr *humer* is rendered *schlürfen, einsaugen* “sip, suck in” in *Tobler-Lommatzsch*, 1226. As a *transitive* verb, it is rendered “draw in, suck in; drink” by Hindley, Langley, and Levy, *Old French-English Dictionary*, 366. For the gloss גמיעה, see n. 71 below.
- 50 פסיקתא דרב כהנא (ed. Bernard Mandelbaum; New York, 1962), 114–15 §6.2.
- 51 The Hebrew verb has an Akkadian cognate, *la’ātu*, with the meaning “swallow.” All or most of the examples given by *CAD* (9:6–7) seem to refer to swallowing without chewing. Moreover, Akk. *ma’latu/mal’atu* means “tongue root” (*AHW* 2:594). These cognates raise the possibility that הלעיט refers to causing an animal to swallow something by placing it on the back of its tongue, where pills are placed today for swallowing. If correct, this would support R. Hisda’s opinion in the Talmud (b. Shabbat 155b), according to which הלעיט refers to pushing food into an animal’s mouth, to a place sufficiently far back that it is unable to spit it out (מקום שאינה יכולה להחזיר).
- 52 Judah Ibn Quraysh, של יהודה בן קורישי: ה’רסאלה’ של יהודה בן קורישי: מהדורה ביקורתית (ed. Dan Becker; Tel Aviv, 1984), 172–73.
- 53 Löw, *Flora*, 570 (contrast his earlier view in n. 36 above); and Muchiki, *Egyptian*, 242.
- 54 Menahem b. Solomon, מדרש שכל טוב על ספר בראשית, ושמות (ed. Salomon Buber; Berlin, 1900–1901), 2:10–11.
- 55 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae veteris testamenti* (Leipzig, 1835–1853), 291.
- 56 Zohary, גָּמָא, 518.
- 57 Cf. Lewis, *Papyrus*, 97: “Strips of papyrus served as bandages.”
- 58 Zohary, גָּמָא, 518.
- 59 Samuel Davide Luzzatto, *Il Pentateuco volgarizzato e commentato* (Padua, 1872), 2:12–13. Around 35 years before I found this passage, the denominal etymology was proposed in my Hebrew semantics class by Yitzhak Kertesz, a budding philologist who regrettably did not live to see his idea in print; see <https://ajlpublishing.org/index.php/jl/article/view/185/175>.
- 60 William B. Hafford, “Straws that Bind,” *Popular Archaeology*, Fall 2018 <https://popular-archaeology.com/article/straws-that-bind/>; cf. Ian Spencer Hornsey, *A History of Beer and Brewing* (Cambridge, U.K., 2003), 86; Michael M. Homan, “Beer and Its Drinkers: An Ancient Near Eastern Love Story,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004): 86; and U. Seidl, “Saugrohr. B. In der Archäologie,” in *RIA*, 12:95. In later times, reeds and reed-cutters were so common in Babylonia that the phrase קטיל קני באגמא “cutter of reeds in the marsh” came to be used as a derisive term for a common (i.e., uneducated) man in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (b. Shabbat 95a, Sanhedrin 33a).
- 61 Hafford, “Straws.” See also Seidl, “Saugrohr,” 94–95; and Hornsey, *History*, 86.
- 62 For scenes from cylinder seals that are thought to show *gods* using straws, see *ANEP* (<https://archive.org/details/ancientneareasta00prit>), 48 (plate 158), 267; and 219 (plate 675), 330. The impression in fig. 2 above is from the same seal as the one in *ANEP* 220 (plate 679); 331. By a happy coincidence, this plate appears immediately above plate 681, the “seal of Adda”!
- 63 Homan, “Beer,” 86. For the Aboriginal Australian use of straws made of long hollow stems and reeds to filter drinking water covered with scum (and to extract inaccessible drinking water from crevices, etc.), see Philip A. Clarke, *Australian Plants as Aboriginal*

- Tools* (New South Wales, Australia, 2012), at nn. 303–31. The botanist W. Wayt Thomas, who studies the sedge family, informs me that, as reeds mature, their pith becomes hollow, making it possible to fashion drinking straws from them without much effort (email communication).
- 64 Homan, “Beer,” 86; Aren M. Maeir and Yosef Garfinkel, “Bone and Metal Straw-tip Beer-strainers from the Ancient Near East,” *Levant* 24 (2013): 218–223; and Rachael T. Sparks, “Canaan in Egypt: Archaeological Evidence for a Social Phenomenon,” in *Invention and Innovation: The Social Context of Technological Change 2, Egypt, the Aegean and the Near East, 1650–1150 BC* (ed. Janine Bourriau and Jacke Phillips; Oxford, 2016), 36: “One strainer even has remnants of the original reed straw preserved inside.” The Sumerian term for the strainer-tip was recently discovered in a list of beer utensils; see Walther Sallaberger, “Der Trinkhalm für Bier: Ein prä-sargonischer Textbeleg,” *RA* 107 (2013):105–10.
- 65 Homan, “Beer,” 86.
- 66 Sparks, “Canaan in Egypt,” 35, with the cylinder seal from Ugarit shown in Figure 3.4b on p. 34.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 35. Cf. Wilhelm Spiegelberg and Adolf Erman, “Grabstein eines syrischen Söldners aus Tell Amarna,” *ZÄS* 36 (1898): 126–28; F.L. Griffith, “A Drinking Siphon from Tell el-‘Amarnah,” *JEA* 12 (1926): 22–23; Jozef M.A. Janssen, “Fonctionnaires Sémites au service de l’Égypte,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 26 (1951): 53; *ANEP* 48 (plate 157), 267; and Robert K. Ritner, “Semitic Functionaries in Egypt,” *COS* 3:37.
- 68 See P. Dikaios, “An Iron Age Painted Amphora in the Cyprus Museum,” *ABSA* 37 (1936/1937): 63: “The importance of the appearance of the rite of drinking through a siphon on our amphora ... is naturally great. It shows the cultural relations between Cyprus and Syria. These relations have a long tradition....”
- 69 See Maeir and Garfinkel, “Beer-strainers,” 222: “... the majority of the metal as well as bone strainers from Israel seem to come from Middle Bronze II contexts.” This suggests an early date for the coining of הגמליה rather than the post-exilic date proposed by Alexander Rofé, “An Enquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff* (ed. E. Blum et al.; Neukirchen Vluyn, 1990), 29. In any event, Rofé’s argument does not meet the rigorous criteria, established by Avi Hurvitz in many publications, for identifying distinctive LBH features. For example, it does not establish that a different word for “sip” was used in Hebrew prior to LBH. As such, it is an argument from silence—an argument that would lead us to the unreasonable conclusion that an MH term unattested in the Bible could not have been in use in pre-exilic Hebrew, even if it turned out to have, say, a Moabite or Ugaritic cognate; see J.C. Greenfield, “Amurrite, Ugaritic and Canaanite,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies held in Jerusalem, 19–23 July 1965* (Jerusalem, 1969), 99. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, “Some False Leads in the Identification of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Cases of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27–36,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 26–27.
- 70 See מדרש בראשית רבא (ed. J. Theodor and C. Albeck; Berlin, 1912–29), 2:645 line 10 §60.6; and n. 50 above. For the rendering “one sip,” see Jacob Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Pesiqta deRab Kahana* (Lanham, 2001), 69.
- 71 The replacement of *g-m-ʿ* with *g-m-ʿ* (as in הגמיעה), discussed already in the Talmud (b. Shabbat 77a, etc.), is a predominantly Babylonian feature according to J.N. Epstein, *מבוא לנוסח המשנה* (Jerusalem, 1948), 1:405–406; cf. Menahem Moreshet, *לקסיקון הפועל* (Ramat Gan, 1980), 124. It can perhaps be attributed to hypercorrect spelling and/or contamination with Aram. *g-m-ʿ* “sink, be immersed,” known primarily from Syriac. For a different explanation, see Lambdin, “Egyptian,” 149 n. 35.
- 72 So according to Codex Kaufmann in both places.
- 73 In Codex Kaufmann, חלב is a correction, possibly for an original חומץ according to Ma’agarim. The reading חומץ would make excellent sense in light of 14:4. On the other hand, חלב would make sense if this mishnah is speaking of a baby’s sip; cf. אבר קטן in the continuation of the mishnah, often interpreted as referring to a baby’s toe.
- 74 Cf. the rendering *einschlürfen* “sip/suck in” in A. Sammt, *Mischnaioth ... Ordnung Moëd* (Berlin, 1887), 32.
- 75 W. Max Müller in Wilhelm Gesenius and Frants Buhl, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (14th ed.; Leipzig, 1905), 848 (Egyptian cited but not as etymon); BDB, 1116 (ditto); *Wörterbuch*, 4:482 s.v. *šms*: “borrowed by Aramaic”; Rainer M. Voigt, “Inkompatibilitäten und Diskrepanzen in der Sprache und das erste phonologische Inkompatibilitätsgesetz des Semitischen,” *WO* 12 (1981): 153; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York, 1987), 668 (among other etymologies); Klaus Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer* (Göttingen, 1994), *Ergänzungsband*, 424–25; *HALAT* 5:1793: “uncertain”; John Huehnergard, etymological note in *American Heritage Dictionary* (4th ed.; Boston, 2000), 1599 s.v. *shammes*: “probably”; Richard C. Steiner, “The ‘Lemma Complement’ in Hebrew Commentaries

- from Byzantium and Its Diffusion to Northern France and Germany,” *JSQ* 18 (2011): 369 n. 9. Contrast Tur-Sinai in Ben Yehuda, מלון, 8:7297 n.4 (Eg. not cited); *DNWSI*, 1168 (Eg. not cited); Muchiki, *Egyptian* (שמש “serve” not cited); and Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, Ind., 2009), 1576 s. v. שמש: “etym(ology) unkn(own).”
- 76 For the meaning “serve,” see *Wörterbuch*, 4:483–84 s.v. That meaning is not included in the *definition* given by *TLA*; however, in some of the *examples* cited there the verb is taken to mean “serve.”
- 77 W.E. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 567a–b.
- 78 Compare this assimilation with two later dissimilations: (1) Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic שמש > Yiddish שמש (šámes) “sexton (of synagogue)”; and (2) Syriac ܫܡܫܐ = διάκονος “servant, deacon” > Arabic الشماس “id.” Both of these exhibit dissimilation at a distance, and both
- restore the original sibilant (of Eg. šms) at the end! At the moment, the most prudent course is to view these two cases of dissimilation as parallel developments. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that the dissimilated Arabic form was brought to Europe at an early period by Arabic-speaking Jewish traders; see Richard C. Steiner, עקבות לשוניים של סוחרים יהודים מארצות האסלאם בממלכה הפרנקית” *Lešonenu* 73 (2011): 347–370 (with English summary on pp. iv–v). For a slightly different explanation, see Tur-Sinai in Ben Yehuda, מלון, 8:7297.
- 79 Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 608a s. v.
- 80 Lambdin, “Egyptian,” 154.
- 81 Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 572a.
- 82 Yigael Yadin, J.C. Greenfield, and Ada Yardeni, שטר” מתנה בארמית מנחל חבר (פפירוס ידן 7): 400.

Abbreviations

- ABD* = *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
- AHw* = Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*
- Akk. = Akkadian
- ANEP* = James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*
- BDB* = Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
- BH = Biblical Hebrew
- CAD* = *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
- CHI* = *Cambridge History of Iran*
- DBY* = J.N. Darby, *The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation from the Original Languages*
- DJBA* = Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*
- DJPA*³ = Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*
- DNWSI* = J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*
- Eg. = Egyptian
- HALAT* = *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*
- IDB* = *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*
- ISV = International Standard Version
- Jastrow = Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*
- LÄ* = *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*
- LBH = Late Biblical Hebrew
- MH = Mishnaic Hebrew
- NJPS = New Jewish Publication Society of America Tanakh
- NRSV = New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
- Ofr = Old French
- RLA* = *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*
- TLA* = *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* <http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/index.html>
- Wörterbuch* = A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*