Approaches to the Etymology of Arabic

edited by

STEPHAN GUTH

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 17 (2017): 311-453
## Contents

**STEPHAN GUTH** ......................................................................................................................... 313
Introduction

**ZEUS WELNHOFER** .................................................................................................................. 322
On Some Arabic Roots and Their Etymological Relevance

**SIMONA OLIVIERI** .................................................................................................................... 332
The *ism* in the Arabic Grammatical Tradition: Reflections on Its Origin and Meanings

**STEPHAN GUTH** ......................................................................................................................... 345
Biradicalist Mimophonic Triradicalism: Sounds, root nuclei and root complements in M. Ḥ. Ḥ. Gabal’s ‘etymological’ dictionary of Arabic (2012)

**JEAN-CLAUDE ROLLAND** ........................................................................................................... 377
Éclats de roche : Une étude d’étymologie sur les noms de la pierre en latin, grec et arabe

**LUTZ EDZARD** .......................................................................................................................... 407
Notes on the Emergence of New Semitic Roots in the Light of Compounding

**FRANCESCO GRANDE** ............................................................................................................... 415
The Arabic Lexicographer IbnSidah and the Notion of Semantic Field

**GİZEM İŞIK** ............................................................................................................................... 434
Etymology and Polysemy: A Non-Objectivist Approach to the Domain of Vision in the Semitic Languages

*Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* • 17 (2017): 311-453
Introduction

STEPHAN GUTH (University of Oslo)

The idea for this little dossier spécial emerged from a workshop, held in Berlin in December 2016 to discuss the possibilities of fundraising for projects related to the study of the etymology of Arabic. The workshop came as a follow-up of two others: one larger, held in Oslo in June 2013, with the aim (as expressed in the title) of Breaking the Grounds for an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic (EtymArab), and another, smaller one, arranged in Erlangen in December 2015 and designed for a younger generation (“jil ḣadīd”) of researchers interested in Arabic etymology. All three events were motivated by the fact that, strangely enough, there is to this day no full-scale etymological dictionary of Arabic, although this language is among the most widely spoken languages of the world, can count as the most important living Semitic language, has a long and fascinating history and a rich literary heritage, is the language of one of the “hot spots” of contemporary global politics and, aside from all that, even enjoys the status of one of the official languages at the United Nations.

1 This workshop was convened by myself in collaboration with Catherine PENNACCHIO (CERMOM, INALCO) and Lutz EDZARD (IKOS, Oslo) as an ESF Exploratory Workshop, financed by the European Science Foundation and co-sponsored by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS, University of Oslo) and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.


3 For an etymological dictionary of Arabic words of non-Semitic origin, cf. ROLLAND 2015.

4 Among the reasons for this more than deplorable lacuna we may mention, on the Arab side, the notorious lack of an indigenous tradition of historical linguistics, owing itself to the traditional view of Arabic as a sacrosanct ‘unchanging’ language, the idiom God Himself had chosen to address mankind in his ultimate, ‘eternal’ message, the Qur’ān; and, perhaps even more important, the experience of colonialism and, continuing even after political independence, of Western cultural domination, resulting in a reluctance to allow Western theory to ‘invade’ and ‘colonize’ one of the last reservations of indigenous culture and identity; on the Western side, the disregard for, or neglect of, etymology in Arabic Studies can partly be traced back to the marginalisation of philology as such after Edward SAD’s verdict, which saw old-style philology as part of an overall Orientalist discourse that made colonialism possible; to a large extent this disregard and neglect is however also the result of the subjection, or subjugation, of academic research to the principles of neoliberal market economy, a process that increasingly resulted, and continues to result, in the abolishment of “small” linguistic disciplines in favour of the large Middle East Studies programs with their focus on politics and society of the contemporary
After the Oslo meeting, work on the *EtymArab* project was taken up immediately, and the idea of gradually building up a nutshell “zero version” of an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic was spread, discussed and further developed on several occasions⁶ and in a number of publications,⁷ all drawing on material collected in the *EtymArab* database (incl. discussion and preliminary conclusions), the project’s working platform currently hosted by Bibliotheca Polyglotta.⁸

Arab world, a process that often is accompanied by competitive fights among the “small ones,” who desperately struggle for survival; focussing exclusively on best-selling disciplines, market economy, and with it university administrations, also create a ‘neo-Orientalist’ discourse that tends to reduce the Arab World to a sphere of religiously motivated violence and a potential threat for global peace; policy-makers in academic administration therefore are inclined to marginalise philological and culture-oriented disciplines, branding them as “irrelevant” due to a lack of public interest and demand (for an attempt at an assessment of the present situation, see Guth 2018b, with further references, also to earlier and more comprehensive assessments); another reason for the deplored lacuna may lie in the frequent decoupling of Arabic Studies from Semitic Studies, a process seemingly necessitated by the growth of the disciplines, esp. after the oil crisis of the 1970s, and the need for specialisation within Oriental Studies; this process resulted in a situation where Arabic linguistics often only deal with Arabic itself, without a Semitist framework, or Arabic Studies do form part of Semitic Studies but are marginalised there due to various reasons, mainly the traditional focus of Semitic Studies on other Semitic languages than Arabic (Akkadian, Ethiopic, Aramaic, etc.).


⁷ <https://www2.hf.uio.no/polyglotta/>. – To access the *EtymArab* database/dictionary directly, go to <.../index.php?page=volume&amp;vid=626> and choose “Go to the first sentence” (in the “Sentence by sentence view”). Search via the “Search” field or by clicking on an item chosen from the menu to the left where the Arabic roots are arranged alphabetically (Arabic ʔālīf-bāḥ) and, within a root, according to the system used in WEHR’s dictionary.
Introduction

Practical work on the roots and individual lexical items suggested by the Oslo exploratory workshop\(^8\) proved to be highly giving—in many respects:

– First and foremost, it showed how much research has already been done on the etymology of Arabic. Much of this material is scattered here and there, in monographs or articles on individual lexical items or larger semantic complexes, but also in many studies on, and dictionaries of, other Semitic languages. Originating, partly, from the beginnings of Oriental Studies in Europe, it goes without saying that this material often is quite dated. In many cases, however, even a thorough revision could not shake its validity. In any case, this material can serve as a starting point for further research, even though it will have to be replaced or modified at a later stage, when the picture becomes clearer thanks to the findings of more recent research. (An examination of etymological studies also sheds light on the history of the discipline as well as, connected to it, the conditions and motivations that have framed etymological research over the years and decades.)

– As a result of one of EtymArab’s main operations—the assembling and collating of extant research—we were also able to obtain, for many roots and individual lexical items, a number of insights that go far beyond what earlier studies had achieved: a viewing together of pertinent findings, often possible only now, thanks to digital technology and facilitated access to old studies and the processing of larger amounts of data, helped to see things more clearly and paved the way for more advanced investigations in many cases. In this way, working on the EtymArab “zero version” proved an old Orientalist assumption wrong: it is not at all hopeless to try to make some advances into the history and pre-history of the Arabic language! This is not to ignore the many difficulties, obstacles, challenges that an etymologist still meets and has to deal with: the complexity of the subject matter itself, i.e., the richness and enormous multifacetedness of the Arabic lexicon, the diglossic situation, the huge regional diversity, resulting in polysemy, etc., not to speak of the scarcity of available sources for early stages of the language’s history and the unreliability of editions in many subfields. However, Arabic

\(^8\) The choice of items in the 1000-lemma start-up list was (and still is) meant to be somehow representative of Arab cultural history and at the same time to be appealing to a larger general public. It includes most of the Swadesh basic vocabulary (cf. SWADESH 1971; for a 200-word version of this list, see, e.g., BENNETT 1998: 40, or <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Arabic_Swadesh_list>, last accessed December 28, 2017), almost all terms discussed in Arthur Jeffery’s seminal study on The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an (JEFFERY 1938), all items from BERGSTRASSER’S list (1928), many Islamic “key concepts” (as identified by ALI & LEAMAN 2008), a large number of items extracted from studies on the formation of Modern Standard Arabic during the Nahḍah (19th and early 20th century), such as MONTEIL 1960, STETKEVYCH 1970, LEWIS 1988, REBHAN 1986, AYALON 1987, or JACQUART (ed.) 1994, a certain percentage from the thematic lists in BUCKWALTER & PARKINSON’S Frequency Dictionary (2011), collated with a selection from The World Loanword Database (WOLD) compiled by HASPELMATH & TAMOR. The list further filled up according to pure frequency considerations and, last but not least, own personal preferences, not seldom inspired by the place where, or occasion on which, I presented the EtymArab project: for instance, giving a paper in Venice (Arabic: al-Bunduqiyya), I searched, among others, into the roots \(\text{bNBDQ}\) and \(\text{FNDQ}\); shortly before Christmas, I lectured on the etymology of Christmas-related terminology, etc.—cf. the list of presentations and publications given in notes 5 and 6, above.
is not too different from other languages in these respects. A quick glance at etymological dictionaries of other major languages should be enough to acknowledge the fact that etymologists of non-Arabic languages, too, struggle with similar problems, and they are in fact unable to solve these problems satisfactorily for larger parts of the lexicon as soon as they try to ‘dig’ themselves into older, unattested layers of the history of the respective languages. It is more than common to find concluding statements like “of unclear origin” or “etymology obscure,” in addition to the revision of earlier findings or the discussion of the pros and cons of certain theories. Thus, previous assertions about an essential “otherness” of Arabic that would make any serious research impossible seem to owe their existence mainly to Orientalist prejudices.

On the other hand, it is only natural that work on the etymology of the 1000-lemma start-up list also made numerous lacunae and challenges apparent. Of course, these are lacunae indeed, and challenges still are unsolved problems. However, one should not only see the negative aspects here. The identification of a lacuna or a challenge is an achievement in its own right, an essential first step towards closing the gap and finding a solution. Moreover, the most important benefit to be drawn from such challenges is probably a sensitization for theoretical and methodological questions of a more general nature.

It is in this spirit that the Berlin workshop convened—and concluded that at the present stage, the biggest desideratum is to reach an overview over theoretical and methodological obstacles and challenges and that therefore a publication that would make an effort to provide such an overview, or help to provide one, would be most welcome. The present dossier spécial is meant to be working towards the fulfilment of this task. Based on observations made in their source material, each of the articles presents the more general questions arising from these observations and discusses relevant methodological approaches and their theoretical underpinnings. The discussion is informed by the authors’ long-standing ‘exposure’ to questions related to Arabic etymology and the experiences they made when applying certain theories and methods.

Of course, etymology is a vast field and has too many sub-fields as to be covered in this little dossier: there are phonological as well as semantic aspects and synchronic as well as diachronic approaches; there are the tracing of borrowings and the analysis of principles of word-formation (derivation, compounding, ...); there is the study of phenomena that can be explained by genetic relatedness or by language contact, as well as the reconstruction of hypothetical proto-forms; there are several cultural dimensions (What can a language tell us about the culture of those who use it? What can we learn from etymological data about contacts between peoples or the interaction of human beings from different language communities?), and many other aspects. Yet, the seven articles gathered in the present collection cover quite a broad range of topics, questions, theories, and methodological approaches.

Taking some Arabic roots containing the pharyngeals $\zeta$ and $\eta$ or the velar/uvular fricatives $\dot{g}$ and $\dot{h}$ as his starting point, Zeus WELLNHOFER looks into phonetic features and

\footnote{For standard overviews and introductions to etymology in general, see e.g., MALKIEL 1975, MALKIEL 1993, and DURKIN 2009.}
regular sound changes, or deviations from standard patterns, to discuss the relevance of these features as heuristic tools that may help to distinguish ‘genuine’ Arabic words from borrowings, particularly inner-Semitic loans, as well as for the explanation of pairs of phonetically distinct, but semantically close Arabic roots.

The latter phenomenon is also what the following three articles are interested in, though from different perspectives and drawing on different etymological traditions. While Weltin–hofer sticks to what may be called the ‘mainstream’ in Western approaches to Arabic etymology, Simona Olivieri and myself present traditional Arab views. Olivieri demonstrates how early Arab grammarians understood the word ism and how their view on grammar influenced the way they ‘derived’ this word either from √SMW or from √WSM, and vice versa: how the derivation from either of these two roots influenced their view of the ism as a grammatical phenomenon—grammar, semantics, and etymology are intricately interwoven. Although the Arab grammarians’ opinions about the etymology of ism certainly are not tenable from the point of view of Western historical linguistics, they are interesting in themselves nevertheless: on the one hand, they provide useful explanations for a certain semantic shading of Arabic ism as compared to its Semitic cognates (semantics are influenced by the use as a grammatical term); on the other hand, they also serve as a fine example of how the main principle of traditional Arab(ic) grammar and lexicography—the idea of the tri-consonantal “root” (gīḏr)—imposes on indigenous Arab etymologists a specific way of thinking that forces them to ‘derive’ (iṣṭaqqqa) every word from a hypothetical 3-radical gīḏr, an operation that often brings them close to what could look like ‘folk etymology’ from a Western perspective. Yet, this ‘folk etymology’ should not be easily dismissed as complete nonsense: the way a word is etymologised forms part of its meaning and therefore may, in the long run, contribute to a change in semantics, so that both, ‘genuine’ and ‘folk’ etymology, will have to be taken into consideration in order to provide convincing comprehensive explanations of semantic change.

The same holds true for a modern Arab etymologist’s, the late Muhammad H. H. Gabal’s, approach that I am discussing in my own contribution (Guth, “Biradicalist Mimophonic Triradicalism”). It has been a major concern of this article to not only present Gabal’s basic assumptions and key operations, but also put these in dialogue with the Western tradition, both earlier findings and more recent approaches to the question of the composition of Arabic “roots”, such as Christopher Ehret’s idea of pre-Proto-Semitic root extensions, Rainer M. Voigt’s “Reimwortbildung”, or George Bohas’s matrices et éty-

mons.

The Bohasian approach and its possible bearings are exemplified in extenso by Jean-Claude Rolland in his essay on the terms for “stone” in Latin, Greek and Arabic. Basing themselves, like Gabal, on an essentially mimophonic approach, Bohas and with him Rolland widen the idea of a similarity of sounds and, as is assumed, corresponding semantic relatedness considerably, sketching huge (synchronic) semantic fields and sub-fields (like the “stone=beating/breaking/cutting” field explored by Rolland) rather than trying to trace lexical items back, diachronically, to attested predecessors or reconstructed ‘origins’. Their approach may seem quite different from traditional Western ‘mainstream’ ones, mainly because of their focus on (more or less) synchronous similarity in sound and meaning. On the other hand, also Western scholars like Rainer M. Voigt operate with sound similarity (“rhyming”) as explanation for semantic overlappings and vicinity, and none of them all—
neither Voigt, nor Gabal, nor Bohas and Rolland, nor the traditional Arab ‘etymologists’—touch upon the idea that, except perhaps for the geminated $R_1R_2$ type, all real, existing roots are thought to be triradical (it is only Ehret and some researchers with a background in Russian academia, which often was more open to include an Afroasiatic or even Nostratic dimension in the overall picture, who were/are ready to ascribe historic reality to bi-radical roots). Moreover, it should be said again that even though sound similarity as an explanatory category tends to be refused (except for cases of assimilation, metathesis, etc.) as untenable, if not even as ‘folklore’, in Western etymological thinking there may nevertheless be more etymological truth to it than this academic tradition usually assumes, exactly because there are not only diachronic processes going on, but there is also synchronic interaction and association on account of phonetic similarity.

The composition and/or formation of roots is also the topic of Lutz Edzard’s contribution to the present dossier, although his study is not concerned with the question of bi- or triradical roots. Rather, he looks into phenomena of morpho-phonological re-analysis, for instance those in which an expression or a string of words is first abbreviated into a kind of “acronym” (e.g., basmala for “to pronounce the formula bismi ‘llāhi ‘l-rahmāni ‘l-raḥīm”) and then a corresponding root (here: *√BSML) is extrapolated. The article also makes an attempt to establish a hierarchical typology of such processes.

While the preceding five studies shed light on the root concept, the composition of roots and their formation as well as the implications of the concept for grammatical and etymological thinking, Francesco Grande’s and Gizem Işık’s studies draw our attention away from the more formal, morpho-phonological aspects to another huge complex of etymological relevance: semantics and semantic categorization. Grande compares European notions of the concept of the “semantic field” to what may correspond to it in the native Arab lexicographical tradition, especially the idea of a bāb in Ibn Sīdah’s Muḥkam and Muḫaṣṣaṣ. Elaborating on congruencies and differences among the two traditions, the article points to a fact that traditional etymology to this day tends to neglect: Semantic taxonomies are dependent on time, place, and the culture from which they emerge; therefore, familiarity with the semantic field(s) to which a given word is ascribed in a given language and, thus, an intimate knowledge of the cultural aspects surrounding the respective lexical item may help to solve etymological questions. Gizem Işık then goes a step farther, demonstrating how the application of a—in her case—cognitive linguistic approach can provide a useful instrument for the analysis of a complex semantic field such as ‘vision’, and how this grants the etymologist a better understanding of the development and distribution of the many facets of ‘vision’ in Arabic, and Semitic in general.

* * * * *

It goes without saying that this little collection of articles related to etymological theory and methodology is far from being a comprehensive introduction to the field and the challenges that the project of an Etymological Dictionary of Arabic still will have to face. Moreover, it did neither provide an overview of the history of the discipline nor include a case study that could have served as an example of the political dimensions of etymology,
Introduction

particularly the etymology of Arabic. As the editor of the dossier, I also would have liked to see an article dealing with ‘paretymology’ (popular/folk etymology): To which other word(s)/idea(s) do ‘lay’ etymologists trace back certain words, irrespective of ‘proper’ etymological findings? What do people associate with a word that may be borrowed, but whose true origin is ignored or forgotten? What kind of history do they assign to such words? As for the cultural aspects (which also would have been quite prominent in a ‘paretymological’ study), some of them have certainly been addressed by Grande and Işık; but there are of course many more, and each of them would deserve a study in its own right: investigations into borrowing, for example, often shed light on trade relations, knowledge transfer, cultic practices, migration movements, power relations under occupation/colonisation, etc. I would also very much have liked to include a study comparable to Huehnergard’s brilliant essay on the Proto-Semitic lexicon in which he sketches a picture of the everyday world of the Proto-Semites (including agricultural tools and techniques, human relations, religious belief and practices, etc.), based on the vocabulary that can be reconstructed for this period of linguistic history (HUEHNERGARD 2011). I could imagine that similar studies on the etymology of Arabic words could be equally giving. (There exist already a fair number of studies on the two main periods of translation, the early Abbasid times and the Nahdah, and also many others on borrowings from languages like Akkadian, Syriac, or Italian—to name only a few. But in many cases, these are either dated and would benefit from a thorough revision, or they are far from comprehensive and/or satisfactory, leaving ample room for addition and elaboration. Often they also content themselves with stating that ‘x is from y’, without framing the instances of borrowing with informations on the circumstances and cultural environment in which the borrowing supposedly happened.)

Not to speak of the many aspects of more traditional, “formal” etymology and historical semantics that have not been touched upon: There is much left to do with regard to sound changes (re-analysis, metanalysis, ‘contamination’, associative sound changes like Voigt’s “Reimworbildung”), word formation (neologisms, back-formations, etc.), borrowing (patterns of appropriation, motivation for borrowing, inner-Semitic borrowing), the relation between sound and meaning (onomatopoeia, mimophony, phonaesthesia, expressive formations) as against the Saussurian arbitrariness of such a relation, and the sketching of individual word histories, and so on. Nevertheless, I still hope that this little collection of essays will serve the interested reader by contributing to a due survey of the field, mirroring the state of affairs in the study of the etymology of Arabic and its theoretical and methodological challenges, but also its vast chances and opportunities, and with all that hopefully stimulating further research, and inviting to collaborate.

Oslo, December 2017

10 Cf., however, in this context, my little “etymological rhapsody” on “Arabs, Hebrews and Europe,” mentioned in fn. 5, above.
References


CORRADO, Monica (ed.) → STEPHAN, Johannes


Introduction


WOLD = Martin HASPELMATH & Uri TADMOR (eds.) 2009.

ZEMMIN, Florian (ed.) → STEPHAN, Johannes

© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS) University of Oslo / Norway  ► stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ◄
On Some Arabic Roots and Their Etymological Relevance

ZEUS WELLNHOFER (Berlin)

Abstract

One of the features of Arabic is the distinction between the pharyngeals ʕ / ḥ and the velar/uvular fricatives ḡ / ḫ. The present article will focus on a number of Arabic roots containing one of these four consonants. Such a comparison may contribute to further investigations concerning the following two objectives: First of all, to consider the possibility of loanwords in early Arabic, or Semitic, that might explain the existence of two different roots with similar meaning. And, secondly, to take into account the possibility of semantic interference between different roots. Moreover, the question of semantic interference and inner-Semitic loans deserves some attention due to its relevance for etymological considerations.

Key words: Etymology, semantic interference, loanwords, Arabic, Gəʿez, Hebrew, Syriac

A main objective of the present article is to study the opposition between pharyngeals and velar/uvular fricatives in Arabic. This includes sketching a—preliminary, and certainly extensible—list of minimal pairs that show this opposition, as well as proposing some new etymological relations. The latter are, in general, in accordance with the regular correspondences and might not represent loanwords. Nevertheless, loanwords and semantic interference between different roots will be taken into consideration. In all this, however, the following two restrictions have to be acknowledged:

– Since Arabic has the largest attested lexicon of all Semitic languages, it has been used to interpret roots of uncertain meaning in several ancient Semitic languages, like, e.g., Ugaritic and Sabaic. This is especially relevant in those cases where the languages do not have a manuscript tradition and research has to rely on a comparatively small text corpus.¹
– It might be tempting to include a discussion of minimal pairs of voiced and unvoiced sounds. This, however, deserves a treatment in its own right. Before any such inclusion, a primary assessment of such phenomena like voicing, devoicing, assimilation and dissimilation may be needed in general.

¹ Cf., e.g., RENFROE 1992. It is self-evident that whenever the interpretation of a word in such a language is based exclusively on the Arabic lexicon a comparison with the Arabic lexicon makes little sense and gives no additional evidence whatsoever for a certain interpretation.
The distinctive phonemes

The inner-Semitic correspondences show the clearest sound changes with the pharyngeals, the velar fricatives, the laterals and the interdentals, which are given in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>pharyngeals</th>
<th>velar fricatives</th>
<th>laterals</th>
<th>interdentals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab.</td>
<td>ⱱ</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ǧ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gəʕaz</td>
<td>ⱱ</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aram.</td>
<td>ⱱ</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ʃ (q)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebr.</td>
<td>ⱱ</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>ū</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akk.</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>ū</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, the correspondences of Arabic s, i.e., s¹ (š) and s³ (s), the spirantization of pl/ṯk and bidṯg in Aramaic and Hebrew and the sound change of p to f in Arabic and South Semitic might make a difference in loanwords. The following text will treat some pairs of Arabic roots with an inner-Arabic opposition between pharyngeals and velar fricatives, taking into account their cognates in other Semitic languages.

The Arabic roots

Several Arabic roots containing either pharyngeals or velar/uvular fricatives are presented below. The roots are arranged according to the Arabic alphabet. Arabic roots that differ only in one of these consonants will be listed together and not separated.

(1) √ḥdr: Arab. ḥadara “to swell, to fatten; to incline, to descend”, Jib. ḥədər “to turn, to look aside”, Hebr. ḥādar “to enter, to penetrate”, Ugar. ḥdr “(funeral) chamber”, cf. Arab. manzil “house, station” from Arab. nazala “to descend”.

2 One might think also of the similarity between South Semitic rbh, Arab. ribh “profit”, and Northwest Semitic rwḥ, Hebr. rewḥ “profit”.
4 JOHNSTONE 1981: 103.
\( \text{\textbf{\textit{ḥdr}:}} \) Arab. ḥidrun “curtain, shelter”, ḥadira “to be numb, asleep; to paralyze”, ḥadara “to conceal; to stay (in a place)”; cf. Goşz ḥadārā “to spend the night”.\(^7\) Sab. ḥdr “(funeral) chamber”.\(^2\) Jib. ḥxor “to put up a sunshade”.\(^10\) The meaning “(funeral) chamber” could have been—in either case—a loanword that had been interpreted as being from the corresponding other root, i.e., a hypothetical loanword Arab. ḥidrun “funeral room” might have been associated with something like “shelter”, “restricted place” or “place of sleep” and a hypothetical loanword Arab. ḥidrun “funeral room” might have been associated with something like “place to descend, station, cave”. Moreover, the Arabic meaning “to conceal” might be influenced by Aramaic ḥṣdar “to surround”, which is related to Hebr. ḫāzar “to return”.

\((2)\) \( \text{\textbf{\textit{ḥsr}:}} \) Arab. ḥasira “to be laid bare, to lay bare, to be in distress”,\(^11\) Sab. ḥsr “to be in distress”,\(^2\) Goşz ḥasra / ḥasra “to be disgraced”, cf. also Akkad. eseru “to press for payment due”.\(^13\)

\( \text{\textbf{\textit{ḥsr}:}} \) Arab. ḥasira “to suffer loss”,\(^14\) Goşz ḥasra “to be wasted, to be reduced”,\(^15\) Jib. ḫxor “to lose; to pay a bride-price”,\(^16\) Hebr. ḫāser “to diminish, to lack”,\(^17\) Syr. ḥsar “to be wanting; to lose”,\(^18\) Ugar. ḥsr “to be missing”,\(^15\) Akkad. ḥēsēru / ḥasāru “to chip”.\(^19\) Arab. ḥasira “to be in distress” could be compared to Goşz ḥasra “to be disgraced”. It is not improbable that there were two roots in Goşz. It cannot be excluded that ḥas‘ira “to be in distress” may be a very old loan word going back to ḥas‘ira “to loose, to chip”.


\(^13\) Cad 1958, IV: 332; von Soden 1965, I: 249f. The latter could be associated with and related to Arab. ḥusār “to be hard, difficult; to be in difficulty”.


(3) \( \sqrt{\text{dhr}} \): Arab. \( dāhara \) “to push (away), to defeat”\(^2\), a synonym to \( \text{ʔabʕada}, \text{ʔahhara} \) “to drive away” and to \( saḥaqa \) “to crush out”. Gəʕəz \( dāhara \) “to divorce, to send away”. Jib. \( dāhr \) “to find, to befall”, \( edhēr \) “to lean on”\(^2\), cf. also Gəʕəz \( dāhrā \) “after, behind”\(^2\).

\( \sqrt{\text{dhr}} \): Arab. \( dāhara \) “to become small, base, to shrivel up (?)”. The root is contrasted to Arab. \( fāhara \) “to get big, to take pride”. The root is probably related to Syr. \( ḏhrā \) “hardness”, \( ḥūhar \) “to make hard”. The root might be related to Gəʕəz \( dāhara \) “to marry off, to sanction, to allow”, since Arab. \( dāḥirun \) means “being small” and probably “lacking pride”.

Gəʕəz \( ḏhrā \) “after” is usually derived from Sem. \( ḥr \) “behind”, but the similarity to Arab. \( ḥabʕada \) and \( saḥaqa \) and the Jib. meaning “to lean on” suggests that Gəʕəz \( dehra \) “to follow behind” could have been \( dhr \), and was later linked to \( ḥr \). On the other hand, one could argue for a semantic relation between \( dhrr \) “small, hard” and \( dhfr \) “far”, since something that is left more and more behind is getting small and little or even scarce, cf. also Hebr. \( l-\text{ṭimm rḥqot} \), lit. “at distant times”, i.e. “at rare intervals, seldom”. In this case, one might ask, whether \( dāhara \) “to push away” could be an old loanword in Arabic.

(4) \( \sqrt{\text{dwm}} \): Arab. \( dāʕama \) “to strengthen, to support, to assist”. It is not clear, whether this root is somehow related to Jib. \( dāʕam \) “to crash into”. One might think of something like “to throw in” and “to be thrown in”.

---


25 Cf e.g. the Arab. saying \( al-ʔawwala ḍhīrūn wa-l-ʔāḥara ḍhīrūn \) “the first one is getting big (or taking pride), and the other one small,” az-ZA‘ĪDĪ 1972, XI: 278.


28 Cf. LESLAU 1991: 129. The derivation from \( ḥfr \) or \( ḫf \) alone lacks a good explanation of the \( d \) in \( ḏhrā \), as long as there are not more examples in support of a sound correspondence \( t?/t \) to \( d \) in Gəʕəz.


\( \sqrt{\text{dgm}} \): Arab. \( dağama \) “to befall, afflict sb. (heat, frost), to be heavy (rain), to hit and break the nose, to cover up, conceal (vessel)”, \( dağima \) “to get a black nose, afflict sb. (heat, frost)”.\(^{31}\) Magh.-Arab. \( dğom \) “to bruise”.\(^{32}\)

Considering the meaning of both roots, interference is possible. Jib. \( daʕam \) “to crash into” and Arab. \( dağama \) “to befall” are quite close in meaning. In contrast to \( daʕama \), Arab. \( dağima \) is to be seen in the context that several derivations of this root have somehow to do with the nose, cf. Arab. \( ḏaḏgam \) “having a black snout (about a wolf who is suspected to have eaten something forbidden to him), having darkened or reddened nose tip and chin, having a dark face”. \( ḏaḏgama \) “to insert the bit or noseband of the birdle into the mouth of a horse”, \( daḏm \) “to break the nose to the inside”.\(^{33}\) The root \( dğm \) has, therefore, a clear connotation that distinguishes it synchronically from Jib. \( daʕam \) “to crash into”. Nevertheless, Jib. \( daʕam \) could be related to Arab. \( daʕama \) “to support”. Thus, I would not exclude that one of the two forms may be an old loanword.

(5) \( \sqrt{\text{dmm}} \): Arab. \( ṣadima \) “to lack, to lose, not to have, to be destitute”\(^{34}\), Ugar. \( ʿdm \) “loss, misery, desolation (?)”.\(^{35}\) In a technical usage Arab. \( ṣadamun \) can mean “debit” and is an antonym to Arab. \( milkīyatun \) “credit”, cf. also Syr. ḥṣār “to be wanting” and Ugar. ḥṣr “debit”.\(^{36}\) Anything that is still on the agenda and is not acquitted is still missing. Gašša \( ṣaddāmā \) “to designate, to determine, to convok[e]” is probably related.\(^{37}\) cf. Gašša faqada “to want” as opposed to Arab. faqada “to lose” and Amh. \( ḡ̣ḍḍay \) “affair, matter, wanting” as compared to Amh. \( ḡ̣ḍḍilātā \) “to be missing, to lack”.

\( \sqrt{\text{dgm}} \): Alg.-Arab. \( ḡudamun \) “salicornia fruticosa”.\(^{38}\) The word is not well attested and could be regional, cf. also Arab. \( ḡudamun / ḡuddāmūn \) “arthrocnemum macrostachyum” and \( ḡudabun \) “serophularia”. Arab. \( ḡudamun / ḡuddāmūn \) is described as a sort of \( ḡamāṭun \), which is a generic term for several ‘desert’ trees like, e.g., saxaul.\(^{39}\)


\(^{32}\) Baussier 1958: 338.

\(^{33}\) Cf. Lane 1868, III: 886f.; Ibn Manẓūr 1990, XII: 202f.; az-Zaḥbī 2000, XXXII: 160ff.; Našwān al-Ḥimyārī 1999, IV: 2108ff. This might be taken as an initial argument for some relation between Arab. \( dğm \) and Arab. \( ḥṃm \) “snout”.


\(^{35}\) Cf. Del Olmo Lete 2003, I: 150; Del Olmo Lete 2015, I: 146.


\(^{37}\) Leslau 1991: 56; Dimmell 1865: col. 1009f.

\(^{38}\) Dozy 1881, II: 202.

The Ugaritic meaning “loss, misery” shows, how similar Arab. ḥasira “to lose” and Arab. ḥasira “to be in distress” are actually. A relation between Arab. ḡudamun “lack, debit” and Gašaz ṣaddīmā “to designate, determine” seems obvious. Nevertheless, it escaped the notice of Leslau in his etymological dictionary of Gašaz.40 There is no obvious semantic similarity between the root ūdm and Arab. ǧudamun. Arab. ǧudamun could be, however, from the root ǧgm, considering that the source that is quoted by Dozy refers to plant names in Algeria and that the dentals and the interdentals are usually not distinguished in the Arabic dialects of that area. The latter could mean that ḡudamun is a dialect form of Arab. ḡadāmūn.

(6) ʕḏḥ / ʕḏw: Arab. ʕiḍāhun “(thorn) trees”,41 ʕiḍatun “(thorn) tree”.42 cf. Hebr. ʕēṣ “tree”,43 Ugar. ʕē “tree, timber, beam, staff”,44 Gašaz ʕaṣi “tree”,45 Akk. isu “tree, timber lumber, wood, wooded area”,46 Cf. also Arab. ʕāṣan “stick”, which is not far from ʕēṣ “(piece of) wood, stick”,47 and ʕiḍatun / ʕuḍwun “part, piece”.48

ʕġḏw: Arab. ǧadān “saxaul tree” or similar to saxaul, maybe also “Calligonum comosum L.”Her”,49 is designated by the Arabic lexicographers as the prevalent tree in the Najd50 and is often described as a sort of tamarisk.51 That both roots, i.e., ʕḏḥ and ʕḏw, might be related has already been suggested adducing for the etymology of Hebr. ʕēṣ both Arab. ʕiḍatun and Arab. ḡadān as “tree”.52 The Gašaz

40 LESLAU 1991: 56.
47 Cf. e.g. CLINES 2007, VI: 512.
49 HESS 1917: 104ff.
52 See KOEHLER 1967, I: 817.
plural ḡašā suggests the plural form fišāl from the Singular fišl of a root tertiae infirmae. Nöldeke links ṣidāhun “(thorn) tree” to ṣiddun ẓuddun “thorn bush”, which leads to a refutation of a relation of ṣiddun “thorn bush” to Arab. ṣada “to bite”. Nevertheless Arab. ẓuddun might indeed be at first the “biting” and then used secondarily for “pricking (bush)”. When ṣiddun “pricking bush” was contrasted with ṣidāhun “trees” the obvious difference was that the latter is bigger and the most obvious common ground that both terms include thorn trees. The acceptance or rejection of the link to ṣiddun “pricking bush” also explains why the definition “thorn tree” for ṣidāhun instead of just “tree” was obviously not everywhere accepted.

(7) ṣwašša: Arab. wašša “to spin; to turn; to let rise”, Yem.-Arab. wašš “regrowth”, Gəʕəz ḡawsa “to answer”.

ṣwaša: Arab. waša “to splatter”. Arb. wašaša has, basically, two meanings: “to turn” and “to rise”. Some etymological relation between the them cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, this relation is not certain in any way and both meanings could just as well come from different roots. A relation to Arab. waša “to splatter” is not evident either. The relation between Arab. wašaša and Gəʕəz ḡawsa has not been proposed so far, although it is very probable, since a semantic relation between “to turn” and “to reply” is quite frequent, cf., e.g., Hebr. ḏiš “to return” or Tigr. māläss “to reply”.

Dillmann compares Gəʕəz ḡawsa / ḡawsa “to speak; to reply” with Arab. waša and waswaša / wašwaša “to whisper, to murmur”. The first, Arab. waša, is rather “to embellish; to augment; to lie”. The derivation from Arab. waša suggests that the glottal stop is lost in Arabic, which is not without precedence but, in general, uncommon in verbal roots. Thus, the derivation from ṣwašša “to turn” seems more plausible and less problematic.

55 Cf. Nöldeke 1910: 145; Ibn Manzūr, XIII: 516; Wa-qilla ṣiẓūmu š-saḡarī kalā-hā ṣidāhun, and ibid.: 517; Qilla [Ibn Barī ?:] Wa-l-ṣ-Arab tusammī kulla šaḥrātun ẓazimatin wa-kulla šayʔin ẓāza l-buqūla l-ṣidāhun ... wa-qilla l-ṣidāhun kallu šaḥrātun ẓazimatin l-buqūla kāna l-ḥā ẓawwan ḥaw lam yakan.
62 Cf., e.g., the Arab. personal pronouns ḥiwa and hiya.

Zeus Wellhofer
Summary

The objective of the present article was to treat several Arabic roots and their etymological relevance. Since oppositions between pharyngeals and the velar/uvular fricatives are also relevant for comparative Semitic studies, the article focuses on roots that differ in these consonants. The issues that are addressed by the present study are various. Some possibilities like the question whether Arab. ǧaḍan “saxaul tree” is to be linked to Hebr. ʕes “tree” are taken up. A small number of etymological relations are newly proposed as with Arab. ʕadima “to lack”. And in some cases, the difficulty of semantic interference has been addressed, as with the contrasting of Arab ǧiddun “pricking bush” and Arab. ǧiddahun “(thorn) tree” or with Arab. ḫaddar “to conceal” and Syr. ḫdar “to surround”.

Since Arabic is one of the languages that distinguishes the pharyngeals and since it has a large text corpus attesting many roots, further research on Arabic etymologies might help to get a better understanding of the language history of Arabic and its relation to other Semitic languages. Moreover, the comparisons also have some relevance for Gəʕəz. Thus, Gəʕəz ḫasra “to be disgraced” and Gəʕəz ḫasra “to be wasted” is usually considered to be only one root, because ḫasra can occur as a mistake for ḥasra. However, since ḥsr is attested in Arabic and Sabaic with a comparable difference in meaning, one might argue for two roots in Gəʕəz.

Furthermore, one can assume that Arabic has a number of inner-Semitic borrowings, such as from Aramaic, South Semitic and Akkadian, at a very early stage. Due to the specific sound correspondences and phonetic peculiarities of the respective languages, one can expect certain rules or correspondences in these loanwords. Moreover, assuming that there was some kind of bilingualism, semantic interference is not improbable. Another research topic is the inner-Arabic semantic development.

With the present article the author hopes to have contributed to a small number of these Arabic and Semitic etymologies and the wider questions that are involved in these comparisons, i.e., the question of loanwords and semantic interference, but also the question of inner-Arabic semantic development. The presented preliminary list of roots is to be complemented and amended in further articles.

Bibliography

加强对安的专著和其对语言学的贡献


63 Cf. KOEHLER 1967, I: 817f.


65 An example would be the proposed theory that the primary meaning of Arab. ʕiddah is rather “tree” than “thorn tree”, but that the term was narrowed down to the second meaning, because it was put by the lexicographers in direct opposition to ʕidd “pricking bush”.

Page | 329

17 (2017): 322-331
Zeus Welinhofer


On some Arabic roots and their etymological relevance


© Zeus Wellnhofer, Freie Universität, Berlin / Germany

zeusw@zedat.fu-berlin.de
The *ism* in the Arabic Grammatical Tradition: Reflections on Its Origin and Meanings

**SIMONA OLIVIERI** (University of Helsinki)

**Abstract**
This article aims to present an overall reconstruction of the debate on the definition and etymology of Arabic *ism* ('noun', 'substantive'), by discussing and comparing texts from the Arabic linguistic tradition. The first part deals with the definition of the grammatical element and its functions, while the second is fully dedicated to the examination of the etymological issues, focusing on the two assumed roots of derivation for *ism* (namely *s*-m-*w* and *w*-s-*m*). The arguments are presented through the collation of the opinions of the relevant Arabic grammarians, examining both the wider debate between the early grammatical schools of Baṣra and Kūfa (2nd/8th–3rd/9th centuries), and the reports of the arguments as described by later scholars.

**Key words:** Arabic linguistic tradition, Arabic grammar, Arab grammarians, Root, Philosophy of language

1. The parts of speech

It is common agreement, within the Arabic linguistic tradition, that language consists of three parts of speech (*ʾaqsām al-kalām*), namely nouns, verbs, and particles. The delineation of the tripartite vision is usually ascribed to Sībawayhi (d. 180/796) who opens the *Kitāb* by defining the *partes orationis*: “words are noun, verb, and particle.”

Each category presents differences in status and characteristics, as pointed out also by later grammarians, with distinctions mainly based on the role played within an utterance. Among the three, the noun (*ism*, pl. *ʾasmāʾ*) meets those criteria that make it a superior category, being an element “able to both operate as and receive a predicate” (*mā yuḫbaru biḥī wa-yuḫbaru ʿanhu*) as in ‘Muḥammad is our Prophet.’ In this example, nouns function as both predicate and predicator, acting as *muṭādaʾ* and ḥabar in the noun clause.

Conversely, verbs (*faʿl*, pl. *ʿafāl*) and particles (*ḥarf*, pl. *ḥurūf*) do not share the same features: the verb “can be used as a predicate but cannot receive one” (*mā yuḥbaru biḥī wa-lā yuḥbaru ʿanhu*), while the particles “cannot be predicates nor receive a predicate” (*mā lā yuḥbaru biḥī wa-lā yuḥbaru ʿanhu*).

In addition to this, major distinctions rely on the fact that nouns—as well as verbs—have a well-defined morphology and range of meanings, while particles are meaningful words in themselves but have no strict forms.

---
1 *faʿl*-kalim *ism wa-faʿl wa-ḥarf, Kitāb*, i: 1.1
2 This also relates to the difficult interpretation of Sībawayhi’s definition of the ḥarf, described as what “comes for a meaning that is neither noun nor verb” (*gāʾa li-maʿna ʾan laysa bi-sm wa-lā faʿl*, *Kitāb*, i: 80).
1.1 Definition

Sibawayhi does not provide clear definitions of the *ism* in the *Kitāb*, but—relying on a common linguistic practice—reduces his explanations to a *tamṯīl*, providing few examples of what may be considered a ‘noun’, as for instance ‘man’, ‘horse’, and ‘wall’ (*faʾl-ism raḡul wa-faras wa-haʾīf*).

This represents the starting point from which grammarians of later periods drew inspiration to formulate their own definitions, examining the *ism* according to its intrinsic features and grammatical peculiarities.

The formulation of linguistic theories is framed within the conventional grammarians debate as part of the *ʾiǧmāʿ* (‘consensus’) tradition. Being a fundamental element of the whole Arabic culture and usually widely exercised in juridical discussions,⁵ the *ʾiǧmāʿ* plays a key role also in grammatical disputes,⁶ where unanimity is the main criterion to state the correctness of an argument. Ibn Ḥinnī (d. 392/1002) in the Ḥaṣāʾīṣ⁷—and with regard to a strictly linguistic framework—calls it *ʾiǧmāʿ* ‘ahl al-baladayn’ and by doing so he circumscribes the practice to the agreement among the Baṣran and the Kūfan grammarians.

However, as in other fields, the explicit agreement is not the only possibility to determine a concurrence of ideas, which may also be reached with either an implicit agreement or lack of explicit disagreement.⁹ This might be the case of the tripartite division of the parts of speech that has never been challenged after being stated in the first place. As a matter of fact, the lack of a clear definition in the *Kitāb* left room to a profound discussion on the subject, so that grammarians after Sibawayhi could define the nature of the category and focus on providing further details to delineate the characteristics of the noun.

2. What is a ‘noun’?

Lane’s Lexicon describes the *ism* as:

---

1.1. The impossibility to clearly define what the grammarian meant leaves room for further and opposite interpretations. Hence, some later grammarians interpreted the element as something that—not having a meaning of its own—needs to be in combination with either a verb or a noun, while others acknowledged an inherent meaning.

3 Lit. ‘quotation of examples’, ‘representation’.

4 *Kitāb*, i: 1.1.

5 For an extensive discussion on the topic, see KAMALI 2009.

6 The close relationship between the juridical and the linguistic sciences has been extensively investigated, as by Carter who states: “The two sciences are united by a common purpose, to control linguistic and general behaviour respectively, and they share a common methodology, namely the inductive derivation of rules from a linguistic corpus and the deductive application of these universal rules to particular acts of the Muslim.” CARTER 2007: 25.

7 The chapter *bāb al-qawl alaʾ iṯmāʾ ʿahl al-ʿarabīyya matā yakūn ḥuǧja* is fully dedicated to this topic. (Cf. al-Ḥaṣāʾīṣ, i: 189-193).

8 al-Ḥaṣāʾīṣ, i: 189.

9 SULEMAN 1999: 15-16.
The name of a thing; i.e. a sign [such as maybe uttered or written] conveying knowledge of a thing […] and a word applied to denote a substance or an accident or attribute, for the purpose of distinction […] or a substantive in the proper sense of this term, i.e. a real substantive; and a substance in a tropical sense of this term, i.e. an ideal substantive […] is that which denotes a meaning in itself unconnected with any of the three times [past and present and future]: the pl. is أسماء [a pl. of pauc.] and أسمائات the latter said by Lḥ to be a pl. of اسم but it is rather a pl. of أسماء, for otherwise there is no way of accounting for it […]\(^\text{10}\).

This definition mostly relies on those provided by Arabic grammarians,\(^\text{11}\) for whom a noun is a word\(^\text{12}\) which expresses a meaning but ‘is neither connected with a time’ (gayr muqtarin bi-zamān) nor is ‘time part of it’ (wa-laysa az-zamān ḡuz’an minhā). Besides, it may be defined as a word indicating something ‘perceptible’ (ṣayr maḥṣūs) or ‘non-perceptible’ (gayr maḥṣūs) which is a means of rising into notice the thing denoted thereby, yet never referring to time. The discussion on what a ‘noun’ should be is rather extensive,\(^\text{13}\) and grammarians themselves record the proposition of a quantity of different positions and statements.\(^\text{14}\)

Part of the discussion is related to the additional features of the noun, which may:\(^\text{15}\)

1. exhibit the genitive case;
2. have the nunation;
3. be used as a vocative;
4. be marked as either defined or undefined;
5. be used as the subject of a sentence (mubtada’);
6. have a predicate (musnad ‘ilayhi).

Despite the different propositions, grammarians generally agree on the fundamentals of the category. Some of them add additional features or sub-categories, as al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/10 LANE 1863, iv: 1435).

\(^{10}\) LANE 1863, iv: 1435.

\(^{11}\) WEHR’s definition lists several possible types of nouns, providing a full range of grammatical information. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this research it is of less interest, since it does not provide information on the debate on etymology.

\(^{12}\) ‘Word’ is here meant as the translation of Arabic kalima, but also of ḡarţ, ‘sound’, ‘expression’. For an extensive discussion on the rendering of word, see LEVIN 1986 and LANCIONI & BETTINI 2011.

\(^{13}\) For more arguments on this, see al-DAHDAH 1992 and ḤASAN 2004.

\(^{14}\) ḤASAN 2004: 26. Also al-ANBĀRĪ (d. 577/1181) acknowledges the proposition of circa 70 definitions. Finally, the definition that is usually considered as most general among those provided by the Arabic grammarians is the one declared by al-ṢIRĀJ (d. 368/978): “Everything that is the expression of what indicates a meaning not referring to a specific temporality, both past and other, is a noun” (kul ʾayr dal-la ḡafzūḥā ’alā mu’nān gayr muqtarin bi-zamān muḥaṣṣal min mudīyy ʾaw gayrīhī fa-huwa ism). Šarḥ, i: 53.

\(^{15}\) Several works deal with the presentation of the inherent features of the ism. For a general but accurate presentation, see especially EALL, ii: 424–29 by BERNARDS and EF, iv: 179-182 by FLEISCH, both s.v. “Ism”.
The ism in the Arabic grammatical tradition

1505) who mentions a fourth category ḥālīfa, and al-Farābī (d. 339/950), who proposes the category ṣawālīf among others.

As a consequence of the stigmatization of the approach, grammarians were forced to frame several elements within a rather strict scheme and find a way to make their subdivisions fit the rules set for the tripartition.

Thus, elements differing from each other have been classified under the label ‘noun’, along with a set of sub-categories to indicate less obvious cases. The elements acknowledged as fully matching the definition of ism are: the common noun (ism al-ḡīn), the proper noun (ism al-ʿalām), the concrete noun (ism al-ʿayn), the abstract noun (ism al-maʿnā), and the active and passive participles (ism al-fāʿīl and ism al-maṣʿūl). Likewise, are associated to the same category the adjectives (ṣifā), the infinitives (masdar), the nouns referring to space and time (ism al-zamān wa l-makān), the pronouns (mawṣūm), and the numerals (ism al-ʿadād).

Summaries of the debate on what may or may not be a noun are available in works such as Ibn Fāris’ (d. 395/1004) al-Ṣāhibī.

As for the noun, Sībawayhi says: “The noun is for instance man and horse [...] and Abū l-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Zayd al-Mubarrad states that, according to Sībawayhi’s view, “The noun is what can be a subject,” [...] and al-Kisāʾi states: “The noun is what an attribute can be referred to;” al-Farrāʾ says: “The noun is what can exhibit a tanwīn, be in construct state or annexed to the definite article;” al-ʿĀhfaṣ says: “You know that you are dealing with a noun when a verb or an attribute can be referred to it, as for instance in zayd qāma (Zayd stood) or in zayd qāʾim (Zayd is standing), when it can be in the dual form or take the plural, as al-zaydānī (the two Zayds) and al-zaydūna (the Zayds), and when it exhibits a trip-totic inflection.” (faʿ-annā l-ism fa-qāla Sībawayhi: “al-ism naḥw raqul wa-faras” [...] Abū l-ʿAbbās Muḥammad bīn Zayd al-Mubarrad yaqūlu maḏhab Sībawayhi anna “al-ism mā ẓālaḥaʾan yakūna fāʾilan” [...] wa-qāla al-Kisāʾ: “al-ism mā waṣīfa” [...] wa-kāna al-Farrāʾ yaqūlu: “al-ism mā ʿḥtamala al-tanwīn aw al-ʿidāfaʾw al-ʿalīf wa l-ʿalām” [...] wa-kāna al-ʿĀhfaṣ yaqūlu: “’īḏā waqāḍaṭa šayʾan yahṣunu lahu ”l-fīl wa š-ṣīfa nahwa zayd qāma wa-zayd qāʾim ṭūmma waqāḍatāhu yuṭnā wa-yuḏma nahwa qawlik al-zaydān wa l-zaydūn ṭūmma waqāḍatā annahu yamānī min-ā l-tаṣrīf fa l-šam annahu ism”).

Further information concerning the lexical category ḥālīfa can be inferred from the studies of Aḥmad Makkī al-ʿAnṣārī who investigates the role of al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) in the Arabic linguistic tradition as the leading figure of the grammatical school of Kūfa. The author states that al-Farrāʾ was the first who investigated and proposed a fourth lexical category between the noun and the verb. Hence, seems that the Kūfān grammarian anticipated the modern studies on the topic, proposing a four-category division of the parts of speech, and overcoming the tripartition proposed by Sībawayhi. (Cf. al-ʿAnṣārī 1964)

16 Zimmermann translates ṣawālīf (plural of ḥālīfa) with ‘substitute’, adding that it is used by al-Farābī as the equivalent of ‘pronoun’. (Cf. ZIMMERMAN 1981).

17 See also WEHR and COWAN 1994, s.v. ḥālīfa.

18 For some grammarians, the interrogatives such as kayfa ‘how’, ʿayna ‘where’, and so forth, are to be included, too. Same for the ʿasmāʾ al-ʿafīl ‘verbal nouns’, often labelled as nouns when meant as interjections or exclamation locations, other than onomatopoetic.

19 al-Ṣāhibī: 49.
Yet, oftentimes these reports are rather partial, as in the case of al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) who, in the al-Muqtaḍab, declares a longer version than the one reported above, and also partly different. After defining the noun as *ism mutamakkin*, the grammarian proceeds by stating that:

A noun is everything that can be preceded by a preposition, and if it is not possible then it is not a noun. (kallū mā daḥala ‘alayhi ḥarf mīn ḥurūf al-ḡarr fa-huwa ism, wa-‘in-i ‘mtanā’a ḍālīka fa-laysa bi- ṣm)23

Another significant definition is provided by al-Zaḡḡāq (d. 311/923) and quoted by Ibn Fāris:

[The noun is] an articulated and comprehensible sound that expresses a meaning but has no implications of time and space (ṣawt muqatṭa’ maḫūm dāll’ alā mā’naŋ ḍayr dāll’ alā zamān wa-lā makān).26

Here the argument evolves from logic and concludes with a definition of the noun clearly influenced by the Greek tradition. The importance of his contribution lies in the different approach to the topic, more oriented towards the concept of the meaning of the noun.

3. *Ism*: the discussion on etymology

3.1 The preliminary debate

Being the definition of the category controversial also in the eyes of the Arabic grammarians themselves, semantics and etymology contribute to defining what *ism* is meant for.

Excerpts of the arguments and a summary of the theoretical development are reported in several grammatical works, such as al-Bāqillānī’s (d. 403/1013), al-ʿUkbarī’s (d. 616/1219) and al-Anbārī’s. The latter presents the issue on the etymology of *ism* in two major works, *ʾAsrār al-ʿArabiyya* and the *Kitāb al-ʾInsāf*.27

---

22 According to the Kitāb, the category of the “mutamakkin” nouns refers to those elements that present peculiar features, may occur in various syntactic constrictions or have syntactic functions themselves, and may be inflected both in the determinate and in undetermined state. (Kitāb, ii:33; ii:40)

23 al-Muqtaḍab, i: 141.
24 Lit. “it indicates”.
25 Lit. “it does not indicate”.
26 al-Ṣāḥīfī: 51.
27 For an extensive and accurate study of the Greek influence on Arabic linguistic thinking, see Versteegh 1977.
28 As already examined by Fleisch, it is clearly recognizable here the influence of Greek logic in the way the definition is articulated. The effects of the influence are so massive that we can also state that there is an almost sharp division between grammarians pre- and post al-Zaḡḡāq. Cf. Fleisch, s.v. “Ism”, *EF*, iv: 181-82.
29 ḫalafa ‘n-nāṣ ṣī ‘l-ʾism wa-mimmā ṣītiqūquḥū, “People disagree on the *ism* and from what it is derived.” al-Bāqillānī 1957: 255.
30 *ʿAsrār*, 3-17.
The ism in the Arabic grammatical tradition

The debate is presented through the examination of two hypothesized roots, namely s-

m-w and w-s-m, whose inherent meanings should be intended as practical explanations of the term and refer to the function attributed by the Arabic grammarians to the ism:

The Kūfan grammarians argue that the ism derives from wasm, which indicates the ‘mark’, while the Baṣran grammarians argue that it derives from simuww, which indicates the ‘elevation’ (ḍahaba ‘l-kāfyyūn ‘ilā ‘anna ‘l-ism muštaqq min-a ‘l-wasm wa-huwa ‘l-’alāma wa-ḥahaba ‘l-basriyyūn ‘ilā ‘annahū muštaqq min-a ‘l-simuww wa-huwa ‘l-‘alaww). According to these propositions, simuww—meaning ‘elevation’, ‘height’—is coincident with the function of a ism identified with the signifier, whose role is to stay on a higher level than the signified below (al-musammayūt ṭaḥtahā). Conversely, Kūfan grammarians analyze the ism as derived from wasm (used as a synonym of ‘alāma, ‘mark’), and sima ‘sign’.

The Kūfan grammatical school presents a reasoning related to the markedness theory:

[ism] derives from wasm because in the language [of the Arabs] it indicates the mark, and a noun is a definition mark distinct from the symbol that identifies it [...]. For this reason, we assert that ism derives from wasm, and the same has been stated by Ṭa’lāb who argues that the noun indicates the sign that has been established for

---

31 ‘Insāf, 1-6.
32 The passages quoted below shall show that Arabic grammarians do not refer to roots when discussing the process of derivation (ištīqāq), but rather refer to words. As described by Larcher: “Dériver, ce n’est donc pas tirer un mot d’une racine, mais un mot d’un autre. Pour autant, les grammariens arabs n’ignorent ni la racine ni la forme (ou schème). Si la forme est appelée ici d’un mot (ṣīqa) qui en est un correspondant exact, il en va tout autrement de la racine, appelée ici tarkīb, c’est-à-dire «combinaison [de consonnes]». […] Enfin, troisième et dernière différence: tout en dérivant d’une base concrète, les grammariens n’ignorent pas, on l’a vu, le concept de racine, ni celui, corollaire, de forme. Par suite, la racine n’étant pas première, elle n’a pas de sens en elle-même, mais seulement comme trace de la base dans le dérivé.” LARCHER 2008: 87, 90.
33 The Lisān al-ʿArab also registers the variant as-sumuww. Cf. Lisān al-ʿArab, xix: 121-128., s.v. samā (root s-m-w).
34 He is not mentioned in the text, but the latter proposition seems to be shared also by al-Zā ā Ǧ ā ā. (Cf. al-Ṣāḥibī: 57).
35 ‘Insāf, 1.
36 Also ‘mark’, ‘stigma’.
37 Mark is used here to recall the markedness theory, where the marks are grammatical elements (gender, number and case) and not lexical. According to this theory, the noun is not a mark. But, for the purpose of the translation, the word has been adopted under a generic—and not technical PROFILE.
38 The kalām al-ʿarab is usually one of the main sources for grammatical observations. The reference is to the Arabic variety spoken by the Bedouins of the Arabic peninsula. The Arabs, whose unconscious knowledge of the language prescription is a manifest concept for every grammarian, are presented by early scholars as having an innate wisdom (ḥikma) which makes them choose the correct forms without being really aware of the grammatical reasons.
39 ṭāfa, from wāḍ, indicating the creation of a name: “The phrase wāḍ al-bayja which may be translated as the foundation of language, represents a concept that is central to classical Muslim scholarly thinking.
what conveys a meaning\(^{40}\) ('ammā 'l-kāfīyyūn fa-'htaggā bi-'an qālū 'innamā qulnā 'innahū muštaqq min-a 'l-wasm li-'ānna 'l-wasm fī 'l-luġa huwa 'l-'alāma wa' l-ism wasm 'alā ' l-musammā wa-'alāma lahū yu'rāf bihā [...] fa-li-hādū qulnā 'innahū muštaqq min-a 'l-wasm wa-li-ğallīka qalā 'Abū 'l-'Abbās 'Aḥmad bin Yahyā Ṭa'lab al-ism sima tūda' ('alā šay' yu'rāf bihā).\(^{21}\)

To prove the inherent meaning of 'height', 'elevation', semantics comes to adduce evidence: sumuw is an attested result inferred from the verb samā, yasmū, sumuw, whose meaning is 'to be elevated':

The term derives from sumuw, because in the Arabic lexicon it indicates the elevation: when something is elevated you say samā, yasmū, sumuw. From this the sky has been called samā because it is in the height, and [likewise] the noun stands above the signified and shows what is below, as far as the meaning is concerned ('innamā qulnā 'innahū muštaqq min-a 's-sumuw li-'ānna 's-sumuw fī 'l-luğa huwa 'l-'ulūw yuqālu samā yasmū sumuw wan 'idā 'alā wa-minhu summiyat as-samā' samā' an li- 'ulūwihā wa' l-ism ya'ā alā ' l-musammā wa-yaḏullu 'alā mā tahtaḥī min-a ' l-ma'ānā').\(^{52}\)

Also, according to al-Mubarrad:

The noun refers to the nominatum below, but this argument is sufficient for the etymology, but it is not for the meaning. And since the noun is raised above the nominatum and stands above its meaning, this means that it is derived from sumuw and not from wasm (al-ism mā dalla' ' alā ' l-musammā taḥtahū, wa-hādū ' l-qavāl kāfīn fī 'l-luḡa lā fī 'l-taḥādīd fa-lammā samā' ' l-ism 'alā musammā' wa- 'alā alā mā tahtaḥī min ma'nāhu della 'alā 'annahū muštaqq min-a ' l-sumuw fī min-a ' l-wasm).\(^{53}\)

### 3.2 Grammatical observations on etymology

Despite the evident logic behind the reasoning, it is evident that the opposition between s-m-w and w-s-m is merely speculative and part of a rather theoretical discussion.

The grammatical interpretation posing in contrast the two elements may be or may not be acceptable as a reasoning,\(^{44}\) but for the etymology there are many proofs showing that the Kūfī interpretation is erroneous. Medieval Arabic grammarians pointed out the

---

\(^{40}\) This interpretation is also registered in the Lane: “A sign [such as may be uttered or written] conveying knowledge of a thing” – LANE 1863, iv: 1435.

\(^{41}\) 'Insāf: 1-2.

\(^{42}\) 'Insāf: 2.

\(^{43}\) 'Insāf: 2.

\(^{44}\) al-Anbārī himself agrees with the Kūfans on the strictly grammatical interpretation, although he does not agree on the etymology.
The ism in the Arabic grammatical tradition

uniqueness of the root through a grammar-oriented reasoning, as much as modern comparative studies do.\textsuperscript{45}

Bāṣrāns' confutatio Kūfan thesis is articulated in five passages,\textsuperscript{46} corresponding to the five modalities of mistake observed in their propositions. These arguments, four of which shall be examined in detail in the next paragraphs,\textsuperscript{47} conclude by demonstrating that despite the logic behind the Kūfans' grammatical reasoning, there is one only possible root ism may be ascribed to: s-m-w.\textsuperscript{48}

3.2.1 The form of the term

The first analysis reported in the Kitāb al-Insāf refers to the form of the term ism and its phonetic realization, which results from the drop of the weak radical in the noun formation.

The Kūfans state that the wāw occurring in the first position is dropped and replaced by a hamza\textsuperscript{49} which functions as a letter of compensation (ta'wīl). If this phenomenon were productive, then the initial hamza would be a systematic result whenever a weak radical

\textsuperscript{45}The concept of root is a key element shared all throughout Semitic, and, as pointed out by VOIGT: "All Semitic languages have a verbal form and a nominal form (except for functional words and particles), characteristically consisting of a triradical root and a vocalic pattern which may also require the addition of further consonants" (EALL iv: 173-74). For the case study presented in this paper, other Semitic languages further substantiate the correctness of the arguments in favor of the root s-m-w, for they prove that a root, either biliteral or with a weak radical occurring in final position [s(š)-m or s(š)-m-w/šy], is attested all throughout Semitic. Hence, given the range of meanings: (1) 'noun', 'name', 'substantive' for Arabic ism, and (2) 'sky', 'heaven(s)' for Arabic sama', their cognates in other Semitic languages are, for example: Akk. (1) šumu, (2) šamā; Mehri (1) ham, (2) haytem; Jibbali (1) šem, (2) šatum; Gś'ez (1) sim, (2) samāy; Old South Arabian (1) sm, (2) šmyn [Sabean], šmih [Minean]; Syriac (1) šmū, (2) šmā; Biblical Aramaic (1) šm, (2) šmyn; Biblical Hebrew (1) šem, (2) šmym. In addition to those mentioned above, in Mehri and Jibbali are attested also the forms šom and šīḥ, both clearly Arabisms, and in Soqotri is attested a corradical form ʾeṭen carrying the same meaning. – As for Hebrew, it is worth mentioning that the Hebrew and English Lexicon (BROWN, DRIVER, and BRIGGS 2010) reports an 'unknown' root for the lemma דֵּשֶׁם, and lists among the cognates (and therefore possible related roots) both "Ar. שֵׁמוֹ, אֶשֶׁם, אֵשֶׁם, בָּשֵׁם, הָישֶׁם name". – Finally, the Dictionary of Semitic Inscriptions reports also the following attestations: "šm Sing. + suff. 3 s.f. šmih 10/9 - subst. name. šmy Du. abs. šmym 7/17, 12/14(*2), šmyn 8/12, 11/12, 15/14, š[my]n 22/6; emph. šmy(*) 10/2, 17/11, 12; + suff. 3 s.m. šmyky 8/12, šmwny (šmwny") 16/14 – subst. Du. heavens" (HOFTZIUS et al. 1995: 1265).

\textsuperscript{46}The arguments presented hereafter—mainly based on morpho-phonological observations—are meant to recapitulate grammarians' opinions as presented in al-Anbārī's Kitāb al-Insāf (Insāf, 3-6). Similar—if not identical—arguments may be found in other works, too. One example is al-Bāqillānī who reports a more concise examination of the issue in the Kitāb al-Tamhid (al-BĀQILLĀNĪ 1957: 255-257).

\textsuperscript{47}The fifth wrong argument presented by al-Anbārī shall not be analyzed here in detail, since it mainly proposes different variants of the term as registered in local Arabic varieties. The text mentions few different realizations of the term: ism, usm, sim and sun (ism bi-kasr al-hamza, wa-usm bi-dammāh, wa-sim bi-kasr as-sīn, wa-sun bi-dammāh. Insāf: 6). So, for instance, usm would be registered as of the tribes Tamīm and Qurayš. Besides, al-Anbārī briefly reports further explanations for some of the variants, as for sun, shaped on a proposed historical form "sumāw" with a consequential shift of the wāw onto a 'alif because of the vocalization in fātha of the preceding letter.

\textsuperscript{48}The arguments presented in §3.3.1–3.3.4 are also briefly mentioned in LANE 1863, iv: 1435.

\textsuperscript{49}Clearly a hamza al-wasīf, but it is always referred to as hamza only by the grammarians.
occurred in the first position. Hence, in cases such as waʿada the expected realization would be *riʿ (waʿada—*riʿ as in the pair wasama—ism).

Yet, the resulting terms reflect a different state of affairs, as the outputs of this type of roots would consist of terms ending with a tāʾ marbūṭa (in fact the attested form derived from waʿada is ʿida), as rightly stated by the Baṣrans.

Baṣrans consider the final tāʾ marbūṭa as a compensation letter indicating the drop of the first—weak—radical, while the initial hamza would result from the drop of the last radical. Thus, ism derives from an underlying form *simw, shaped on the pattern fiʿl where the first radical is vocalized in kasra and the second is quiescent.50 According to the Baṣran proposition, in that instance the root would suffer from the drop of the third radical and, resulting bilateral, would compensate the elision of the wāw by appending a hamza at the beginning of the word, on the paradigm ifʿ.

3.2.2 The past tense
The second Baṣran proposition is about verbal analysis and how verbs are formed out of this type of root, starting with the mādī of the fourth form. The Baṣrans argue that the underlying form of the verb is *asmawtu, but the wāw—which comes to be the third radical of the root and occurs here in the fourth position—undergoes a regular process of transformation, turning into a yāʾ resulting then in the form 'asmaytu. The proposed theoretical form, as well as the resulting one, shows that the weak radical does not occur in first position in the root, which otherwise would result in a fourth verbal form *awsamtu.

The same phenomenon is also attested in the muḏārī, where the vowel shift is usually very regular due to the vocalization pattern of the form (ʿafʿala—yuʿilu), as in yuʿilī, yuʿilī, and yusmi, inferred from the underlying forms *yuʿilīw, *yuʿilīw, and *yusmiw, and where a quiescent wāw is preceded by a letter vocalized in kasra. The phenomenon is very regular and is recorded whenever a quiescent wāw comes to occur in a position adjacent to a consonant vocalized in kasra, as for instance in miqāt, miʿād, and mīzān, whose underlying forms would be *miwqāt, *miwʿād, and *miwzān, inferred from al-waqt, al-waʿd, and alwazn.

3.2.3 The diminutive
Within the debate, also the formation of the diminutive contributes to the definition of the root. Considering the root proposed by the Kūfans, w-s-m, the diminutive form of ism would result in the form *wusaym, where the first weak radical is retained. Yet, the variant attested for ism is sumayy.

The Arabic lexicon does not record a form containing a weak radical occurring at the beginning of the word, whereas it records a form with a last weak radical.

The word is ascribable to an underlying form *sumayw, on the paradigm fuʿayl, but having a wāw as its last radical it shifts into a yāʾ: when a yāʾ and a wāw occur together and the first letter is quiescent, then the wāw turns into yāʾ, resulting in a geminated form. This

---

50 On a pattern R₁-i-R₂-Ø-R₃.
51 Other examples from the text are ʿalaytu and ʿaddaytu, from the underlying forms ʿalawtu and ʿaddawtu.
paradigm is widely attested and productive, as demonstrated by common terms such as sayyid, ḡayyid, and mayyit, whose underlying forms would be *saywid, *ḡaywid, and *maywit. ûa’ being easier to articulate, a shift of the wāw onto a ûa’ is favored.

3.2.4 The plural
The last Baṣran proposition concerns to the formation of the plural form of ism, for which two major forms are registered: ‘asmā’ and ‘asāmī. Both are derived from the root s-m-w and cannot be ascribed to w-s-m, from which the resulting forms would be *awsâm and *awāsīm.

Of the two possible plural forms mentioned above ‘asmā’ is more correct because of its major attestation and plausibility. Its underlying form is *’asmāw, which records a wāw occurring in the final position, and preceded by a ’alif zā’ida. In such cases, the wāw usually shifts into a hamza, as recorded in other examples such as samā’, kasā’, and rağā’ whose underlying forms would be *samāw, *kisāw, and *rağāw.

In addition to this, another proposition argues that the wāw undergoes a process of shift into ’alif, acknowledging the existence of an abstract form where the fatha occurring before the ’alif is triggered by a vocalized wāw. The latter, when occurring in a vocalized form and preceded by a letter carrying a vocalization in fatha, must necessarily turn into a ’alif.

The conclusion would then be the combination of two ’alif; one added to the root and one deriving from the last radical. But being both quiescent they do not merge; therefore, the second ’alif turns necessarily into a hamza, both hamza and ’alif being two hawā’iyya53 letters.

Conclusions
The aim of this contribution was to present an overall view on how Arabic grammarians dealt with the issue of defining the root from which the Arabic term ism should be derived. It was inferred from the inventory of arguments discussed in early works and here presented through the words of a 12th-century scholar, that ism may be derived from two distinct roots: w-s-m and s-m-w.

The history of the Arabic linguistic tradition shows that the speculative activities of grammarians belonging to the Baghdādi tradition, like al-Anbārī, often reiterate previously discussed arguments with a manifest orientation towards Baṣran ones. Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly important that in retracing the development of Arabic linguistic sciences the debate itself becomes as important as the linguistic issue discussed, because of the methodological approaches proposed. Al-Anbārī’s way to present the debate is a kind of storytelling, where the Baṣran predominance is justified by the fact that the method of analysis they propose is better theorized and developed. Thus, strict methodological procedures and

52 ‘aḫaff, lit. ‘lighter’.
53 “’al-hāwi <qui comporte un souffle> est un épithète de l’’alif at-ḡarsī: <celui qui produit un son> par opposition à l’’alif support de hamza”. CANTINEAU 1960: 24.
a sophisticated attitude to the reasoning show a clear superiority of the Baṣran group over its counterpart, as in the case study presented in this paper.

In fact, as discussed in paragraphs 3.2.1 through 3.2.4, it is evident how the discussion led by Kūfan grammarians—despite its logic—does not have very solid foundations, but rather presents a more speculative approach. Not considering the propositions on semantics, common to both groups and ascribable to a higher level of linguistic abstraction, Baṣrans’ arguments on morphological phenomena are more well-grounded, and properly explain why the term ism cannot be derived from the root w-s-m, contrary to what Kūfans argue. Furthermore, cognates evidence that also in other Semitic languages the root is either biliteral or has a weak letter as its last radical, thus adding an additional proof on a comparative level.

References

The ism in the Arabic grammatical tradition


Biradicalist Mimophonic Triradicalism: Sounds, root nuclei and root complements in M. Ḥ. Ḥ. Gabal’s ‘etymological’ dictionary of Arabic (2012)

STEPHAN GUTH (IKOS, University of Oslo)

Abstract
This article presents and discusses the monumental ‘etymological dictionary’, or ‘lexicon’, al-람اعام al-イスتيقاق al-ماثاشل,1 by the late Egyptian professor of Arabic language at al-Azhar University, Muḥammad Hasan Hasan Gabal (d. 2015),2 and tries to situate it on the map of positions taken in Arabic and Semitic Studies in the West regarding the question whether or not the triradical roots of the Arabic and Semitic lexicon may have developed, via extension, from earlier biradical ones.

Key words: biradicalism, triradicalism, root, ḳistiqāq, traditional ‘Arab’ etymology

The study that this article aims to present and discuss is remarkable in at least three respects:

1) It gives eloquent proof of the deplorable fact that, in spite of globalisation and an increasingly interconnected world, Western and indigenous Arab linguistics obviously continue to live as if in two separate galaxies—neither does Gabal refer, in any way whatsoever, to the bulk of Western research on the questions that are central to his own linguistic efforts,3 nor seem scholars in the West to have taken notice of Gabal’s magnum opus so far.

2) Although the Muʿğam does not communicate with Western research, the theory developed by Gabal nevertheless implicitly contributes to the discussion of one of the key issues of Arabic (and Semitic) linguistics: the so-called “biradicalism problem” (Voigt),4 i.e., the question “whether the Semitic lexicon is primarily built on biradical or triradi-

2 Gabal also formerly served as Dean of the Faculty of Arabic Language in al-Manṣūrī; when the Muʿğam was published he was ustāḏ Ḳayr muṭafarrīg at the Faculty of Qur’ānic Studies, Taʿṭā.
3 The Bibliography (“al-Maṣādir”, Muʿğam, iv: 2400-2408) does not contain any non-Arabic references.
cal bases, that is, whether triradical roots are original or developed out of a more archaic biconsonantal base". Uninformed as Gabal shows himself of the decades-old debate in the West as well as of many of its basic assumptions and major findings, his approach certainly suffers from what many in the West will consider a basic prerequisite for being taken serious in academia. Nevertheless, I do not think that this lack of communication with the non-Arab linguistic tradition and research community should be sufficient reason for Western scholars to ignore such a major contribution to the field, all the less so since Gabal was and is still revered in the Arab world as one of the ‘leading authorities’, in the field of Arabic language studies. Furthermore, his theory can be regarded, in quite a number of aspects, as a kind of ‘missing link’ between biradicalist and triradicalist positions.

3) Given that Gabal considers Arabic as one of the ‘purest’ (ṣānqā) languages of the world (Maṣṣaṣ, i: 10, fn. 1) and therefore does not feel the need to deal with possible influences from non-Arabic contact languages, his approach to the lexicon is ideosyncratic and shows the notorious tendency to explain the semantic variety in a root from one single basic meaning. This is why many of his assumptions or conclusions will look wrong and unacceptable, or even ridiculous, to Semitists who think they can prove the foreign origin of numerous words and roots, particularly in cases where semantic diversity and obvious unrelatedness among lexical items within ‘one’ root (cf., e.g., ṢIFR ‘zero’ vs. ṢaṢFIR ‘whistling, high tone’ vs. ṢaṢFaR ‘yellow’) as well as evidence from other Semitic languages make the non-Arabic origin of at least one of some of the items

6 HASSELBACH, ibid., even calls it “centuries-old”.
7 Gabal’s devotion to Arabic linguistics and his erudition are reflected in numerous publications, which earned him a great deal of his prestige among colleagues in the Arab world. The most important of these publications, apart from the Maṣṣaṣ, seem to be (in chronological order; sources: Library of Congress, LBS Halle-Merseburg, Internet):

- al-Maṣṣaṣ al-ḥaḡaḡ: dirāsaḥ naẓariyya wa-taḥbīqiyya. [s.l. : s.n.], 1981 ([Cairo]: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿādaḍ);
- Ḳaṣār fī al-ṣa phạt al-Saʿādaḍ. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-Ṣaḥāba, [1987];
- al-Maṣṣaṣ, i: 10, fn. 1

highly probable. Nevertheless, again, I do not think this deficiency justifies an *in toto* rejection of the *summa* of an erudite Arab scholar’s eminent knowledge and vast intellectual efforts—for mainly three reasons. First, although parts of the work are certainly not tenable from a modern linguistic perspective, others actually *do* overlap with certain trends in Western research on the composition of the Arabic lexicon, to such a degree that it seems hardly believable that they should have developed without knowing about each other. Second, the partial inacceptability of Gabal’s approach notwithstanding, it still provides a huge amount of illuminating insights and is a veritable treasure trove of interesting ideas that can be useful also to Western research, particularly so because he is in constant dialogue with the indigenous Arab linguistic tradition. Thirdly, the tendency of most Arab scholars to derive all lexical items with identical root consonants from a single root, even if they belong to highly diverging semantic fields, may, it is true, produce ‘wrong’ results from the point of view of strictly scientific diachronic linguistics. They are, however, nevertheless worth our attention because they often produce/create relations that, although linguistically untenable, from some point onwards start to live lives of their own. The semantic ‘relations’ postulated by this type of par- etymological ‘derivation’ do not reflect historical truth, but allow the researcher to look into the interesting processes of dynamic value production: like popular etymology, they grant insight into connections that a culture makes between items or activities that, originally, do not have anything in common but that the language has assigned similarly sounding words to.

**Gabal’s approach**

Gabal explains his approach (and the lemma structure of his dictionary) in the introduction to this 4-volume study (‘Bayn yaday ḥāḏī ‘l-muḥǧam’). He shares the assumption of the classical lexicographers that the meaning of any genuinely Arabic word (*lafẓ*) can be ‘derived’ (*muštaqq*) from an underlying sequence of (generally three) root consonants that carry a basic semantic value. He calls this sequence a ‘structure’ (*tarkīb*, elsewhere identified with *māddaẗ* ‘theme’ or *ǧ̱iḏ* ‘root’)¹⁰ and explains the fact that all items derived from such a *tarkīb* participate, in one way or another, in its basic meaning, as the result of the principle of *waḥdat al-ʔaṣl*, the ‘unity of the root,’ which he considers a unique specificity of the Arabic language (*Muḥǧam*, i: 10). While some classical lexicographers would allow for the side-by-side existence of homonymous, but unrelated roots, e.g., $\sqrt{1}ṢFR$ (*ṣifr* ‘zero’, etc.) alongside with $\sqrt{2}ṢFR$ (*ṣafīr* ‘whistling, high tone’, etc.) and $\sqrt{3}ṢFR$ (*ʔaṣfar* ‘yellow’), Gabal follows those who believe that even such a diversity can, and must, be derived from a still deeper *tarkīb*, that is, in our example, $\sqrt{0}ṢFR$. For some grammarians, this is only a formal construct; Gabal, however, who believes *radically* in the ‘unity of the root,’ goes with those who do not regard assumed

---

9 According to HASSELBACH, “[t]he concept of a triradical root was originally developed by Arab grammarians in the tenth century C.E.” – *op. cit.*, 373.

roots like √ṣFR as a merely formal idea but always also attach a real value to it, a value that is not only hypothetical but is attested in the sources (in our case: ‘emptiness’, xulūw, fārāq, as in ṣafir, a., v., ṣafir, ṣafīr ‘to be empty, void, vacant’—Muṣḡam, iv: 1271). Here, as in less complex, non-homonymous roots, the very basic meaning has to be ‘extracted’ (istxtaṣa) from all existing items, i.e., concrete realisations/derivations in the lexicon. To have done this extraction for all the items relevant for the Qur’anic vocabulary (which is Gabal’s main corpus), is, in the scholar’s own words, his greatest achievement because it demanded his hardest efforts and a long-standing experience. In his search for the basic meaning of a tarkīb he says he let himself be guided by the work of earlier lexicographers, but often also went beyond their findings. A major criterion for Gabal to decide which out of a variety of meanings represents the basic value is its closeness to the senses, or sensual perceptibility (ḥissiyāt), palpability, concreteness, or ‘materiality’ (māddiyāt). ¹¹ To take again our ṣFR example, he finds the basic *‘emptiness’ in the adj. ṣifr (also ṣufr, ṣafar, ṣafīr) ‘empty, void, vacant’ and explains ṣifr ‘zero’ [√ṣFR] as *‘circle made around an emptiness’, ṣafir ‘whistling, high tone’ [√ṣFR] as *‘sound produced by blowing into a hollow (= empty) reed’, and ṣafar ‘yellow’ [√ṣFR] as *‘colour of the face of s.o. who is hungry (= has an empty stomach), or has a certain disease (called ṣafar) in the belly that renders the face yellow’.

For Gabal, the sequence of the root consonants within a given tarkīb is fixed: when altered, even if the consonants may remain the same, the basic semantic information changes (compare, e.g., √BRK, √BKR, √KBK, √KBR, √KRB, all of which contain the same radicals B, R, and K, but are bearers of very different basic meanings because of the unique position of the radicals in each root). However—and this is probably the reason why Gabal prefers to call a root a tarkīb “composition”—, according to the author, each 3-consonantal tarkīb is “composed of” an initial 2-consonantal unit, or nucleus (C₁C₂), and a third radical (C₃) that modifies the meaning of the 2-consonantal kernel in a specific way—and always regularly so, because each modifier consonant has a certain meaning attached to it; for example, -ṣ as a modifier C₃ always expresses some kind of “solidity/compactness or coarseness combined with spreading/diffusion” (kaṯāfā’ ʿaw ǧilaẓ muṣṭafa taṭaṣṣū)—Muṣḡam, i: 40-41.

Gabal calls the 2-consonantal kernels “lexicon chapters (or: divisions)” (sg. faṣl muṣḡamiyyat) because they provide him with a primary principle to group his material. Each biradical nucleus carries a specific meaning produced by the interplay of the two consonants following each other, a value that usually is represented in its purest way in the corresponding gminated verbs (C₂; or C₁=C₂), i.e., those that do not have an additional third root consonant as a modifier. The C₁C₂ unit may be preceded, separated or followed by ʔ, W or Y without these having a significant impact on the C₁C₂-sequence and its semantic essence. This is why all roots containing hamz and/or weak consonants are grouped differently than in traditional dictionaries; e.g., ħWD, ṣWD and ᵐWD are all treated in the ʕD chapter. Consequently, there are no fuṣūl muṣḡamiyyat starting with ʔ, W or Y at all.¹² Thus, chapter BD deals with

¹¹ Muṣḡam, i: 14-15.

¹² GABAL thinks that the “strong, sound” consonants (ṣīḥīḥ) play the decisive role in determining the meaning in roots that also contain a weak consonant (ṣillāt) or a hamz. He claims this to be one of the
\(\sqrt{BD}, \sqrt{BDW}, \sqrt{BYD}, \sqrt{BD}, \sqrt{BD}, \sqrt{BD}, \sqrt{BDL}, \sqrt{BDN}\) — all sharing the basic notion of ‘emptiness and width/extension in space, and the like’ (farāq wa'-ítisā' wa-mā ðilà gâlîka) attached to the nuclear BD sequence (Muʕğam, i: 19-20). In this way, Gabal groups the roughly 2300 roots he deals with, in c. 370 chapters dedicated to the biconsonantal nuclei from which their meanings are ‘derived’ (Muʕğam, i: 22).

The semantic modification caused by the addition of a third consonant to the biconsonantal nuclei is explained by Gabal in mimophonic terms. That is, for the author, the relationship between sound and meaning is not arbitrary but determined by the phonetic features of the involved consonants. The “solidity/compactness or coarseness combined with spreading/diffusion,” mentioned above, that is added to the C1C2 kernels when complemented by -T, corresponds to the articulation of [θ] as a voiceless dental fricative, an obstruent (→ “solidity/compactness, coarseness”) with only limited closure of the vocal tract, not stopping airflow but making it turbulent\(^\text{13}\) (→ “spreading/diffusion”). The semantic values of all consonants are described in detail in Gabal’s “Introduction” and explained again in the opening paragraphs of each fašl muʕğamī when a definition of the basic values (sg. maʔnà mîhwârî) of the biconsonantal kernels as well as the triconsonantal tarâkîb is given. Gabal’s terminology seems to draw on earlier—Classical—source(s), but the author does not mention any name, and I have not been able so far to determine in whose footsteps he is following:\(^\text{14}\)

\[\text{BSV} = \text{basic semantic value, al-maʔnà al-luʔiwwî al-ʕâmmî}\]^\(^\text{15}\)

\(\slash{\text{T}}\) = daʔt ‘stress’ → BSV: tuʔakkid maʔnà mā taʔxABahu-fi ‘l-tarâkîb ‘confirms/underlines the meaning of the basic structure that it accompanies’

\(\slash{\text{L}}\) = taʔâmmuʕ tarâkûmi raxw, maʔfâ talâsuyqîn mā ‘soft accumulative concentration, with some cohesion’ → BSV: taʔâmmuʕ raxw, maʔfâ talâsuyqîn mā ‘soft agglomeration, with some cohesion’

\(\slash{\text{N}}\) = daʔt daqqaʕ (yuʔaddî ðilà habs daʕstî ðaw ˈgayr ˈsadîd) ‘fine/soft/gentle pressure (leading to a light, or not strong, obstruction/retention)’ → BSV: daʔt bi-diqaʕl wa-ḥiddâl yataʔattû min-hu maʔnà ‘l-imtisâk al-ðaʕstî wa-maʔnà ‘l-qâʕî ‘fine, but sharp\accen-tuated pressure, giving the meaning of a weak retention or interruption’

innovative ideas that he added to previous research. He also thinks that \(\text{\text{?}}\), \(\text{W}\) and \(\text{Y}\) hardly can be imagined to form part of a biradical nucleus because of their “volatility” – Muʕğam, i: 22.


\(^{14}\) However, when I presented GABAL’s approach at the all-German meeting of Oriental Studies (Deutscher Orientalistentag, Jena) in September this year, the terminology did not ring any bells in the audience (some 30–40 people) either. Nor did Jonathan OWEN (Bayreuth) recognize in it the terminology of any classical author. (Thank you to the DOT audience and J. OWEN— as well as to G. LEUBE who was so kind as to ask Owen his expertise for me—for their informed feedback.) This evidence would speak against my assumption that we are dealing with some older phonetic terminology here; rather, it would suggest that GABAL invented it himself. – For the translation of GABAL’s terminology in the following paragraphs I am deeply indebted to Zeus WELLNHOEFER, Berlin, who supported my first attempts with some further suggestions which inspired the version that I ended up with.

\(^{15}\) Muʕğam, i: 26-39; basic semantic value (BSV) as given ibid., i: 40-41.
\( \text{ʃ} / = \text{nafa\d{d} diq\d{a}q bi-ka\d{a}\d{f}a\d{a} wa-\text{ntish\d{a}} m\d{a}, ka\d{'}-tafa\d{a}sh\d{a} \text{‘fine air flow (lit. penetration\breakthrough of s.th. fine)’} 16 \) with a certain density\solidity and spreading, such as diffusion\to BSV: ka\d{a}\d{f}a\d{f} jaw gila\d{z} ma\d{a} tafa\d{a}sh\d{a} \text{‘solidity\compactness or coarseness combined with spreading\diffusion’} \\
\( \text{ʃd}/ = \text{ta\d{g}amma\d{u} ha\d{d}d la-hu hidda\d{a} m\d{a} \text{‘delicate\fragile\gentle concentration that has a certain sharpness\markedness\venement\pitch\precision about it’} \to BSV: \text{dto.} \) \\
\( \text{ʃn}/ = \text{gaf\d{a}f fi \text{‘l-ba\d{a}\d{t}in ma\d{a}} \text{‘hitkak bi-\text{Sirad yubriz wa\d{u}g\d{u}d al-mamarr al-\text{\d{a}\d{g}aff fi \text{‘l-gawf ‘dry-\ness inside, accompanied by a friction bi-\text{Sirad},17 making apparent the existence of a dry corridor\channel\passage-way deep down’ \to BSV: ihtik\d{a}k bi-\text{Sirad wa-gaf\d{a}f ‘friction bi-\text{Sirad and dryness’} } \) \\
\( \text{ʃt}/ = \text{taxalxul [etc.] fi \text{‘ajna\d{a} gila\d{z} ‘shaking\loosening\relaxation\vibration [etc.]’ 18 within a coarseness’ \to BSV: taxalxul ma\d{a} gaf\d{a}f ‘shaking\vibration [etc.], accompanied by dryness’} \) \\
\( \text{ʃt}/ = \text{imtid\d{a}d t\d{a}l\d{a} daq\d{u}q ma\d{a} \text{‘n\d{h}is\d{a}r, \text{\d{a}y ihtib\d{a}b\d{a} f\d{a}n al-\text{\text{\d{a}r}} ‘soft vertical extension accompanied by a constriction, i.e., obstruction, over the breadth’ \to BSV: ihtib\d{a}b\d{a} bi-dag\d{t} wa-\text{mitid\d{a}d ‘blocking\obstruction\occlusion, accompanied by pressure and extension\broadening’} 19 \) \\
\( \text{ʃt}/ = \text{\text{\d{a}r\d{a}n \d{a}n \text{\d{a}r\d{a}w g\d{a}f\d{a} (muhtar\text{\d{a}n) y\d{a}n\d{a}f\d{a} \to BSV: \text{nafa\d{d} t\d{a}r\d{a}n \d{d}{\d{a}r\d{a}w g\d{a}f\d{a} \text{‘permeable thickness/thick\broad air flow, showing a certain softness\lexuality\relaxation and coarseness’} 20 \) \\
\( \text{ʃt}/ = \text{su\d{y}la\d{a} al-\text{\d{a}r\d{a}m ma\d{a} \text{‘stirs\d{a}l, \text{\d{a}y \d{a}say? min al-tam\d{a}\d{a}\d{u}k ya\d{a}g\d{a}bal al-\text{\d{a}t\d{a}\d{a}\d{m} \text{\d{a}\d{\d{a}r\d{a}d w\d{a}d\d{a}\d{\d{a}\d{a}n \d{a}\d{‘}f\d{a}w (\d{= through?) the throat (or fauces), accompanied by a letting go, i.e., some retention, making both continuation\connection and endurance evident’ \to BSV: istirs\d{a}l ma\d{a}a tam\d{a}\d{a}\d{u}k m\d{a} ‘a letting go\relaxing, (but with some retention\cohessiveness’} \) \\
\( \text{ʃt}/ = \text{\text{\d{a}t\d{a}d ik\d{t}in\d{a}z bi-\text{\d{a}zi\d{d}h\d{a}m \text{\d{a}\d{\d{a}r\d{a}n wa\d{a}g\d{a}z\d{a} \d{a}\d{\d{a}r\d{a}n d\d{a}lu h\d{d}{\d{a}l\d{a} la ba\d{d}d ‘intense compactness (produced) by pressing things or parts against each other’ \to BSV: ik\d{t}in\d{a}z wa-\text{"\d{a}zi\d{d}h\d{a}m} 19 \) \\

---

16 \text{nafa\d{d} ‘penetration’ seems to indicate the air flow observed in a fricative.} 
17 \text{Would this \text{\text{\d{a}r\d{a}d ‘breadth’ or \‘obstruction’ mean the sound’s articulation with the tongue root against the back of the pharynx?} \) 
18 \text{Does taxalxul ‘shaking, vibration, etc.’ here mean the sound’s articulation with the back of the dorsum at the soft palate?} 
19 \text{I have no idea what \text{\text{\d{a}r\d{a}m means by \text{\d{a}t\d{a}l ‘vertical’ in the context of \text{\d{a}r\d{a}n\text{‘}f\d{a}w the tip or blade of the tongue when being pressed (cf. dag\d{t} against the teeth where it also ‘broadens’ (cf. \text{\text{\d{a}re}) and extends (cf. imtid\d{a}d)’? – For \text{\text{\d{a}re cf. also above, \text{\d{a}n and note 17\) } \) 
20 \text{I am too uncertain about the vocalization of Gabal’s expression as to attempt a translation of his description.} 
21 \text{For \text{\text{\d{a}r\d{a}d interpreted as ‘air flow’ cf. \text{\d{a}n, above. The sound’s ‘thickness’ and ‘coarseness’ can perhaps be explained as describing the constriction of the air flow through a narrow channel at the place of articulation, while rax\d{a}w\d{a} may point to the release of air.} \) 
22 \text{Does this refer to the air streaming between the (tip of the) tongue and the alveolar ridge that causes the tongue to vibrate in a trill?} \)
‘compactness and compression’

\[ l/sl \equiv \text{imtidād daqiq} (\text{hdād law waw qawiyy}) \text{nafūd fi ţīrm law min-hu ’extension/persistence/prolongation of something fine (sharp or strong) coming through a tube, or from it’) \rightarrow \text{BSV: imtidād bi-diqqā al-хаdhāl ‘continuation/persistence/prolongation, accompanied by fineness/precision and intensity/sharpness’}

\[ f/l/\equiv \text{taṣṣuṣ} \text{ wa-taṣṣaqaq} \text{, ṭay intiṣār wa-taʃsīn}, \text{wa-ṣadam ṭağ̱mumū} \text{ wa-taʃaqqud ‘efusion and diffusion, i.e., unfolding/expansion and spreading with no concentration/contraction or hardening/clotting’ } \rightarrow \text{BSV: taʃsīn ṭay intiṣār maʃa diqqā ‘diffusion or spreading, (but) with some precision/exactitude’}

\[ l/sl \equiv \text{kawn al-šay} \text{ gāliż} \text{ wa-gawiyi} \text{ ṭiÎāth xāliṣ mimmā yuxāliṯuŋ ‘internal coarseness and strength/powerfulness, free of contamination/contaminating mixing’ } \rightarrow \text{BSV: naʃād bi-ɡilaz wa-quwwat wa-xulās ‘airflow (lit. penetration/permeation) combined with coarseness, strength/powerfulness, and purity’}

\[ l/dl \equiv \text{gilaz law tišl la-hā hiddāl} \text{ mā, yuxāliṯ fa-yadīg bi-ɡilazīn wa-tišlīn ’coarseness or heaviness that comes with a certain sharpness, blending itself in so that this coarseness and heaviness exercise pressure/produce emphasis’ } \rightarrow \text{BSV: daqī ṭi-katāf al-wa-ɡilaz ‘emphasis with density/compactness and coarseness’}

\[ n/l \equiv \text{nawʾ min al-daqī bi-ɡilaz wa-tišl} \text{ maʃa hiddāl muḵalīṯai ’a kind of stress/pressure/emphasis, combined with coarseness and weight/heaviness, with some sharpness/vehemence blended in’ } \rightarrow \text{BSV: al-daqī bi-’ittisār wa-ṣtiğḏ ‘stress/pressure’ emphasis accompanied bywidening and thickening/hardening/tendency to coarseness’}

\[ l/sl \equiv \text{hiddāl tusalīṯ al-šay} \text{ al-kaṯf, ṭay: tasrī ṭi ṭaŋdi LGBT ’sharpness blended into s.th. dense/solid/compact, i.e., permeating it/running through it’ } \rightarrow \text{BSV: naʃād bi-ɡilaz ṭaw hiddāl maʃa katāfāl ‘permeation/penetration/airstream combined with coarseness or sharpness, but also density/solidity/compactness’}

\[ s/l \equiv \text{rāxawat ţīrm mulahVM (ittisān ṭaw imtidād)} \text{26} \rightarrow \text{BSV: iltiḥām šalā riqqa al-ʃa}

---

23 Probably a reference to the fact that the tongue is dense close together when the tongue directs the airstream towards the sharp edge of the teeth when this voiced alveolar sibilant is articulated.

24 It seems hard to relate this description to the features Western phonetics usually ascribe to \[ f/l/\]; cf., e.g.: “Its manner of articulation is sibilant fricative, which means it is generally produced by channeling air flow along a groove in the back of the tongue up to the place of articulation, at which point it is focused against the sharp edge of the nearly clenched teeth, causing high-frequency turbulence [cf. taʃṣuṣ, taʃṣaqaq, intiṣār, taʃṣīn?]. Its place of articulation is palato-alveolar, that is, domed (partially palatalized) postalveolar, which means it is articulated with the blade of the tongue behind the alveolar ridge, and the front of the tongue bunched up (‘domed’) [cf. diqqā?] at the palate.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiceless_palato-alveolar_sibilant> (as of 28Dec2017). The element of coarseness, power, sharpness, vehemence, etc., recurring in GABAL’s characterisation of \[ s/l, ψ/, ξ/, ʕ/\] seems to correspond to our Western experience of these consonants as ‘emphatics’, i.e., ‘strong’ and ‘expressive’ (from Greek emphainen ‘to present, exhibit, display, let s.th. be seen, etc.’).

25 I find this description untranslatable, mainly due to the unclear meaning of ţīrm, but also to the unmarked vocalisation of mulahVM (active or passive?) and the difficulty to relate spatial categories (ittiṣār, imtidād) to the phonological features that Western phonetics usually attribute to \[ s/l\] as a voiced
While in most other descriptions the prepositions bi- and maša are used, here we find šalāl followed by maša. Does it indicate more or less the same as bi- (a feature accompanied by, or combined with, another), or is it meant to express some other kind of combining (‘against’, ‘as opposed to, contrary to’)?

GABAL’s description seems to focus on the constriction (bi-quwwašt) of the airflow in the fricative, while his ittišār ahdor intišār do not have a direct correspondence in Western characterisations of the sound, which only take into account the place of articulation (labiodental) and the moment the air passes through the channel, not however what happens ‘outside’, during articulation (air escapes and spreads).

I was unable to track down the word ṣawlr from which this adjective obviously is a nisba formation. It seems clear, however, that it has something to do with ṣawr, i.e., a profound, unfathomable depth.

‘Pressure’ and ‘vehemence’ can probably be related to the characteristic features of a plosive, while ‘precision/fineness’ may be seen as resulting from the articulation at the soft palate.

For tašām, intiwād, and ittišāk, cf. probably the closed mouth, lips pressed together, as for zāhirī. GABAL seems to regard /m/ primarily as a ‘surface phenomenon’; the ‘levelling’ or ‘adjustment’ of

Stephan Guth

---

hiddat mā ‘fusion\union\cohesion with (?) a thinness accompanied by some sharpness’

lʕ = mā yusbih al-šuš našūwašt alay bi l-lāb sûā, min kạšāfi ḍaw quwwašt wa-hiddat, maša taxal-xušt mā ‘resembles the belch which (also) has some density or powerfullness and sharpness, in spite of a certain vibration\wavering’ → BSV: taxalxal maša sûā? min al-raqdwašt ‘vibration/wavering with some gentleness/softness’

lʕ = naṣāf bi-quwwašt (ka’l-ṣaṣd wâl-l-ribašt) ʔilâ zāhir al-sîyâ? maša ‘ttišār al-naḥf ḍaw intišārī ‘powerful breaking through\airflow (as under expulsion or removal [of s.th.]) to its outside, accompanied by its expansion\widening or spreading’ → BSV: ṣard wa-ribašt ‘expansion\expulsion\expulsion and removal’

lʕl = taqammus (mutaṣaqqid) dâ ḥiddâl fî bâṭin al-sîyâ? ḍaw šumqih (qad yunfâ [or: yanfâ ?] minhu) ‘(dense\complex and) sharp concentration (deep) inside of s.th. (through it a breakthrough\eruption\emittance may happen’ → BSV: taṣaqqud wa-ṣtidād fî ‘l-šumq ‘hardening\clotting\concentration and intensity deep down’

lʕl = daqī ḍā’ārī maša ḥiddâl ḍaw daqiq ‘pressure in the depths accompanied by sharpness\vehemence or precision\fineness’ → BSV: ḍaqī ḍā’ārī daqiq yuʔaddī ʔilâ ‘mīṣāk ḍaw qaṭt ‘fine\precise pressure\emphasis deep down (?) causing retention or interruption’

lʕl = nawṣ min al-ittidâd min sûā? ka’l-ṭaṣalquq maša tamayyuz ḍaw istiqlâl ‘a kind of extending from something, as if clinging (to it) while (at the same time) distinguishing itself, or making itself independent (from it)’ → BSV: taṣalquq ḍaw intiṭidâd maša ‘stiqlâl ḍaw tamayyuz ‘adhesion\cohesion\attachment\clinging (to s.th.), or extending (from it), accompanied by separation and distinction’

lʕm = taḍāmm ḍaw istiwād zāhirī li-sîyâ? ḍaw šalâ sûā? ‘union\conjunction, or an outward equalisation\adjustment to s.th.’ → BSV: ittišāk ḍaw istiwād zāhirī ‘retention or outward levelling’

pharyngeal fricative. For these, cf., e.g., <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voiced_pharyngeal_fricative> (as of 29Dec2017).

27 While in most other descriptions the prepositions bi- and maša are used, here we find šalâl followed by maša. Does it indicate more or less the same as bi- (a feature accompanied by, or combined with, another), or is it meant to express some other kind of combining (‘against’, ‘as opposed to, contrary to’)?

28 GABAL’s description seems to focus on the constriction (bi-quwwašt) of the airflow in the fricative, while his ittišār ahdor intišār do not have a direct correspondence in Western characterisations of the sound, which only take into account the place of articulation (labiodental) and the moment the air passes through the channel, not however what happens ‘outside’, during articulation (air escapes and spreads).

29 It seems clear, however, that it has something to do with ṣawr, i.e., a profound, unfathomable depth.

30 ‘Pressure’ and ‘vehemence’ can probably be related to the characteristic features of a plosive, while ‘precision\fineness’ may be seen as resulting from the articulation at the soft palate.

31 For tašām, intiwād, and ittišāk, cf. probably the closed mouth, lips pressed together, as for zāhirī. GABAL seems to regard /m/ primarily as a ‘surface phenomenon’; the ‘levelling’ or ‘adjustment’ of

---

Stephan Guth

• 17 (2017): 345-376
\( /l/ = \text{imtidād laṭīf fī} \text{ ǧawf} \text{ ʔaw} \text{ bāṭin} \text{ ǧirm} \text{ ʔaw} \text{ min-hu} \) ‘subtle extension\expansion\continuation in the innermost or inside of a body\object\tube, or from it’ \(\rightarrow\) BSV: \text{imtidād laṭīf fī} \text{l-bāṭin} \text{ ʔaw} \text{ min-hu} \ ‘subtle extension\expansion inside, or from inside’

\( /b/ = \text{farāġ al-gawf} \text{ ʔaw} \text{ ŋfrāġ} \text{ mā} \text{ fī} \text{ bi-quvwal} \) ‘emptiness of a cavity, or emptying it by force’ \(\rightarrow\) BSV: \text{farāġ ʔaw ŋfrāġ} \ ‘emptiness or emptying’

\( /w/ = \text{ištimāl wa-} \text{ḥtiwāʔ} \) ‘encompassing\including\comprising and containing’ \(\rightarrow\) BSV: \text{ištimāl} \ ‘comprehensive inclusion’

\( /y/ = \text{ittiṣāl al-mumtadd šayʔ} \text{ an} \text{ wāḥid} \text{ an}, \text{ wa-} \text{ʕadam tafarruqih} \text{ ʔaw} \text{ tasayyubih} \) ‘the reaching out of an extension to something (?)’ \(\rightarrow\) BSV: \text{ittiṣāl} \ ‘connection’

Gabal then goes on and collates these features with the basic semantic values that one gets by examining words in which the respective consonants appear in their ‘purest’, concentrated form, i.e., where they feature ‘alone’ and their value is not ‘contaminated’ by any additional element. For example, in order to determine the basic value of \( /b/\), he searches the Arabic lexicon for words that contain as many \( b\)-s as possible and finds that the essential value of \( /b/\), in its most condensed form, must be represented in \text{babbaẗ} \ ‘well-nourished youth, thick, fat, brawny’, because this word contains not less than three \( b\)-s (and only the fem. suffix \text{-aẗ}, which is irrelevant for the basic meaning). Given that neither vowels nor \text{hamz} and semi-vowels count as particularly ‘contaminating’ ingredients, words containing these elements can be used in the extraction process, too. Thus, for the identification of the basic semantic value of \( /d/\), not only \text{dad} \ ‘play, sport’ and \text{dadid} \ ‘joking’ are relevant, but also, e.g., \text{ʔidd} \ ‘misfortune, adversity’ or \text{ʔadīd} \ ‘difficult, serious (affair)’. Gabal is convinced that this method allows for a ‘natural, unconstrained, unmannered’ \(\text{dūn takalluf}\) reconstruction of basic representatives of the consonants’ \(\text{maʕnà luġawī ʕāmm}\). The second criterion that helps him to identify the basic semantic value of a consonant and also to double-check a hypothesis arrived at with the first method, is the consonant’s ‘taste’: depending on where and how it is articulated it comes with a certain \text{ḏawq}, i.e., a way how ‘it feels’ to utter or hear it. Thus, phonetics (as described above) and semantics are closely intertwined.

\( s.\text{th.}, \) or against \( s.\text{th.}, \) is most likely taken from the fact that the lips meet each other and ‘unite’ to produce this bilabial.

32 \text{GABAL’s} ‘cavity’ can perhaps be seen as corresponding to the glottal place of articulation (‘deep down’), while the ‘emptiness’ could be seen together with the fact that \( /h/\) is often regarded as the counterpart of the vowel that follows it.

33 \text{WELLNHOFER} (see note 14, above) proposes: ‘connecting the extended as one thing (?)’. – Neither my own nor Wellnhofer’s renderings seem fully convincing, so both will remain with a big question mark attached to them.

34 \text{Mutīgam}, i: 25. – The word \text{GABAL} builds his argument on is not found in \text{LANE’s Lexicon}; cf., however, \text{HAVA}, \text{Arabic-English Dictionary}: \text{babb} and \text{babbān} ‘fat baby’; and \text{DOZY}, \text{Supplément}: \text{babbaẗ} ‘nom qu’on donne à un très-petit enfant’.

35 Meanings given as in \text{HAVA’s Arabic-English Dictionary}.

36 Gabal mentions that already \text{al-XĀLĪL} b. \text{ʔAḥmad} dealt with notions of \text{dawq} or \text{taḍawwaq} – \text{Muʕgām}, i: 25.
The author is consistent in his mimophonic approach in that he does not limit the sound-meaning correspondence to the modifying \( C_3 \) consonants; he also applies it to the nuclei and, in the last consequence, to the lexicon as a whole. That is, while the basic value (mašna miḥwārī) of a triradical root is explained as the product of the modification made on a \( C_1C_2 \) kernel by a \( C_3 \) complement of a certain sound quality and, hence, semantic function, the basic values of the \( C_1C_2 \) kernels themselves are explained as the result of the interplay between the two consonants from which they are formed; each having peculiar phonological features, which in turn each carry a certain meaning, their combination in the nuclei produces unique semantic notions.

**Gabal’s and Western approaches compared**

In the following, I will treat the main differences, but also overlappings between Gabal’s approach and Western views on the composition and development of the Arabic lexicon.

**Synchrony vs. diachrony**

An essential difference between Gabal (as also the traditional Arab lexicographers) and most Western Arabists lies in the very perception of language as such. While most scholars in the West deal with linguistic phenomena as something subject to change in time, i.e., reflecting a certain stage in a historical development, Gabal, like his classical predecessors, is either not interested in diachrony or regards the language he studies as an unchanging, somehow “eternal” entity. Any statement he makes about ‘derivation’ (ištīqāq) is therefore never intended in the sense of a development (“X developed from/into Y”), but rather as a description of a (static) condition. Thus, his approach does not differ from traditional Arabic ištīqāq which, according to Fleisch,

introduces no historical perspective into the study of the language. The relations or origins that are detected form merely part of the revealed language and are given with it.

Consequently, and unlike in many Western biradicalist theories, the segmentation of triradical ‘structures’ into biconsonantal nuclei + modifiers is in Gabal’s approach never meant as mirroring a process in which one would have to assume historical priority, in an earlier stage of the language’s history, of the nucleus, to which then, later were added the modifiers; for Gabal, the discovery and description of the nuclei is rather a way of bringing some kind of logical order into the otherwise seemingly arbitrary composition of the Arabic lexicon. With this systematisation, Gabal says, he continues, fully develops, and com-

---

37 The author does not neglect the existence of borrowings from other languages (daxīl, muʕarrāb) (Muʕǧam, i: 10) but remains silent about their historical background or the periods of borrowing.


39 Cf., in contrast, a statement like Christopher Ehret’s: “If we are right in assuming that the thirty-seven extensions had become non-productive, and the forms containing them lexicalized, by the Proto-Semitic period, then the meanings identified for them by internal reconstruction must be projected back to the last point in time at which they were still productive, i.e., pre-Proto-Semitic. Once lexicalization
plete, the work of classical lexicographers and grammarians like Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH), al-Zamaxšāri (d. 538 AH) and al-ʔĀlūsī (d. 1137 AH). He does not seem to be aware, however, of the old debate, going on in Western research since more than a century now, about “whether or not biradical roots historically preceded triradical ones”.  

This said, we may add, however, as a note on the margin, that Gabal’s argumentation probably is not totally free from a sense of, and for, historical development. Although the author does not go as far as to speak of ‘origins’ (which would imply historicity, a starting point to which a development could be traced back in time) but rather prefers the term maʔxād ‘source’ (avoiding a temporal implication and referring to a deeper structure instead), he nevertheless does assume, though perhaps only implicitly, some kind of development when he confirms the view of the classical lexicographers that the ‘purest’, i.e., unadultered, variety of Arabic was that of the Bedouins in the desert. The criterion that, in Gabal’s eyes, confirms that a hypothetical ‘essential, basic’ value of a root or nucleus really is the maʔxād miḥwarī, the ‘central value’ the identification of which is the aim of all his efforts and from which all other values can be explained (‘derived from’), is its carrying ‘a Bedouin flavour’ (ʔarīǧ ʕarabī), its ‘smelling of the [Bedouin] environment’ (rāʔiḥaẗ al-bīʔaẗ – Muʕǧam, i: 11). That is, Gabal obviously takes for granted that a certain “contamination” or confusing diversification has happened to the Arabic language after an early, Bedouin stage and that it is now the lexicologist’s task to trace the many meanings within one root back to the original, “authentic” one. For the Muslim believer, this is essential because a correct understanding of the Qur’an will not be possible unless the original meanings of the words are known (ibid.).

**Biradicality vs. Triradicality**

Classical Arabic ištiqāq denies the existence of biradical roots; it always operates with triradical roots as the language’s “minimal templates”. Even though Gabal further segments triradical roots into biradical nuclei plus modifiers and applies this segmentation systematically to the whole lexicon, he still does not touch on the principle of a basic triradicalism as such—this is why I labeled his approach a ‘biradicalist triradicalism’ in the title of this article. Nor does Gabal oppose the view that “[a]ltering the position of any of the radicals would cause a complete change in the meaning”. In this respect, his approach does not go beyond the confines of what classical Arabic linguists usually term al-ištiqāq

40 These three authorities are mentioned by GABAL himself (Muʕǧam, i: 21, ), in particular Ibn FĀRIS, Maqāyīs al-luḡaẗ, section on √ZLL; al-ZAMAXŠĀRI, al-Kaššāf, commentary on Q 2:1 and sections on √NFQ and √FLḤ; and al-ʔĀLŪSĪ, as Zamaxšāri, Kaššāf; plus his discussion of dulāk (Q 17:78). However, the author continues, none of the three had further elaborated on the way how the third radicals modified the meaning of the nuclei (Muʕǧam, i: 22).

41 EDZARD, review of VOIGT 1988, 158 (my emphasis, S.G.).

42 CHEKAYRI, “Ištiqāq”. – For an example of the discussions that unfolded among Arab linguists when the third radical was invisible and not easy to determine, cf. Simona OLIVIERI’s contribution on ʿism in the present dossier spécial, pp. 332 ff.

43 CHEKAYRI, “Ištiqāq”. 
In Arabic and other Semitic languages it is also called ištiqāq kabīr, the ‘largest derivation,’ invented by Ibn Ǧinnī. Here, “neither the actual sense of the root nor the order of succession [of the radicals] are preserved,” nevertheless a sense that is common to some possible combinations can be extracted. For example, among the six roots that all contain the radicals Q, L and W—√QLW, √QWL, √WLQ, √WLQ, √LQW, √LWQ, all of which are realised in the language— Ibn Ǧinnī found a semantic denominator for most of them, namely al-xūfūf wa’l-ḥaraka’t ‘haste and movement.’

Gabal makes a similar effort, but the example just quoted would be considered by him only because it happens to contain a W, i.e., a weak radical, which he does not count as a full consonant but only as a kind of augment (see above), and only because, if W remains unconsidered, we get roots that share the relative succession of the main (i.e., strong) radicals. Thus, for Gabal, the six roots above can be divided into two groups: one showing the QL sequence (√QLw, √Qwl, √wlQ) and another showing ŁQ (√ŁQw, √LwQ, √wŁQ). A similar grouping would however not be possible, say, for √SLM, √SML, √LMŚ, √LSM, √MLŚ, and √MLS, which, Ibn Ǧinnī found, all shared the idea of a certain ‘gentleness’, or for the six possible combinations of K, L, and M (all expressing the idea of ‘force’).

While each of the two groups of six roots is composed of identical radicals, none shows reduplication, or a weak consonant, or ?, and this is why Gabal treats them all as belonging to different semantic “chapters”, according to their initial nuclei: SL-, SM-, LM-, LS-, MS-, ML-, and KL-, KM-, LK-, LM-, MK-, ML-, respectively.

The fact, observed already by some medieval Arab linguists (see above), that triradical roots with identical C₁C₂ sequences (sometimes also C₂…C₃, and sometimes even not exactly identical, but only similar phonological features of two radicals) often have a common semantic denominator, is uncontested in Arabic (and other Semitic) studies in the West and has some corresponding views in the indigenous Arab tradition as well. As already mentioned above, in this respect Gabal sees himself as the successor and ultimate

According to Henri FLEISCH, "Ištiqāk," the idea is set out in the Xaṣāṣī (Cairo 1371/1952, i: 5-17 and Cairo 1374/1955, ii: 133-9).

Ibid.

On augments, cf., e.g., the example and the explanation given by CHEKAYRI, “Ištiqāq”: “The three forms ṣuḥyān, ṣuḥyān, and ṣuḥyān are derived from the root l-ḍ-ḍ, which carries the semantic load ‘to dispute violently’. According to ḫāṣiq, the glottal stop at the beginning of the word followed by three consonants is analyzed as an augment. The nonvocalized n in the third position and the reduplicated radical are perceived as augments as well.”

George BOHAS, "Lexicon: Matrix and Etymon", in EALL, iii (2008), referring to IBN ǦINNĪ, Xaṣāṣī, i: 133-139.

Cf. EHRET, “The origin” (see fn. 55), 110: “In Arabic and other Semitic languages it has long been evident that there are numerous sets of triliteral roots that share similar or related meanings and are formally identical except in their third consonants.”
perfection of Ibn Fāris, al-Zamāxārī and al-?Ālusī. But how does his approach overlap with, or contradict, Western positions in this critical question?

Western scholars have focused on a variety of phenomena and also drawn various conclusions from their observations.

One whose approach is also essentially mimophonic (see below) and, like Gabal’s, primarily a synchronic description is George Bohas’ theory of matrices et étymons.\(^{50}\) Like Gabal, Bohas argues “that the [traditional] lexicographical classification of words by alphabetical order of their roots masks important semantico-phonetic regularities,” namely that many lexical items containing an identical binary combination of traits often belong to the same larger semantic fields.\(^{51}\) While this opinion is shared by many others, including Gabal, Bohas is unique (in the West, but in a way following the path sketched by Ibn Ǧīmī and the ištiqāq ākbar) in allowing for a “nonlinear ordering of the constituent parts” within his binary nuclei (e.g., \(BT \sim TB\) ‘to cut, cut off’) or even allowing these elements to be preceded, separated, or followed by a third element (marked bold in the following: cf., e.g., \(\text{BaTaKa} \sim \text{to cut, cut off, severe, pluck out, cut off one’s tail}, \text{inBaTaʔa} \sim \text{to be cut off}, \text{BaTaLa} \sim \text{to cut off, separate}, \text{Ba_BT} \sim \text{BT axe}, \text{BaLaTa} \sim \text{to cut off}, \text{SaBaṬa} \sim \text{to cut s.th., cut it off, to shave one’s hair, shaved his head}’).\(^{52}\)

Most other Western theories that, like Gabal’s, segment triradical roots into biradical nuclei plus augment/increment/modifier/extension\(^{53}\) combine their analysis of the lexicon

\(^{50}\) The main publications in which the theory is developed and elaborated upon in detail are probably the following three: Georges BOHAS, Matrices, étymons, racines: Éléments d'une théorie lexicologique du vocabulaire arabe, Paris and Louvain: Peeters, 1997; id., Matrices et étymons: Développements de la théorie, Lausanne: Editions du Zèbre, 2000; and id. and Mihai DAT, Une théorie de l’organisation du lexique des langues sémitiques: Matrices et étymons, Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2007.

\(^{51}\) Mirena MEHARDIYUSKA, review of BOHAS 1997, Middle East Studies Association Bulletin, 32/2: 177-78, 177. – In fact, for BOHAS, “the triconsonantal root is no linguistic reality but merely a grammatical tool” – HASSELBACH, review of BOHAS & DAT 2007, 28.

\(^{52}\) Examples as in BOHAS, “Lexicon: Matrix and Etymon”. My emphasis, S.G.

\(^{53}\) In Western theory, the segmentation of existing roots into ‘core roots’ plus augment is not necessarily of the kind we are dealing with in the present article, i.e., \(C_{1}C_{2} \sim C_{3}\). OREL & STOLBOVA, for instance, think they have discovered, or would at least not exclude the possibility of, a number of prefixes rather than extensions added at the end. Cf., e.g., the following items in HSED (a choice of items where the assumed prefix was added in Semitic while it seems sensible to assume its absence from Afroasiatic):

(prefix \(*hV\):) \(^{4197}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)kum- ‘to take, get’ > Sem \(*\)Vkum- ‘to take’ > Ar \(\sqrt{HKM}\) (a, u)

(prefix \(*V\):) \(^{4196}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)goy- ‘woman’ > Sem \(*\)aḡāz- ‘old woman’ > Ar \(\sqrt{aḡāz}\)

\(^{4169}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)kurab- ‘insect’ > Sem \(*\)aṭkrab- ‘scorpion’ > Ar \(\sqrt{ṭkrab}\)

(prefix \(*nV\):) \(^{4152}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)eq- ‘to mix’ > Sem \(*\)mṬiḡa- ‘to mix’ > Ar \(\sqrt{MSO}\) (a)

\(^{4145}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṭin- ‘egg’ > Sem \(*\)mṬiḡa- ‘to lay eggs’ > Ar \(\sqrt{MSK}\) (a)

(prefix \(*nV\):) \(^{4156}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)cav- ‘look, see’ > Sem \(*\)nṬir- ‘to guard, look’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NZR}\) (a)

\(^{4156}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṭaʔ-\(\sqrt{MVawj}\) ‘to move upwards’ > Sem \(*\)nṬaʔ- ‘to rise, grow, raise’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NⱥS}\) (a, u)

\(^{4156}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṭeq- ‘to smell’ (trans.) > Sem \(*\)nṬaʔ- ‘to do.’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NⱥS}\) (a)

\(^{4157}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṣeq- ‘to moisten, be wet’ > Sem \(*\)nṬiḡa- ‘to absorb (liquids)’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NSF}\) (a, u)

\(^{4194}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)daʔ-\(\sqrt{MVawj}\) ‘to be wet’ > Sem \(*\)nṬaʔ- ‘to do.’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NDW}, \sqrt{NDY}\) (a)

\(^{4115}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṭam- ‘to eat’ > Sem \(*\)nṬam- ‘to be insatiable’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NⱥM}\) (a)

\(^{4197}\) AfrAs \(^{*}\)ṭeq- ‘to spit’ > Sem \(*\)nṬeq- ‘to do.’ > Ar \(\sqrt{NⱥT}\) (i, u)
with a **diachronic** approach in which the nucleus represents an earlier, more original stage of linguistic development (a claim that Gabal does not make, as we have seen above). At the same time, these theories resemble Gabal’s in that the order of the two constituents within the biradical nuclei is **unchangeable** (as opposed to Bohas’ unspecified sequence). The Western approach to which Gabal’s probably comes closest in terms of a **systematic segmentation** (nuclei + modifiers) and the non-flexibility of position of C1 and C2 within the C1/C2- nuclei (**linearity**) is probably Christopher Еhret’s. It is true that Ehret, unlike Gabal, does not treat ?, W and Y as different from other consonants and that he therefore does not allow them to precede or ‘invade’ his nuclei; and it is also true that Ehret does not claim the segmentability of all tiradicals (he only deals with it a **widespread** phenomenon, evidently applicable to “numerous sets of triliteral roots”); apart from these differences, however, Ehret’s and Gabal’s analysis of the Arabic lexicon are very similar. They are particularly similar in the degree of comprehensiveness and systematization with which they assign certain meanings to certain C1 modifiers. In Gabal’s mimophonic view the meanings are generated somehow “naturally”, while in Ehret’s theory they seem to be arbitrary, the results of mere convention; both approaches, however, take the geminating meanings are ge

Here are some examples of how Ehret and Gabal describe the value and effect of the C1-s when following a nucleus:

(prefix *wV-): 4074 AfrAs *gad- ‘to find, seek’ > Sem *wVgVl- ‘to find, meet’ > Ar √WGD 4115 AfrAs *hub- ‘to give, send’ > Sem *wVhVb- ‘to give’ > Ar √WHB

For Ehret, “[t]he proportion of seemingly irreducible triconsonantal roots in Semitic is a pattern unpar


I think Gabal wouldn’t I have had any difficulty to accept a statement by Ehret like the following: “When the verb members of such sets [of triliteral roots that share similar or related meanings and are formally identical except in their third consonants] are grouped according to their third consonants, there emerge recurrent correlations between the presence of particular consonants in C3 (third) position and the presence of particular varieties of meaning modification in the roots containing those C3. [...] the correlations of meaning and form are remarkably consistent, and the case to be made is there-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C₃</th>
<th>Ehret 1989</th>
<th>Gabal 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>durative</strong></td>
<td>‘fine, but sharpened pressure, giving the meaning of a weak retention or interruption’ (dağt bi-diqqat wa-hiddaṯ yataṭṭu min-ha maṣna ‘l-imtisāk al-daṣṣ wa-maṣna ‘l-qafi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>diffusive</strong></td>
<td>‘solidity/compactness or coarseness combined with spreading/diffusion’ (kaṭafiʿa ḥaw gilāz maṣa tafalān)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>finitive fortative</strong></td>
<td>‘delicate/fragile/gentle concentration that has a certain sharpness/markedness/vehemence/pitch/precision about it’ (taqammus haṣṣ maṣa hiddat mā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>iterative</strong></td>
<td>‘friction bi-Siraḏ and dryness’ ( ihtikāk bi-Siraḏ wa-ṣāfaḏ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>diffusive</strong></td>
<td>‘a letting go/releaseing, (but) with some retention/cohesiveness’ (istirsāl maṣa tamāsus mā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>intensive (of manner)</strong></td>
<td>‘compactness and compression’ (iktināz wa-zādāḏān)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>non-finitive</strong></td>
<td>‘continuation/persistence/prolongation, accompanied by fineness/precision and intensity/sharpness’ (imtād bi-diqqat wa-hiddaṯ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>durative intensive</strong></td>
<td>‘stress/pressure/emphasis accompanied by widening and thickening/hardening/tendency to coarseness’ (al-dağt bi-ṭisas wa-stiglāḏ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>partive</strong></td>
<td>‘fusion/union/cohesion with (?) a thinness accompanied by some sharpness’ (ilṭībāḏi ʿalā riqqa maṣa hiddat mā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>finitive</strong></td>
<td>‘adhesion/cohesion/attachment/lingering (to s.th.), or extending (from it), accompanied by separation and distinction’ (taṣalluq ḥaw imtād bi-digqat wa-hiddaṯ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>extensive fortative</strong></td>
<td>‘retention or outward levelling’ (imtisāk ʿaw istiwaḏ zāḥirī)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>non-finitive</strong></td>
<td>‘subtle extension/expansion/continuation inside, or from inside’ (imtād laṭīf fī ‘l-bāṭin ʿaw min hu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/</td>
<td><strong>amplificative</strong></td>
<td>‘emptiness or emptying’ (jāraḏ ʿaw ḥifrāḏ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The similarity of Gabal’s and Ehret’s description of the Arabic root inventory notwithstanding, a major difference between both approaches is, as we saw, the fact that Ehret thinks of the modifier C₃-s as ‘extensions’ that were added at a later stage to historically *fore exceedingly strong* (EHRET, “The origin”, 110; my italics, S.G.). – The fact that the auxents in Gabal’s and Ehret’s models do have a semantic purpose marks a major point of difference between these two theories, on the one hand, and Bohas & Dat’s model, on the other; “according to Bohas and Dat, there is no functional difference between adding a guttural, glide, or other consonant. That is, the augments themselves have no semantic or grammatical purpose that could explain why each is added in a specific instance” – HASSELBACH 2008 (see note 5), 375.
preceding ‘pre-Protosemitic’ biradical roots, while Gabal’s approach is ahistoric. In principle, he does not touch the classical tenet of an essential triradicalism; for him, the segmentation of $C_1C_2C_3$ patterns into $C_1C_2$ nuclei + modifier $C_3$-s only serves the explanation of what he perceives as semantic regularities within a language that he treats as a static system. With this view, Gabal, in a way, comes close, on the other hand, to Voigt who, in his seminal study on the biradicalism problem (see fn. 4, above), argued “that triradical roots need not be explained as expansions of biradical roots”; the semantic similarity that can be observed in many triradical roots with identical $C_1C_2$ should rather be looked at as the result of “later analogical abstraction, a phenomenon of iconicity rather than algorithmic expansion”.

For Voigt, the only group of roots for which it seems to make sense to assume a biradical origin are the geminated ones ($C_1C_2ː$); in his view, all attempts to derive triradical roots from biradical “core roots” are methodologically insufficient and have to be regarded as failed. Thus, for Voigt, like for Gabal, the inventory of Arabic roots consists mainly of triradical as well as a number of geminated roots. The difference between the two scholars’ conceptions of trilateral roots that share similar or related meanings and are formally identical except in their third consonants lies in their explanation of the $C_3$ elements: While for Gabal they have the quality of modifiers of the $C_1C_2$ nuclei, each endowed with a specific semantic function, for Voigt the roots in question are not composed of such “nuclei” plus modifying $C_3$-s; root variation can, and should, rather be explained as the result of what he calls “Reimwortbildung”, i.e., “rhyming” assimilation or analogous imitation of existing (triradical) precedents, or, as Hasselbach puts it: “words that have similar meanings tend to assimilate on a phonetic level. Similarly, words that are similar in meaning and sound also tend to become closer in meaning.”

Mimophony vs. arbitrariness of meaning

As already explained above, Gabal’s approach is strictly mimophonic, i.e., he regards (and does not grow tired to explain) the original meaning of a root as the somehow natural result of an interplay between the sounds that come together in it. Language, for him, is thus ultimately (built on) onomatopoeia. Unlike some classical Arab scholars who, as Gabal is well aware, often identify two or more values for one root (see above), Gabal is always eager to find the one “central meaning” (maʕnà miḥwarî) from which he can “derive” all the others. While he remains strictly consistent in this respect the diversification of meaning—which he cannot neglect, but which in itself is a development—is obviously seen as

59 Cf. Voigt, Die infirmen Verbaltypen, 209 / Fischer, review of Voigt 1988, 129. – One of the reasons for this acknowledgement is the pervasive existence, alongside with geminated roots, of reduplicated forms (√QSQS alongside with √QSː, √FTFT alongside with √FTː, √GLGL alongside with √GLː, etc.) which can hardly be explained other than as originating in biradicals.
60 Edzard’s term, in his review of Voigt 1988, 159.
61 Fischer, op.cit. 129, paraphrasing Voigt’s main argument.
62 Cf. note 49 above.
63 Hasselbach, op.cit. (see note 5), 374, referring to Voigt, Die infirmen Verbaltypen, 81.
64 He mentions Ibn Fāris and al-Rāġib al-Isfahānī – Muṣjam, i: 12, fn. 1.
the result of the activity of the human brain (widening, narrowing, figurative use, etc.) and, thus, of acts of convention that took place after the original meaning was given (by nature/God).

The question of whether or not meaning in a language is conditioned by sounds and combinations of sounds is, of course, a very old one. In contemporary Western linguistics, the Saussure’ian axiom of an essential arbitrariness in the assignment of meaning to sounds in any language can certainly be taken as the communis opinio. Thus, it is presented, for instance, in a standard reference work like Bußmann’s *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*, as a basic fact:

**Arbitrarität […] Grundlegende Eigenschaft von sprachlichen Zeichen, die besagt, dass zwischen dem Bezeichnenden (= Lautbild, Zeichengestalt) und dem Bezeichnen ten eine beliebige, nicht naturnotwendige […] Beziehung besteht. […] De Saussure [1916] […] belegt die Beliebigkeit dieser Verbindung durch die Tatsache, dass dasselbe Objekt der Realität von Sprache zu Sprache verschieden benannt wird.**

As a consequence, prevailing opinion tends to regard as exceptions from the general rule those cases in which languages seek to imitate givens of the real world and where lexemes are motivated somehow “naturally”. But even in these instances of onomatopoeia, the result of imitation usually is not completely identical among the languages and may differ considerably from one to another (cf., e.g., Engl cock-a-doodle-doo, Fr cocorico, Russ kukarekú, Ge kikerikí, Swiss Ge güggerügü, Ar kūkūkūkū, Tu gukiriku, PERS ququli ququ, Chin wō-wō, etc.).

In contrast, traditional Arabic linguistics tended to assume in principle a “natural” relation between sound and meaning, without however developing it into a fully-fledged system. Yet, as a treatise like Karamat Husein’s *The Imitative Origin of Arabic Primary Roots* of 1903 shows, the basic idea seems to have been preserved from classical times into the twentieth century, and it was taken up again, as we saw, not only by Gabal but also by a...
Western scholar like Georges Bohas, who has been able, since the mid-/late 1990s, to gather a circle, if not a veritable “school”, of like-minded disciples and colleagues around himself, a fact that has resulted in the splitting of the scholarly community into a (comparatively small) pro-Bohas’ian and a (large, majoritarian) anti-Bohas’ian camp. It is not the purpose of the present article to discuss again the arguments of both camps. However, what I think can be useful for anybody who consults Gabal’s Muʕǧam—which, I believe, may be beneficial (see below) in spite of the ultimate untenability of its basic approach—is to contrast his method with the Bohas’ian one in order to determine its place among the “mimophoneticsian”.

(1) One major difference is certainly the fact Gabal still shares with mainstream linguistics the “common assumption that the phoneme is the most basic meaning differentiating unit,” while Bohas “considers phonetic features the ultimate distinctive units of a language that cannot be divided further.” Gabal thus remains on the level of what Bohas calls the “etymon” (abb. ϵ) while Bohas himself goes a step farther in that he postulates a “combination of elements […] such as [labial], [coronal], [+/-voice], [fricative], etc.”, i.e., the so-called “matrix” (abb. μ), to “carry the basic semantic notion of a given stock of words”. Therefore, even though the articulation of the consonants are of key importance also for Gabal, his “nuclei” (fuṣūl muʕǧamiyyah) are less comparable to Bohas’ matrices than to his étymons, i.e., the combinations of two phonemes, like, for example, {q, s}, {k, t}, {ǧ, d}, and {k, s}. While in Bohas’ theory, all of the latter are generated by one and the same matrix, namely μ (coronal), [dorsal]) ‘to cut, decide, tear, destroy, death’, Gabal does not see combinations of Q and S, K and T, G and D, or K and S as belonging together under one overarching semantic “roof”.

Other differences have already been mentioned above:

(2) In his mimophonic explanations Gabal is more consistent than Bohas. While Gabal’s approach covers both, the biconsonantal nuclei and the modifiers, Bohas’s (and Dat’s) mimophony applies to their matrices et étymons only, while “the augments themselves have no semantic or grammatical purpose that could explain why each is added in a specific instance”.

(3) Linearity vs. interchangeability of elements within the biconsonantal nuclei: To take up the above example, while for Gabal QS- and SQ- are two distinct bases, Bohas would treat them as two (of several other) possible realisations of ϵ (q, s). The same goes for KT- and TK- vs. ϵ (k, t); GĐ- and DĠ- vs. ϵ (ǧ, d); as well as KS- and SK- vs. ϵ (k, s).

69 With his suggestion that, in Hasselbach’s paraphrase, “on a purely diachronic level, the combinations of phonetic features and notions seem to be tightly linked to the capacities of the first speakers to imitate real-world objects phonetically” (HASSELBACH, op.cit., 376, referring to BOHAS & DAT 2007, 193), Bohas comes conspicuously close to Husein’s argument, sketched in note 67 above.

70 For a concise and sober overview, cf., e.g., HASSELBACH’S review of BOHAS & DAT 2007.

71 HASSELBACH, op.cit., 373 (my emphasis, S.G.).

72 HASSELBACH, op.cit., 375; cf. above, note 57.
(4) Position of additional modifiers: With the exception of hamz and the “weak” consonants/semivowels W and Y, the only position in which Gabal considers modifiers is that of C1 following a C1C2-nucleus. In contrast, Bohas’ian “radicals” (abb. R), i.e., the triradical roots that actually exist in the language and constitute autonomous lexemes, are generated from a biconsonantal etymon, e.g. ε {b, t}, either (a) by reduplication of the second etymon phoneme (gives √BTT), or (b) the addition of a sonorant (R, L, M, N) or guttural (ʕ, H, Ḥ) in any position (gives, e.g., inBaTα and BaTaλa); (c) by addition of a glide (Y, W); (d) by prefixation, as in saBaTα; (e) by adding a final consonant, mostly F or B; or (f) by the merger of two independent etymons, as in ba-ta-ka (presumably a fusion of ε {b, t} and ε {t, k}). Interestingly enough, in Bohas’ theory, these augmentations “have no significant effect on the semantic range of a given etymon,” as Hasselbach rightly observes;73 in Gabal’s theory, only the glides and hamza remain similarly ineffective.

Putting Gabal and Western research in dialogue—the root √ʕRB, for example

As already stated in the introduction, I do not think that the many shortcomings of Gabal’s approach should serve the scholarly community as a justification for an outright rejection of the entire Muṯḡam. Let me therefore close this paper with a short demonstration of what Gabal’s findings may add to our knowledge, or evidence-based hypotheses, about a sample root whose etymology seems to be particularly difficult to establish. As a case in point may serve Ar (and Sem) √ʕRB. The semantic diversity within this root is enormous and any attempt to disentangle the complexity seems to be doomed to plunge the etymologist into deep despair. In Modern Standard Arabic alone we have at least six main values74 (the list gives some major exponents of each only, not the whole bulk of obvious derivatives):

1. √ʕRB ʕarab ‘Arab’, ʕarabī ‘Arabic’, ʕarraba ‘to make Arabic, Arabicize, translate into Arabic’, ʔaʕraba ‘to use desinential inflection, i.e., the ʔiʕrāb’
2. √ʕRB ʔaʕraba ‘to express, voice, state clearly’
3. √ʕRB ʕarraba ‘to give earnest money, make a down payment (ʕurbūn), ʕarrāb ‘godfather, sponsor’
4. √ʕRB ʕarabā‘swift river’
5. √ʕRB ʕarabā‘carriage, wagon, cart, coach’
6. √ʕRB (wādī) ʕarabā‘the Arabah’ (depression to the south of the Dead Sea, Jordan Rift Valley)75

Other values, now obsolete, include:76

73 Hasselbach, op.cit., 374.
74 Taking the entry √ʕRB in WEHR/COWAN’s Dictionary as the database for the survey of the MSA part.
75 Not in WEHR/COWAN 1979 but evidently still in use.
Stephan Guth

1. ṣarib ‘(well, river) containing/yielding much water, abundance of water’
2. ṣaraba‘soul, mind’
3. ṣurbānāt‘(a sort of) lizard’
4. ṣarūb (also [F] ṣarābā, ṣarbī) ‘loving, pleasing, of matching age’; cf. also [F] (denom.) vb. IV, ṣaṣra‘b matrimonium initium femina ṣarīb appella- ta’; should we also compare [LZ] DaṯAr ṣarab lī- ‘être bon pour’?
5. ṣaraba‘to incite with lust, arouse (a partner’s) sexual appetite’, ṣaṣra‘b ‘to copulate, have sex’; cf. also ḍiṣṣra‘b, vb. X, [F] appetitīt māre(m) (vacca), [L] to desire the bull (said of a cow)’
7. ṣārāb i (ṣarb) ‘to eat (much), devour’ [F,L,W]; cf. also [LZ] DaṯAr ṣarab ‘être glouton, grand mangeur’, ṣārūb ‘dévorateur, qui dévore, qui a la fringale’
8. ṣariba‘bad, corrupt, disordered (stomach)’; cf. also ḍaʕraba‘matrimonium iniit cum femina ṣarūb appellata’; should we also compare [LZ] DaṯAr ṣarab lī- ‘être bon pour’?
9. ṣarūba‘(an old, pre-Islamic name for) Friday’
10. ṣarraba‘to incite with lust, arouse (a partner’s) sexual appetite’, ṣaʕraba‘to copulate, have sex’, [LZ] YemAr ṣarab ‘to have sex’; cf. also ḍiṣṣra‘b, vb. X, [F] appetitīt māre(m) (vacca), [L] to desire the bull (said of a cow)’
11. ṣurbub‘abundant water, such as is clear, or limpid’;
12. ṣārāb ‘fruit of the ḥazām tree’
13. ṣārūba‘white/excellent (barley)’
14. ṣūrb, a species of barley-grass, ‘dried buhmā plant’ [F,L]
15. DaṯAr ṣurbiyat‘inguinal region, groin; turgor of lymph node’ [LZ]
16. ‘ṣūrāb ‘clear, limpid, clean (water, a palm-tree, a horse’s hoof, language, etc.); pure, genuine, hence: noble (horse etc., race)’; also (redupl.) ṣūrāba‘abundant water, such as is clear, or limpid’; ṣarraba, [H,W:] also ḍaṣṣra‘b, ‘to prune (a palm-tree); to make an incision in the bottom of the horse / to scarify (a horse) (to make clear that it is a good horse); [F] puram et a viitis immunem protulit (loquelam) [= overlapping with ṣRB in ṣiṣryāb]; to reproach, upbraid s.o. [i.e., point out clearly the faults in s.o.’s behaviour]; ṣaṣṣra‘b [F] ‘distinctam, manifestam effecit (rem)’. – [F] ṣūrb ‘noble horse’, ṣarab ‘nobilitas generis (in equis)’, ṣārūb ‘boum species glabra’; [overlapping with ṣRB ‘Arabic’:] (ḥayl) ṣārāb ‘Arabici nobilisque equi’ (ṣārāb) Arabica et viitis immunis fuit (loquela), ṣārāb ṣārībāl /-āt / ṣārī- bāl’ [F] (Arabum) gens pura / [L] the pure, or genuine Arabs’. – Cf. also next item?
17. DaṯAr ṣurtibiyat ‘inguinal region, groin; turgor of lymph node’ [LZ]
18. ṣūrāb ‘fruit of the ḥazām tree’
What can we make out of this evidence? It seems difficult, if not impossible, to find a common denominator in all these values, even if we leave unconsidered those items that seem to be of foreign origin or due to metathesis, such as $\text{â'arâbā}'$ ‘carriage, wagon, cart, coach’ (from Pers?, Grk?, Skr via Av?, or a corruption of Ar $\text{â'arâdbâ}'$ ‘stone-throwing machine, military siege weapon’, hence also ‘carriage carrying a gun’$^{77}$).$^{25}$ $\text{â'urûbā}'$ ‘Seventh Heaven’ (probably from, or at least akin to, Targ $\text{â'îrâbôj}$), and the dialectal $\text{â'arâbâ}'$ ‘quarter tone, etc.’ and $\text{â'urâbi}'$ ‘tetragonal stones’ (both perhaps from $\sqrt{\text{râba}}$), with metathesis.$^{78}$ Following a triradicalist approach and drawing on previous research and evidence in Semitic, we can tentatively group the items in six larger semantic complexes$^{79}$ (which, however, still do not account for a considerable number of the less frequent words)$^{80}$:

(A) ‘to enter’: According to many (Huehnergard, Kogan, Klein, et al.), this is the very basic value of the root in Sem [Akk $\text{erêbu}$ ‘to enter, enter in the presence (of a god, king, etc.), come in (said of taxes), come (said of months), invade, penetrate; to return, arrive, come, go home’, (Š-stem) $\text{sûrûbu}$ ‘to penetrate’, Ug Phoen $\text{ôrb}$ ‘to enter, go in’). This value seems to be manifest however in Akk, Ug and Phoen only, while it has undergone a shift, or several shifts, of meaning in the remaining Sem area where it is mostly realized as one of five new semantic bases, presented below. Retso, meanwhile, seems to regard Ar $\text{hârwâba}$ ‘to penetrate, copulate, have sex’ ($\text{â'rb}$ ‘enter’ a woman’) and perhaps also the n.gent. $\text{srâb}$ itself ($\sqrt{\text{RB}}$) as possible reflexes of the original ‘to enter’, suggesting for the latter an original meaning of ‘those who have entered [,. .,] into the service of a divinity and remain his slaves or his property’;$^{81}$ cf. also next but one paragraph.

(B) ‘to set, go down (sun), evening, west’: This value is usually explained as an extension of (A), based on the idea of the sun “entering”, i.e., setting, behind/below the horizon. The value can be observed already in Akk $\text{erêb šâmî},$ Ug $\text{ôrb špš}$ ‘sunset’ and is very frequent throughout Sem, including Ar (here, however, with $\text{*RB} > \text{GRB}$, e.g., $\text{gâruba}, \text{gârîba}$ ‘to set’, $\text{gârb}$ ‘place of sunset, west’).$^{82}$ Rotter suggested that also Ar $\text{â'arâbâl}$

77 For details and references cf. the entry in EtymArab, with further references.
78 As note 77.
79 First sketched in the entries I prepared for the EtymArab online dictionary; for more details cf. there.
80 The “homeless” ones include the wadi $\text{ârâbâl}$ ($\text{RB}$), the ‘white/excellent’ barley ($\text{â'rb}$) and a species of barley-grass called $\text{buhmû}$ ($\text{RB}$), the fruit from a certain tree ($\text{â'rb}$ ‘white’, ‘-at’), the ‘bag with which the udder of a sheep, or goat, is covered’ ($\sqrt{\text{râba}}$, ‘somebody’ ($\text{â'rb}$ ‘Ug’, ‘white’, ‘order, arrangement, result’).
81 RETSO 2003: 598.
82 A shift regarded by NOLDEKE 1900: 155, n.1, as a “Steigerung”, likely to be induced by neighbouring -R-.
(11)‘ṣə̀RB), a pre-Islamic name for ‘Friday’, should be put here, originally indicating the *‘day of Venus’ (Lat dies Veneris), i.e., the day of the ancient deity of the evening star. 83

(C) ‘pledge, to step in, stand surety or bail for, give guarantee; earnest money’: In ascribing the meaning *‘to enter, stand surety or bail for, guarantee’ to Sem _vertical_bar RB, Huehnergard obviously regards the idea of ‘stepping in for s.o.’ as integral aspect of the Sem root, going together with (A) *‘to enter’. 84 According to Klein, this is doubted by others (cf., e.g., the fact that BDB groups this value apart from ‘to enter’). 85 BDB mentions that the value usually is connected with (D) *‘to mix’, although this is ‘quite uncertain’. 86 There is consensus nevertheless that the value ‘to step in for s.o., etc.’ is a major basis around which a larger semantic field has built up in CSem (Ug, Can, Aram, Ar, Sar), cf., e.g., Ug ʕrb, Hbr ʕarab ‘to take on pledge, give in pledge, go surety for; to barter, exchange’, Syr ʕrab ‘to vouch for, go surety for’, ʕərb ‘to promise solemnly, be surety, pledge o.s.; (with b-, l-, ʕal-) esp. to stand sponsor (at baptism)’, ʕarāḇ(n)ā ‘surety sponsor, god-parent’ (> Ar ʕRB ʕarrāb ‘godfather’), Ar ʕarrabha ‘to give earnest money’ (ʕRB); Hbr ʕərahôn ‘pledge’, JudAram, ChrPal ʕarbânā (> Ar ʕarabôn ‘pledge, token’, usually treated as from 4-rad. ʕRB). Retsō even tends to see the n.gent. ʕarab (ʕRB) itself as belonging here (as an extension from ‘to enter’) when he suggests an interpretation of the name ʕarab as *‘those who have entered into the service of a divinity and remain his slaves or his property’. 87

(D) *‘mixture > confusion’: With the exception, perhaps, of ʕRB ʕarib ‘bad, corrupt, disordered (stomach)’, there seem to be no other direct reflexes of this basic value in Ar. It figures on the list here nevertheless, for two reasons: first, because there is an old theory that would see the n.gent. ʕarab (ʕRB) as originally meaning *‘the mixed people’ (or even *‘rifraff’), a term applied by the Israelites to all types of foreigners and non-natives; and second, because it could serve as a semantic link between (A) *‘to enter’ and (E) *‘vehemence’ (see below), or (if *‘to enter’ has to be separated from *‘mixture’) as the origin from which *‘vehemence’ could have developed as an Ar innovation. The idea of *‘mixture > confusion’ seems to be realized mainly in Hbr ʕarab, ʕərab, Syr ʕarab, ʕərb ‘to mix, mingle’, Hbr ʕərah ‘mixture, mixed company; swarm (non-Israelites; foreign parts of the Egyptian population, the ethnic melting pot of Babel, foreigners in the land of Juda)’, ʕərah ‘swarm of wild bees or flies—the forth plague of Egypt’ (prob. < *‘swarm of stinging flies’), (?) Syr ʕərābā, ʕərābā ‘swarm of vermin and insect; mixed multitude, riff-raff, rabble; confusion (of words)’. 88 – Do we also have to compare Ar ʕarbānaθ, ʕarbānaθ ‘(a sort of) lizard’ (ʕRB)? 89

\[\text{References}\]

83 Rotter 1993: 123, n. 56.
84 Huehnergard 2011, s.r. ‘RB.
85 Klein 1987: s.r. ‘RB.
86 BDB: s.r. ‘RB.
87 Retsō, The Arabs, 598.
88 Militarev & Kogan, SED II, #36 reconstruct Sem *ʕərərab- ‘kind of vermin, worm’.
89 Klein 1987 considers also Hbr Aram ʕəRB, Ar ʕəRB as belonging here (as extension in *‘L): Hbr ʕərəbel ‘to mix; to cause to whirl; to confuse’, Syr ʕərbel, Ar ərbala ‘to sift’.
(E) ‘vehemence (passion, vitality, agility, outburst, expression, excess, abundance, abundance of passion, exuberance, affection)’: This value is one of the broadest bases for new derivations in Ar, but apparently only there, i.e., it seems to be an Ar innovation. It can be thought to be a development from (D) when the ‘mixture, confusion’ was thought to exceed a certain limit or an emotional quality was attached to it; in many derivations from this basis there is also an element of the ungovernable, unmanageable, or of an uncontrollable eruption. The most frequent items belonging to this complex are probably: ‘abundance (of water)’ (‘rb), esp. that in a ‘swift river’ (‘rb) (of which ‘rb ‘soul, mind’ is likely to be figurative use); it is also tempting to draw a line from this swiftness and agility to that of a ‘kind of’ lizard (‘rb) and the turbulences in a ‘corrupt, disordered’ stomach (‘rb, but cf. D, above) and the ‘swelling’ caused by it (‘rb); DaAr‘urbīyayá’ ‘inguinal region; lymphoma’ (‘rb) certainly also belongs here; the idea of excess is evident in the verb ‘ to eat (much), devour’ (‘rb), and that of passion and affectation in the adj. ‘ to eat (much), devour’ (‘rb) that the Qur’ān uses as an epithet to describe the virgins of Paradise; if the pre-Islamic name for ‘Friday’, ‘ (‘rb), originally really means ‘Venus’ (cf. B, above), then one could also interpret this name as ‘the Affectionate, Loving’ one (rather than ‘Deity of the Evening Star’), from *‘to set, go down < to enter’); to ‘loving, pleasing’ one could also put ‘ to arouse (a partner’s) sexual appetite’ and ‘ to penetrate, copulate, have sex’ (‘rb), keeping in mind, however, that Retsö interpreted the latter as a reflex of (A) *‘to enter’; the same verbs ‘ and ‘ can, however, also remain free of all sexual implication and instead refer to an eruption, an outburst, a letting out of feelings, emotions, thoughts, etc., i.e. an ‘expression’ (‘rb), an outward showing of emotions or feelings or uttering of thoughts; if this ‘expression’ is not properly controlled, we get ‘ ‘foul speech, obscene talk’ (‘rb).

(F) The sixth large semantic cluster within Ar ‘rb is that of ‘clarity, purity’ and hence also ‘nobility’ (‘rb). Since this value, too, seems to be an Ar idiomsynasy, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to try to derive it from the preceding complex, in itself probably an Ar innovation, along the hypothetical line *‘vehemence > abundance > abundance of water > abundance of clear water > clear water > clear > pure > noble’.

Indeed, the idea of ‘abundance’ mostly occurs in connection with water, and items like those indicating an ‘abundance (of water)’ (‘rb) or a ‘swift river’ (‘rb), mentioned in the preceding paragraph, are often characterized in the dictionaries simultaneously with the attribute ‘clear, pure’ and can thus easily serve as bridge between ‘abundance’ and ‘clarity, purity’, e.g., ‘soul, mind’ also fits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.) The basic idea of *‘clarity, purity’ is then transferred into quite a number of very different contexts, so that verbs like ‘ or ‘soul, mind’ also suits into this picture: a swift mind is often also a clear mind.)
out clearly the faults in s.o.’s behaviour], etc. From ‘purity’ the step is not far to ‘nobility’, particularly that of horses (‘ṣurb ‘noble horse’, ‘ṣarab ‘purity of race’), but often overlapping with ethnic purity, esp. that of the Arabs (‘ṣRB’) themselves. – With all probability also ‘ṣarabt ‘white/excellent’ barley (‘ṣRB’) is just a specific application of ‘purity’ on this type of corn.

This is, roughly, where an etymologist with a traditional triradicalist approach will get. In how far do the findings of biradicalists like Ehret, Bohas and Gabal alter or corroborate this picture?

In his seminal study on “The Origin of Third Consonants in Semitic” (1989), Ehret reconstructs a “pre-Protosemitic” root *ṣR ‘to take out, remove’ from which he assumes the following Ar verbs (cited with their verbal noun) to be derived by reduplication or extension in third consonant modifiers:

- ṣarṣar ‘to uncork, pull out an eye’
- ṣarab ‘to separate, put by, put aside’
- ṣarṯ ‘to remove, lift up, lay aside’
- ṣard ‘to throw or fling far’
- ṣarad ‘to flee, take to flight’
- ṣardas ‘to throw to the ground’
- ṣarẓ ‘to tear out violently’
- ṣard ‘to offer, present, show itself, happen, occur, come to meet, show, bring to mind, give or take in exchange’
- ṣarq ‘to depart, set out’
- ṣarw ‘to come up to, approach, visit, occur, happen’

The value ‘to separate, put by, put aside’ of √ṣRB does not figure as such in our own list above. But it seems to be identical with the ‘pruning’ of a palm-tree (‘ṣarraba, ʔaʕraba), an operation in which the leaves are separated and put aside in order to clean the plant. In our own sketch of the semantic field we had assumed this pruning to be a special use of ‘cleaning’ and therefore suggested to make it dependent on (F) ‘clarity, limpidness, purity’ (‘ṣRB). Ehret’s reconstruction would now suggest to see it the other way round and derive the latter from the former. In addition, his findings would invite us to see subfield (F) of √ṣRB together with the other “derivations” from pre-PSem *ṣR—which, however, does not help in any way when it comes to disentangle the remaining areas of the complex field.

In his—not less seminal—book Reconstructing Proto-Afroasiatic (1995), Ehret comes with yet another reconstruction: From pre-PSem *ṣR ‘to be raised’ (< AfrAs *ṣir- ‘to be raised; sky’), he derives the Ar verbs

- ṣarb ‘to swell and suppurate’
- ṣarg ‘to ascend, mount, rise’
- ṣard ‘to shoot up, grow’
- ṣarš ‘to build, erect a trellis’. 92

90 For more details cf. the ṣRB entries in EtymArab.
91 EHRET, “The Origin”, 175-6 (item #33).
The first item is \( ^{16} \text{ľRB} \) in our above list. While we tended to regard the camel’s ‘swollen and purulent’ hump as dependent on either (D) ‘mixture > confusion’ or (E) ‘vehemence’ (incl. excess, abundance, outburst, etc.), Ehret assumes the idea of ‘being raised’ as the underlying general notion. Worth further consideration, I think (all the more so since we will find something similar also in Gabal’s study, see below). Unfortunately though, this step, too, does not bring much more light into the remaining areas of the etymological labyrinth of \( \sqrt{\text{ľRB}} \). One possible consequence would probably be to separate items that can be thought to derive from *‘swelling’ from the rest and consider the possibility of two (or more) distinct etymologies of the different \( \text{ľRB} \) complexes.

Unlike Ehret’s and Gabal’s root nuclei, Bohas’ etymons are, as we saw, non-linear. This means that in order to find a biconsonantal basis from which \( \sqrt{\text{ľRB}} \) may be derived, we have to investigate three cases:

\[
\begin{align*}
\epsilon \{\text{s}, \text{r}\} + /\text{b}/ \\
\epsilon \{\text{s}, \text{b}\} + /\text{r}/ \\
\epsilon \{\text{r}, \text{b}\} + /\text{s}/
\end{align*}
\]

And also a forth possibility has to be taken into account, namely an “etymon merger”:

\[
\epsilon \{\text{s}, \text{r}\} + \epsilon \{\text{r}, \text{b}\}
\]

The data that are to be found in Bohas’ *Matrices, étymons, racines* (1997) and seem to be of possible relevance in our case are:

\[
\begin{align*}
\epsilon \{\text{b}, \text{r}\} /\text{b/r}/ & - ‘good work, good deed, beneficence, liberality, charity; piety; just, truthful, faithful (one of the names of God)’ (\text{barr, bārra, tabarrara, bīr, bār}) \\
/\text{r/b}/ & - ‘benevolent, beneficent; master, lord (also: the Lord, God)’ (\text{rabb, murtabb}) \\
\epsilon \{\text{b}, \text{s}\} /\text{b/s}/ & - ‘noise/sound produced by water when poured from a bottle’ (\text{baʃbaʃ}) \\
& - ‘to make long strides (said of animals)’ (\text{bāʃa ḫabawaʃaʃ}) \\
/\text{s/b}/ & - ‘to gurgle (bucket when being filled with water)’ (\text{ṣabbas}) \\
& - ‘wide and made with all one’s forces (jump, race)’ (\text{wafīb}) \\
\epsilon \{\text{r}, \text{s}\} /\text{s/r}/ & - ‘to be rippled, slightly agitated (said of clear water on the surface of the ground when the wind strokes over it)’ (\text{taraʃraʃa}) \\
& - ‘to become loose, and wabbled, or moved about (tooth)’ (\text{taraʃraʃa}) \\
& - ‘tall, handsome (young man)’ (\text{raʃrāʃ}) \\
& - ‘to guard, take care of’ (\text{rāʃā ḫawṣaʃal}) \\
& - ‘crowd, gathering’ (\text{rīʃal}) \\
& - ‘to compel s.o. to abstain from s.th., prevent s.o. from doing what is unlawful’ (\text{warraʃa}) \\
/\text{s/t}/ & - ‘to remove (the stopper of a bottle to uncork it)’ (\text{ṣarʃara}) \\
& - ‘movement, agitation’ (\text{ṣarʃara}) , ‘to be agitated, and, so to speak, bubbling (said, e.g., from the heart when agitated by violent emotion)’ (\text{wafīra})
\]

92 **Ehret**, *Reconstructing*, 353 and 510 (item 695). – I am not considering here two other pre-PSem *\( \text{şR} \) roots, (696) ‘to burn (intr.), shine’ and (697) ‘hard, firm, strong’ because they do not show any semantic overlapping with \( \sqrt{\text{ľRB}} \).
Of all these values, only very few seem to have any relation to any of the many $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ items of our own list:

- \(\epsilon \{b,r\}\): Both realisations of this etymon, /br/ and /rb/, seem to have to do with beneficence and doing good works. If this could be connected to the idea of ‘nobility’ (which we derived from F *‘purity’), then the second part of the corresponding $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ items could be seen together with rabb, etc.

- \(\epsilon \{b,ʕ\}\): The only possible overlapping I can see here is between sabba /sbl/ ‘to gurgle (bucket when being filled with water)’ and items such as ʕaraba /sbl/ ‘swift river’ or ʕaraba /sbl/ ‘corrupted stomach’ (all in subfields D *‘mixture > confusion’ or E *‘vehemence’).

- \(\epsilon \{r,ʕ\}\): rarrara ‘to be rippled, slightly agitated (water)’: related to (E) ‘vehemence, agitation’?

- \(\epsilon \{ categoria, \}\): saφra ‘movement, agitation’, waʕira ‘to be agitated, violent emotion’: dto.?

- \(\epsilon \{ʕ, r\} + \epsilon \{r, b\}\): A fusion of the two etymons could yield something like ‘agitation + gurgling’ or ‘agitation + beneficence’. The first could be imagined as a mutual reinforcement of the two activities; the latter could bring us, with some phantasy and twisting, to $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ the Arabs as *‘the agitated beneficent ones’.

I leave it to the reader’s discretion to judge how meaningful such speculations are and whether or not they advance our understanding of the etymology of Ar (and Sem) $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$.

I leave it to the reader’s discretion to judge how meaningful such speculations are and whether or not they advance our understanding of the etymology of Ar (and Sem) $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$.93

Gabal, like Ehret, sees $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ as composed of a nucleus $\sqrt{\text{R}}$- and a modifying -B. Unlike Ehret, however, the Egyptian author does not reckon with the possibility of a multitude of $\sqrt{\text{R}}$- bases; Gabal always looks for the one and only common denominator in all. What he identifies as the very basic value of a root or a nucleus is therefore always extracted from all the relevant elements that are found in the language. Thus, the basic value of $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ is filtered out from all existing $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ items, and the basic value of the nucleus *$\sqrt{\text{R}}$- is the common denominator of all existing combinations of the $\sqrt{\text{R}}+\ldots$ type, including also reduplication and ?, W and Y in free position.

Gabal’s $\sqrt{\text{RB}}$ chapter95 therefore starts with a presentation of the (in his view) most typical items (all to be found in our own survey, cf. numbering in parentheses):

\[\text{qurʔān Šarabī} \quad \text{‘the Arabic [i.e., clear] Quran’ (as in Q 41:3) (cf. subgroup F *‘clarity, purity’)}\]

93 BOHAS, Matrices, 99 (#33), 101 (#41), and 121-2 (#197) – my translations from French, S.G. – Where I found a common denominator in Bohas’ data, I tried to summarize.

94 For an exemplification of the dimensions that can be reached with a BOHASian approach, cf. Jean-Claude ROLLAND’s contribution in the present dossier, pp. 377, below.

95 GABAL, Muʕǧam, iii: 1471-74.
Biradicalist mimophonic triradicalism: M.H.H. Gabal’s ‘etymological’ dictionary

nahr ʕarib ‘flood’ (cf. our 37/1RB)
bīr ʕaribāt ‘well abundant in water’ (cf. 7/1RB)
ʕarabat ‘swift river’ (cf. 4/1RB)
ʕarab ‘vitality, agility, liveliness’ (cf. our subgroup E)
ʕariba a (ʕarāba) ‘be swift, lively, agitated’ (cf. subgroup E)
ʕaribat miṣdatuh ‘his stomach was disturbed due to what was loaded on it’ (cf. 15/1RB)
ʕariba ʕā-qr.wk wa-ḥabīṭa ‘there remained some traces of the wound after healing, a degeneration’ (cf. 16/1RB)
ʕariba ʕi-sanām ‘the hump (of a camel) became swollen and purulent’ (cf. 16/1RB).

He then presents his conclusion as to what constitutes the basic value of ʕ̑RB as extracted from the existing vocabulary, namely: nasāṭ wa-ṣ̑ṭilāq bi-ḥiddāt ḏātiyyaẗ līl-ḥulūs mimmā yuhbas, i.e. (roughly) ‘vehement activity/ agitation inside aiming at releasing what is locked up’. It is clear that this is our semantic subgroup (E) ‘*vehemence’ and that Gabal obviously derives all values that he considers authentic ʕ̑RB values from this one notion. Given that our own approach, for the most part of the Ar ʕ̑RB items, remained within the subfields (D) ‘*mixture > confusion’, (E) ‘*vehemence’, and (F) ‘*clarity, purity’ and that these often seem to overlap, Gabal’s suggestion looks absolutely worth reconsidering our own findings in the light of his nasāṭ wa-ṣ̑ṭilāq... Our subfields (A)–(C) (**to enter’, ‘*to go down, set’, ‘*pledge, to step in’) are mainly motivated by the non-Ar evidence and did not yield incontrovertible results. 96

Gabal’s first paragraphs are followed by an amplifying discussion in which the author explains in how far also other ʕ̑RB values than those mentioned in the beginning can be regarded as derived from the one nasāṭ miḥwarī. In many points this discussion confirms our own findings, e.g., the hypothesis that ʔ̑RB ‘expression, outburst’ should be connected to ‘*vehemence’, or that also the notion of (F) ‘*purity’ (16/1RB) may be dependent on this ‘*vehemence’ (Gabal: being free from contamination, al-ḥulūs min al-ṣawāib, is also a ḥiddāt because it means strength/power, qawwāl, this is why pedigree horses or camels are called ʕ̑rab).

In some other points Gabal suggests explanations for items that our own survey had left unconsidered, such as ʕ̑rb ‘dry buhmū plant’ (20/1RB), ʕ̑rab(a)ʕ (ʕ̑rabat) ‘fruit of the ḥazam tree’ (12/1RB), and also the wādī (al-) ʕ̑rabat (ʕ̑RB), the latter being interpreted as just taken from ʕ̑rabat ‘swift (i.e., ‘vehement’) river (with abundant water)’ (4/1RB). Interesting is also Gabal’s explanation of the n.gent. ʕ̑rab (ʕ̑RB):

the Arabs are called like this due to their ḥiddāt ḏātiyyaẗ (≈ innate passionateness, hot temperament), which shows in their vitality (nasāṭ) and their unrestrained mobility (harakat mutasayyibat) when they wander in/roam the open unprotected de-

96 15/1RB ‘Arab’ and 12/1RB ‘to copulate’ are only perhaps from A ‘to enter’, and 11/1RB (pre-Isl.) Friday’ only perhaps from B ‘to go down, set’. 1/1RB ‘to give earnest money; godfather’ is certainly from C ‘pledge, to step in’, it is right; but given that Gabal does not treat the respective items as authentic Arabic—with good reason, since they are borrowed from Aram or based on loanwords from this language—, the overwhelming majority of Ar ʕ̑RB items are indeed concentrated in the D, E and F groups.
sert in search of pasture; it also shows in the emotionality (ʕāṭifiyyaẗ), affectivity
(İmpulsiveness (infiʕāliyyaẗ) and the hot-bloodedness (harārat al-damm) that are
widespread among them; finally, [it also shows] in their ability to express their in-
nermost feelings with minute precision, i.e., [a precision that is to be found in] the
correct or, as was said: pure, expression (ʔarhus, ʔifṣāḥ).

Given that none of the many explanations that have been suggested so far for the ethnonym
is beyond doubt, Gabal’s idea should at least be retained among those that seem to be
further investigation.

The tarkīb ʕRB is treated within the chapter on ʕR + modifiers. Here, the root √ʕRB fea-
tures alongside with the geminated √ʕR:ʕR, the reduplicated √ʕRʕR, the weak √ʕR:W,
√ʕR:Y, √ʕWR, and √ʕYR, as well as the roots with sound third consonants, i.e., √ʕRG,
√ʕRN:ʕR, √ʕRD, √ʕRF, and √ʕRM. The basic value extracted from the values of all
these individual roots is said to be naqṣ ʔaw ǧard mẓāhir al-šayʔ ʔaw ẓahiri-
yabruz ‘a lack or removal on or from the outside of s.th., so that it comes out/shows/ap-
ppears’.

The dependence of the triliterals on the biliteral nucleus is explained as follows:

a lack or removal from the outside of s.th., an act that makes apparent/lets surface
what was hidden, is expressed in ‘scab, mange’ (al-ʕarr al-ǧarab, √ʕRR), and also
in the ‘openings of the handles on a jug or the button-holes at the borders of a shirt’
(√ʕRW), as well as in the ‘being stripped/divested’ (taḡarrud) expressed in √ʕRY,
and so also in the ‘opening in [the place of the missing eye in] a one-eyed person’ or a
‘cleft in the mountains’ (√ʕWR), and likewise in the ‘prominence of the middle rib
in a leaf or the instep on top of a foot’ (√ʕYR); [the same notion is contained] also in
the sharp eruption of s.th. that was locked up and is now released, or in the ‘well
that has stored up abundant water and now wells out’, accompanied by a vehement
outburst (√ʕRB), as also ‘lameness/limping’, i.e. a defect whose impact becomes
apparent in walking (√ʕRG); the ʕurš of a foot are the strong veins/ribs protruding
on it, or on a leaf (√ʕRŠ); ʕatfur ‘breadth’ is the wide side on which everything is
openly visible (√ʕRḌ); the ʕurf (crest) of a cock or (mane) of a horse is what juts
out from their bodies (√ʕRF); and so also √ʕRM [means] something accumulating

97 In The Arabs in Antiquity, RETSÖ tends to derive ʕarab from Sem ʕRB *‘to enter’ (A) which
Huehnergard, as we saw, regards as forming a unit together with *‘to step in for s.o., pledge’ (C). Earlier
theories would connect ʕarab with the ʕArabai (ʕRB) (the Arabs as *‘those who live in the Araba re-
gion’), or with the notion of *‘mixing’ (D) (the Arabs as *‘mixed company’ or, more negatively, a
‘swarm’), or with its opposite, the *‘purity and nobility’ (F) of descent, or with *‘vehemence, excess’ (E)
(the Arabs as ‘people who eat/devour a lot’ [ʕRB] or ‘have much sex’ [ʕRB]), or (by metathesis) with
the ‘Hebrews’ (ʕBR), by which the Arabs like the Hebrews are essentially seen as *‘the nomads, those
who traverse, cross, wander around’ or *‘those who come from, or inhabit, the other side of the river,
the region beyond’. – For further details cf. entry ʕarab in EtymArab.

98 Cf. EHRÊT’s pre-PSem *ʕR ‘to take out, remove’ and BOHAS’ etymon ē [r,ʕ] > ʕār > ʕarʕara ‘to
remove (the stopper of a bottle to uncork it)’.
and piling up outside on the surface, where it then peels off, as for example dirt [on a cooking pot] or the bark [on a tree].

At the same time, all these values are also explained in mimophonic terms. To conclude this presentation with an example also of this feature of Gabal’s approach, here is the explanation he gives for √ʕRB *‘sharp eruption of s.th. that was locked up and is now released’:

In √ʕRB the -B expresses a soft cohesion or accumulation and the tarkīb [as such] an internal vehemence/impetuosity, i.e., one that is stable/contained inside of something, [but] whose effect becomes apparent/juts out, despite a gentle build-up/accumulation, i.e., non-discernibility of its traces, as in Sarab ‘agility/vitality’, where [the internal impetuosity] is not apparent/uncovered, and in the biʔr Saribaẗ, the well that contains plenty of water.

References


EALL = Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics / general editor Kees Versteegh; ass. editors Mushira Eid ... [et al.]. Leiden: Brill, 2006–.


OREL, Vladimir & Olga V. STOLBOVA → HSED.


Éclats de roche : Une étude d’étymologie sur les noms de la pierre en latin, grec et arabe

JEAN-CLAUDE ROLLAND

Abstract
Starting from the Latin cases of semantic parallelism, rūpēs || rumpō and saxum || secō, this study goes through a number of Arabic denominations of the stone to demonstrate that in Arabic too there is a strong relationship between those denominations and many roots that basically express an act of breaking or cutting something. The conclusions are the following:
– the Greek equivalents of “stone”, the etymology of which is obscure, might have the same relationship with some Greek or Latin words expressing the act of breaking;
– Greek πέτρᾱ [pétrā] might be of Semitic origin.

Key words: Arabic, Greek, Latin, lexicology, etymology, stone, fragment, breaking, stroke, Bohas

Les associations sémantiques en rapport avec la pierre sont connues et banales : la première caractéristique de la pierre est sa dureté. Dure, elle est difficile à briser, à tailler, à sculpter. Ancêtre aussi bien du marteau que du couteau, elle va donc servir elle-même d’outil pour briser et tailler des objets moins durs qu’elle. Selon son volume elle est obstacle naturel sur la route ou matériau utilisé pour construire ces séparateurs que sont les parois, murs et muraill es destinés à empêcher les uns d’entrer et les autres de sortir. Il ne faut donc pas s’étonner que le latin rūpēs rocher soit considéré1 par la tradition étymologique comme une forme sans infixe nasal issue de la même racine indo-européenne2 ayant abouti au verbe rumpō briser, rompre, sans qu’on sache si cette forme rūpēs est à l’origine active ou passive, autrement dit si le rocher latin est « brisant » ou « brisé ».

Plutôt « brisé » car la pierre, aussi arrondie soit-elle par l’érosion, est généralement perçue comme ce qu’elle est, c’est à dire un fragment, un éclat de roche. De taille réduite, elle sert de projectile, d’arme lancée par la main, la fronde ou la catapulte. Tout objet un peu dur lui est comparé ou assimilé : noyau, dent, fragment d’os, corail, coquille d’œuf, coquillage et même testicules. Sous forme de sable, de gravier ou de cailloux, elle est marquée de stérilité, d’absence de végétation, de désert. Dite « précieuse » ou « semi-précieuse », elle orne le collier ou la bague. Elle est borne sur la route, statue monumentale, idole, menhir, dolmen, et tombe ou stèle au cimetière.

Cette étude se propose d’examiner brièvement dans une première partie ce qu’il en est—outre le cas de rūpēs, sur lequel nous ne reviendrons pas—des dénominations de la pierre en grec et en latin, pour la plupart d’origines obscures, et dans une deuxième partie,

---


Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 17 (2017): 377-406
© Jean-Claude Rolland, Meaux / France
plus longue et plus élaborée, de faire le même inventaire pour l’arabe, en nous appuyant sur les travaux que Georges Bohas a consacrés au lexique du coup en général et de la coupure en particulier. Ces travaux nous autoriseront en effet à rattacher à ces notions primaires tout un réseau³ de notions dérivées qu’une approche naïve ne permettrait pas forcément de percevoir d’emblée et d’une façon aussi nette et rigoureuse. Aussi renverrons-nous à ce réseau chaque fois que la relation d’une notion dérivée avec les notions primaires risquerait de ne pas être évidente. On verra que notre étude des noms arabes de la pierre, initiée et éclairée par le parallélisme morphosémantique relevé dans la paire rūpēs // rumpō, pourrait bien en retour jeter quelque lumière sur certaines dénominations grecques ou latines aux origines jugées jusqu’à ce jour obscures.

1. Les dénominations grecques et latines de la pierre

1.1. latin saxum pierre, grosse pierre, roc, rocher
1.2. latin lapis pierre, pierre précieuse
1.3. grec λίθος [líthos] pierre et πέτρᾱ [pétrā] roche, rocher

1.1. Latin saxum pierre, grosse pierre, roc, rocher

De l’origine de ce mot—que la langue française conserve précieusement comme composant de quelques termes savants tels saxifrage et saxicole—voici ce que disent Ernout et Meillet dans leur Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine (DELL), p. 597:

Pour la forme, saxum concorde avec le vieil islandais sax, le vieux haut allemand sahs « couteau, épée courte »; mais le mot germanique appartient à un groupe de noms indiquant des objets tranchants : vieux haut allemand sega, sego « scie », segesna, segansa « faux », etc. Les mots germaniques sont donc évidemment de la famille du latin secāre. Le latin saxum y peut aussi à la rigueur être rattaché, mais par un autre procès de sens : le rapport serait de même ordre que celui du latin rūpēs avec rumpō, du vieux slavon skala « pierre, rocher » avec le lituanien skeliū « je fends », etc.

Avec rūpēs // rumpō et saxum // secō, nous voilà donc en présence, pour la seule langue latine, de deux cas d’un probable parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup que la suite de cette étude aura pour objet de confirmer, d’expliquer, et d’étendre à d’autres langues que le latin. Sous le générique pierre, il faut comprendre que nous pourrons en rencontrer toutes les spécificités : rocher, caillou, gravier, sable, etc. ainsi que tout objet dur pouvant lui être comparé : noyau, dent, os, etc. Quant aux diverses et nombreuses spécificités représentées par le générique porter un coup, on les trouvera énumérées, ordonnées et explicitées dans le réseau ad hoc situé en annexe. Citons-en néanmoins ici quelques-unes : frapper, battre, couper, fendre, percer, briser, tuer, repousser, chasser, etc.

Voir Annexe.

³ Voir Annexe.
Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique

1.2. Latin lapis pierre, pierre précieuse

D’après le DELL (p. 340), le mot lapis, -idis—d’où viennent les mots français lapider, lapidaire, etc.—désigne une pierre, ou tout objet en pierre ou qui rappelle la pierre : borne miliaire ou frontière, monument funèbre, statue, et également pierre précieuse. En bref, par opposition à saxum qui n’est que la pierre brute, lapis, c’est la pierre travaillée. En ce qui concerne l’étymologie du mot, Ernout et Meillet ne s’aventurent pas à proposer la moindre hypothèse. Ils rejettent même un rapprochement avec le grec λέπας lépas rocher nu car ce mot, disent-ils, est « loin pour le sens » et « suspect d’appartenir à la famille de λέπω lépō », verbe auquel Bailly donne les sens de peler, écosser et Chantraine ceux de éplucher, enlever une râclée, manger. Le même Chantraine aligne sa position sur celle de ses collègues latinistes : « Le présent radical λέπω n’a de correspondant dans aucune autre langue. [...] Termes de substrat pour Beekes, Orbis 1971, 132. » Dans la notice consacrée à λέπας, Chantraine évoque cependant la possibilité de rapprocher ce mot soit de lapis, soit de λέπο, sans se prononcer clairement pour l’une des deux hypothèses, ni d’ailleurs les rejeter.

Moins savant et plus imprudent sans doute que ces éminentes autorités, nous nous permettons néanmoins de contester leurs deux arguments :

– le premier car entre une pierre, aussi travaillée soit-elle, et un rocher, il n’y a tout de même pas un énorme fossé sémantique. C’est aussi l’avis de Michiel De Vaan4 dont voici une copie de la notice qu’il consacre à lapis : 5

lapis, -dis 'stone, pebble' [m. d] (Naev.+)

Derivatives: lapideus ‘of stone, stony’ (Pl.+), lapidarius ‘of stone-cutting’ (Pl.+), lapidōsus ‘stony’ (Varro+), lapillus ‘small stone’ (Varro+); lapicida ‘stone-cutter’ (Varro+), lapicīdanae [f.pl.] (Cato+) lapidicīdanae [f.pl.] (Varro+) ‘stone-quarries’.


IE cognates: Gr. λέπας [n.] ‘bare rock, mountain’, λέπας, -όος [f.] ‘limpet’, λεπάδες ‘molluses which stick to rocks’ (Hsch.).

Probably a Mediterranean loanword of the structure *lVpVd-.


Notons en effet, ce deuxième cognat d’une accentuation et d’un genre grammatical différents de ceux de son homophone, le nom de ce coquillage, λέπας, que le français appelle tout simplement lépas ou lepas : c’est un coquillage univalve qui s’attache aux roches et aux bateaux et dont la dure carapace présente, comme d’ailleurs celle de tous les coquillages, une évidente ressemblance avec la pierre ;

---

4 De VAAN 2008.
5 Le contenu de cette notice est partiellement repris dans celle que Douglas HARPER consacre à lapideous dans son propre site Etymology on Line (ETYMONLINE).
– et nous contestons aussi le deuxième argument car λέπω a une très bonne raison d’être apparenté à ἱππαζ, à savoir le fait qu’il entretient avec ce mot la même relation morfosophématique que nous avons déjà rencontrée deux fois dans les paires ῥῦπες // ῥŭmpŏ et saxum // secŏ : les divers sens de ce verbe tels que donnés par Bailly et Chantraine se trouvent en effet être des déclinaisons de la notion *porter un coup* (voir annexe, A.1.3.3).

Une fois admise la parenté de lapis avec λέπω par l’intermédiaire de ἱππαζ, on peut aller plus loin. Il suffit de consulter la longue notice que Chantraine consacre à ce verbe et à ses dérivés où il n’est question que d’écailles, d’écaillules, de coques, d’êclats et de pelures d’ognon, etc. Sans surprise, on y trouvera un autre cognat : λέπα lèpre, maladie « caractérisée à un premier stade par la formation d’écailles, de tubercules, de pustules à la surface de la peau ». (TLF).

À ce stade où il semble acquis que les radicaux *lap- et *lep- n’en forment finalement qu’un seul — qu’à l’instar de de Vaan on aurait peut-être écrit *la/ep- —, il est tentant de nous tourner à nouveau vers le latin où nous attend lepus, -oris lièvre, et vers le français où nous attend lapin, deux mots que l’étymologie traditionnelle traite curieusement par des voies différentes quand ce n’est pas par un expédition : « Emprunt à une langue méditerranéenne ». Quel rapport ces animaux entretiennent-ils donc avec la pierre ? Aucun, a priori, même si, via le français lapereau qui se dit laparo en portugais, on a tenté de faire remonter lapin au thème ibéro-roman *lappa- « pierre plate » qui serait à l’origine du portugais lapa « roche saillante ; caverne, grotte », attesté en 907 dans un texte latin,6, au prétexte que les lapins établissent leur repaire souvent dans la terre couverte de pierres.

Sceptique quant à cette hypothèse — on le serait à moins ! —, Pierre Guiraud7 propose quant à lui un croisement du latin lepus avec le verbe français lapper « manger avec avidité, être gourmand ». Nous lui donnons raison mais en partie seulement : en observant la forme et le fonctionnement des incisives caractéristiques de ces deux espèces, nos ancêtres avaient qualifié plus justement que par notre fautif « rongeurs »8 ces animaux qui « mordaient à belles dents » leur nourriture : le lièvre, baptisé lepus en Sicile, d’après Varron, tient très probablement son nom du verbe grec λέπω ; et le lapin son nom français tout aussi probablement d’une variante latine *lāpo disparue mais dont la réalité est attestée par l’existence du substantif lapis, lequel devait être à *lāpo ce que λέπαζ est à λέπω.

Il est bien possible que ces radicaux ne soient que méditerranéens car on ne leur voit pas de cognats dans d’autres langues que le grec et le latin, mais il est plus que probable que tous les mots que nous venons de voir appartiennent à une petite famille dont l’invariant sémantique de base est *porter un coup*, c’est à dire le même qui a été relevé par Ernout et Meillet dans les paires ῥῦπες // ῥŭmpŏ et saxum // secŏ. Autour de la volcanique Méditerranée, on n’utilisait pas le même vocabulaire mais on avait la même vision de la pierre : un fragment de roche, une écaille de la croûte terrestre.

6 Le Trésor de la langue française (TLF).
7 Dictionnaire des étymologies obscures.
8 Les Léporidés sont maintenant classés dans l’ordre des Lagomorphes.
1.3. λίθος [lithos] ‘pierre’ et πέτρα [pétrâ] ‘roche, rocher’

Du point de vue du sens, λίθος est à πέτρα ce que lapis est à saxum, l’un désignant la pierre travaillée et l’autre la pierre brute.

Nous devons au premier l’un des composants de nos lithographie, mégalithe et autres termes savants, et au deuxième—via le latin petra très tôt emprunté au grec—la famille de pierre avec ses deux branches de dérivés populaires (ex. pierreux) et savants (ex. pétrifier, pétrole).

Nous n’en savons guère plus sur ces deux vocables. Leur origine est inconnue. Chantraine ne s’y attarde pas ; sa notice Étymologie du premier se résume à un mot : « Ignorée ». Pour le deuxième, ce sera une phrase : « Parmi les étymologies énumérées chez Frisk, aucune n’est satisfaisante. » Notre méconnaissance de la langue allemande nous interdit de consulter l’ouvrage de cet auteur et c’est bien dommage car nous aurions souhaité vérifier si les hypothèses que nous nous apprêtons à proposer sont vraiment nouvelles.

Nous aurons effectivement, en conclusion de notre étude, des propositions étymologiques à faire, aussi bien pour λίθος que pour πέτρα. Mais il nous faudra d’abord nous pencher assez longuement sur les dénominations arabes de la pierre. Voyons si le détour en vaut la peine.

2. Les dénominations arabes de la pierre

2.1. ḥaǧar pierre
2.2. ḥaṣan (ḥaṣ) pierraille, cailloux
2.3. qaḍḍ sable et petits cailloux, gravier
2.4. raml sable
2.5. šaḥr roc, rocher
2.6. ḡundul ou ḡandal pierre, rocher
2.7. Synthèse

Remarques générales préliminaires

Tels la matière qu’ils dénotent, les six mots vedettes que nous avons choisis ont perduré à travers les siècles. Ils restent aussi usuels en arabe moderne qu’ils le furent en arabe classique, sans changement de forme ni de sens. C’est la raison pour laquelle nous avons choisi de les privilégier. Ce n’est pas pour autant que, dans les lignes qui suivent, nous passerons sous silence les mots de l’arabe classique devenus obsolètes, car ils ont une fonction essentielle, celle de révéler des relations sémantiques que le seul examen du lexique moderne aurait laissées dans l’ombre.

Notre étude porte exclusivement sur les dénominations de la pierre, non sur les racines exprimant la notion de porter un coup en ses diverses déclinaisons, travail dont la plus grosse partie a été faite par Georges Bohas ou par des étudiants sous sa direction. Nous nous sommes efforcé de trouver à quelle famille morpho-sémantique appartenait chacun de

9 On retrouve ce mot dans le toponyme espagnol Guadalajara, littéralement « l’oued des pierres ».
10 À ne pas confondre avec l’emprunt ḡundūl « gondole ».
nos mots titres. Ce faisant, nous avons le plus souvent constaté la présence du parallélisme *pierre // porter un coup* au sein des racines inventoriées, mais nous n’avons pas rejeté celles qui ne présentaient qu’un seul des composants dans la mesure où elles étaient dotées des caractéristiques morphologiques de la famille considérée, renforçant par leur seule existence celle de la famille toute entière.

Dans la théorie de Bohas, une famille morphosémantique arabe se caractérise par la présence, au sein des racines qui la composent, d’un “étymon” bilitère de type \( \{C^1, C^2\} \) porteur d’une même charge sémantique. La troisième consonne d’une racine trilitère a le statut de crément —préfixe, suffixe ou infixe— et la place des consonnes n’est ni fixe ni ordonnée. Les racines quadrilitères ont deux créments ou sont le résultat du croisement de deux étymons synonymes ou complémentaires, soit \( \{C^1, C^2\} + \{C^3, C^4\} \). Les racines trilitères elles-mêmes peuvent être le résultat d’un croisement d’étymons, soit \( \{C^1, C^2\} + \{C^3, C^4\} \). On verra que nous avons très souvent pu constituer dans chaque famille de nombreux sous-groupes de racines composées des mêmes consonnes permutées, au point que ces racines apparaissent parfois comme de simples variantes les unes des autres.

Les glides \( w \) et \( y \) n’étant généralement pas considérés comme des radicales, les racines trilitères qui en comportent révèlent d’emblée leur étymon. C’est aussi le cas des racines dites “sourdes” de type \( C^1-C^2-C^3 \) et des racines quadri-litères à couple redoublé de type \( C^1-C^2-C^3-C^4 \). Ces racines sont dites “non ambiguës”. Toutes les autres sont dites “ambiguës” car elles pourraient être construites sur n’importe lequel des trois étymons théoriquement possibles : \( \{C^1, C^2\}, \{C^1, C^3\} \) ou \( \{C^2, C^3\} \). Seul le sémantisme de la racine en question permet alors de décider lequel des trois étymons est à privilégier, et par là à quelle famille morphosémantique peut être associée cette racine ou au moins certains de ses dérivés, le lexique arabe n’étant pas exempt de cas d’homonymie.

La théorie de Bohas permet d’opérer des regroupements lexicaux à un niveau submorphémique à partir des traits phonétiques qui caractérisent les diverses consonnes de l’arabe et de constituer ainsi des “matrices” phoniques d’étymons synonymes. Chaque matrice a donc son propre invariant notionnel et sa propre arborescence de ramifications sémantiques. Au moins trois des matrices révélées à ce jour—dont la matrice n° 5—ont *porter un coup ou des coups* comme invariant notionnel, ce qui a permis à Bohas d’élaborer le document que nous avons mis en annexe pour nous y référer en cas de besoin. Cela étant, nous avons pris le parti d’en rester généralement au niveau morphémique, laissant à d’autres, plus savants en phonétique et plus hardis, le soin de constituer sur ces bases des familles plus vastes mais en moins grand nombre. On pouvait néanmoins supposer que certains de nos mots titres relèveraient d’une même matrice : on vérifiera que trois d’entre eux relèvent effectivement de la matrice n° 5 et un quatrième de la matrice n° 1, deux des trois matrices ayant *porter un coup ou des coups* comme invariant notionnel.

### 2.1. ḥaǧar pierre

À tout seigneur, tout honneur. Nous nous devions de commencer cette étude par le substantif qui reste le terme le plus usuel pour désigner la pierre.
2.1.1. Morphosémantisme de la racine

Sous l’entrée √ḥǧr du dictionnaire de Kazimirski, on trouvera, entre autres, les items suivants :

- ḥaǧar pierre
- ḥaǧara empêcher quelqu’un d’approcher, lui interdire l’accès
- ḥuǧraẗ enclos pour les chameaux ; cabinet, cellule, chambre

On constate d’emblée dans cette racine la présence du parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup. Les sens du verbe et ceux de ḥuǧraẗ relèvent en effet des items A.7.1. pousser, repousser et A.7.2. protéger conserver, garder du réseau sémantique de porter un coup (voir annexe).

On pourrait en rester là et passer au mot titre suivant. Mais les plus sceptiques de nos lecteurs risqueraient de critiquer la légèreté avec laquelle nous traiterions la première de nos vedettes en nous appuyant sur le seul fait que les notions de pousser et de protéger auraient quelque chose à voir avec porter un coup ou couper. Et ils auraient raison. Voyons donc d’abord ce qu’il en est de la morphologie et des liens de parenté que la racine √ḥǧr entretient avec d’autres racines arabes ou plus généralement sémitiques.

La première racine qu’il vient à l’esprit de rapprocher est √ǧrḥ blessé (à l’arme blanche), faire une coupure dans la chair : d’aucuns diraient que les deux racines pourraient effectivement être apparentées, au moins par le forme, au prix d’une simple métathèse. Nous préférons dire que ces deux racines ont peut-être le même étymon {ǧ,r} affecté du même crément ḥ, en position initiale ou préfixée dans l’un, en position finale ou suffixe dans l’autre. Il se trouve que, dans la théorie de Bohas, cet étymon, doté de la charge sémantique porter un coup ou des coups, portait le même étymon dans une racine non ambiguë, la racine √ǧrr. Aux formes verbales I et IV de cette racine, on trouve effectivement les significations suivantes :

- ḡaṛra – I. extraire, arracher, faire sortir ; fendre la langue à un petit chameau – IV. porter un coup de lance

Or, sous cette même entrée, dans le dictionnaire de Kazimirski, on trouve également :

- ḡarr coquillages ou autres petits objets qu’on attache au cou des animaux en guise d’ornement – ḡarrāraẗ terrain déprimé, encaissé, couvert de cailloux

- ḡaḍagh sol dur et rocailleux n’est à l’évidence qu’une extension du radical ġr- par redoublement de la première radicale.

On peut ajouter le tigré gərgər rocher, falaise, trouvé dans le DRS, fasc. 3, p. 181, et l’amharique gurangur terrain pas très pierreux... mais quand même un peu ! (id. p. 189).

Ce sont des racines quadrilitères obtenue par redoublement du radical GR-, plus un infixe nasal pour la deuxième.

11 Curieusement, ne sont signalés dans le DRS sous la racine GRR (fasc. 3: 191-192), ni les sens du verbe fendre la langue à un petit chameau – IV. porter un coup de lance, ni les deux substantifs que nous donnons ici, alors que ces données sont pour nous, on le voit, essentielles.
Voilà donc qu’à l’image de ce que nous avons constaté en grec et en latin, nous trouvons associés sous une même racine sémitique, extensions comprises,

– un verbe exprimant la coupure,
– un nom désignant un rocher ou une falaise,
– plusieurs noms désignant un sol dur, un terrain pierreux, rocailleux ou caillouteux,
– et un nom désignant des coquillages.

S’il ne s’agit que d’une coïncidence, avouons qu’elle est pour le moins troublante.

À la lumière de ce qui précède, nous ne pensons pas qu’il soit nécessaire de chercher dans ḫaḡar un autre éymon que {ǧ,r}. Ne disposant pas d’autres racines non ambiguës construites sur cet éymon à examiner, voyons donc ce qu’il en est des racines ambiguës.

2.1.2. Racines ambiguës probablement apparentées

Notre hypothèse sera confortée par la présence du parallélisme pierre // couper dans de nombreuses racines ambiguës.12 Certaines sont isolées13 mais la plupart constituent des sous-groupes autour de leurs consonnes communes permutées ; c’est par elles que nous commencerons, le crément en italiques permettant de les différencier :

– Groupe ǧ-r-b

ǧūrūｂ ḇlocs de pierre servant d’assise (DRS, fasc. 3, p. 178) – ǧaraba’ (terre) frappée de sécheresse et de stérilité
sudarabique ǧrb pierre brute (DRS, id.)
ǧarab gale14
hirḡāb grand de taille (homme) – Pour la forme, cette racine quadrilatère peut être considérée comme une extension préfixée de ǧrb. Pour le sens, nous rencontrerons plus loin d’autre cas où la pierre est non seulement synonyme de dureté mais aussi de solidité et par extension de force, de grandeur, de grosseur, d’épaisseur.
syriaque garb’dūdā morceau de rocher (DRS, id., p. 179)
amharique g’arbaṭṭa inégal (terrain) ; noueux (bois) (DRS, id.)
– Groupe ǧ-r-d

ǧurdaẗ sol uni et nu, où rien ne croît – Implicitement, c’est un terrain qui s’apparente à la pierre.
ǧarada oter, enlever (p. ex. les feuilles des arbres, la peau, etc.)
tigré gārdādā ronger
Voir annexe A.1.3.3. Pour la peau qui pèle, cf. grec λέπω et λέπρα.

12 Le Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques, fasc. 3: 175 et suivantes, signale bien que de nombreuses racines en GR- ont la valeur couper > enlever, arracher, casser, etc. mais il ne fait pas de lien avec plusieurs désignations de la pierre qu’on trouve sous ces mêmes racines.
13 Voir plus bas, note 16.
14 Cette maladie de la peau nous rappelle que nous avons plus haut rencontré λέπρα lépra dont l’équivalent arabe est ḫaraṣ. On notera la présence de l’éymon {b,r} dans ces deux termes. Autrement dit, ǧarab résulte probablement du croisement des émyons {ǧ,r} et {b,r}.
Notons également que l’arabe gurad désigne les muridés...

- Groupe ġ-r-z
  ġariza être épais et dur
  ġaraza couper, retrancher

-hebreu garzen hache, pic à roc (DRS, id., p. 185)

- Groupe ġ-r-š
  hadrawi ġarīša meule à bras

- Groupe ġ-r-f
  ġurf, ġuruf terre que l’eau du torrent ronge et emporte ; berge, bord rongé par l’eau ; pl. ġurūf pierre, digue en pierre

- Groupe ġ-r-
  ġurafa enlever, emporter tout, en balayant, d’un coup de balai ou de pelle

- Groupe ġ-r-
  ḥašraǧ source dans un terrain couvert de cailloux ; cailloux

- Groupe ġ-r-
  šaraǧa – VII. se fendre ; être gercé, crevassé

Sans commentaire.

- Groupe ġ-r-
  faǧara faire jaillir l’eau en fendant un rocher
  faraǧa fendre, pourfendre

Notre parallélisme n’est avéré dans aucune de ces deux racines quoique la biblique présence du rocher dans la signification du premier verbe ne soit certainement pas fortuite. Quant au deuxième verbe, il semble bien n’être qu’une variante du premier. Quoi qu’il en soit, nous nous devions de signaler l’existence de ces deux racines au sein du groupe ġ-r-f.
– Groupe ǧ-r-m

ǧarama noyau de datte – hébreu gerem, syriaque g'rūmā os, noyau
ǧarama couper, retrancher ; prendre, enlever
Sans commentaire.

ǧammara jeter des cailloux – ǧimār petits cailloux qu’on jette, pendant les fêtes de la
Mecque, à la vallée de Muna, selon les cérémonies d’usage, comme pour lapider
Satan ; pierre sépulcrale – ǧumraḥ braise allumée, charbon ; espèce de pustules qui se
declarent sur le corps ; cailloux, petits cailloux dont le lit des torrents est jonché
ǧammara couper un palmier
Sans commentaire.

ǧumḥūr monticule de sable
ǧamḥara enlever la meilleure partie d’une chose
Cette racine quadrilatère est une probable extension de ǧmr par l’infixe guttural h. On
peut aussi la considérer comme relevant du groupe ǧ-r-h avec infixe nasal m. Nous la
retrouverons donc plus loin.

raǧama lapider – raǧam, ruǧum, ruǧmaḥ tas de pierres jetées sur un cadavre – riǧām
grande pierre ; pierre attachée au bout d’une corde pour agiter la vase au fond du puits
raǧama éloigner, repousser qqn à coups de pierres ; couper, arracher, séparer du tout
Sans commentaire.

marǧān corail
marīga être en désarroi, se déranger, se désorganiser – IV. violer, enfreindre un pacte,
une alliance
Le nom marǧān a fait l’objet d’un article de Michel Masson15 dans lequel l’auteur
démontre l’origine sémitique de ce mot et son rattachement à la racine √mrḡ mais par un
autre cheminement que le nôtre. Les deux démonstrations se confortent plus qu’elles ne
s’opposent.
La locution nominale harǧ wa-marḡ grande confusion, justement citée par Masson,
nous fournit la meilleure transition possible vers le groupe suivant.

– Groupe ǧ-r-h

ǧumḥūr monticule de sable
ǧamḥara enlever la meilleure partie d’une chose
Racine quadrilatère vue plus haut dans le groupe ǧ-r-m.

Nous n’avons dans ce groupe pas d’autres racines présentant le parallélisme pierre / couper
mais nous en avons plusieurs présentant l’un ou l’autre de ses composants :

Deux racines trilitères :
harǧ désordre, troubles et meurtres
Signalé plus haut en compagnie de marḡ dans la locution harḡ wa-marḡ. Pour le lien
sémantique avec porter un coup, voir annexe, B.2.

15 MASSON 2013b.
**Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique**

**haǧara** rompre avec qqn et s’éloigner ; abandonner, délaisser (une chose) – hiǧraẗ rupture, séparation, cessation de rapports entre les personnes qui ont été amies ; éloignement, départ ; manière de se séparer, de rompre ses relations avec qqn ; émigration d’un pays dans un autre ; Hégire.

Quatre racines quadrilitères :

**haǧāris** verglas
Nous rencontrerons d’autre cas où gel, glace et verglas sont assimilés à la pierre.

**hirgās** gros, corpulent
Même composition consonantique que la précédente.

**harāġīl** grands, longs (hommes) ; gros, énormes (chameaux)
**gawhar** bijou, pierre précieuse
À notre avis, il existe probablement deux **gawhar** homonymes, celui-là, d’origine sémitique et apparenté à **haǧar**, et **gawhar** essence, substance, nature, qui est un emprunt au pehlevi **gühr**, id., d’où le persan **gawhar**.

– **Racines isolées**

√ǧrʿ – **garʿaẗ, garʿaẗ** terrain sablonneux, monolithe de sable
hébreu **gāraʿ** tailler la barbe, raccourcir, ôter – syriaque **gʿraʿ** tondre

√rǧl – **rīṭaġaẗ** roc, rocher
**rataġa** fermer, barricader une porte

sudarabique **gerbēt** dune de sable
**garaḥa** blesser (à l’arme blanche), faire une coupure dans la chair

Le parallélisme est si évident dans ces paires qu’elles se passent de commentaire.

2.1.3. **Racines ambiguës avec le seul sémantisme pierre**

Pour les deux racines ci-dessous—qui n’en font peut-être qu’une—nous avons bien le premier composant du parallélisme, la pierre, mais, sauf erreur, nous n’avons pas le second :

**garala** être pierreux et dur – **garal** terrain pierreux où il se trouve des arbres – **garil** pierreux et dur (terrain)

**garwal, garwil, guṟūlaẗ** terrain pierreux ; pierres, rochers
Cette racine quadrilitère peut être considérée comme une extension infixée de **yṛgl**.

√yṛgļ – **ʾarḡal** dur et raboteux, semé de pierres (sol)
**harağaṯ** grands, longs (hommes) ; gros, énormes (chameaux)
Cette racine quadrilitère, déjà vue plus haut dans le groupe **g-ṛ-h**, peut aussi être considérée comme une extension préfixée de **yṛgļ**.

On voit que **ʾarḡal** a de fortes chances d’être apparenté à **garil** plutôt qu’à la racine **yṛgļ** homonyme dont le sémantisme est pied. Ce n’est qu’artificiellement et par étymologie populaire qu’on le rattache à cette dernière en disant, comme on le lit, non sans sourire,

16 « Racines isolées » signifie que je n’ai pas trouvé d’autres racines avec le même crément pour pouvoir constituer un groupe.
Jean-Claude Rolland

chez Kazimirski, “... et qui endommage promptement le pied du piéton.” Cela dit, c’est tout de même une allusion à l’aspect tranchant de certaines pierres aux arêtes particulièrement aiguëes.

2.1.4. Récapitulons
On trouve en arabe la séquence bilitère -ǧr- (plus rarement -rǧ-) dans un nombre relativement important de racines dont un verbe dérivé a fondamentalement un ou plusieurs des sens suivants : couper, fendre, briser, peler, etc., ou un sens dérivé : arracher, oter, enlever, éloigner, repousser, blesser, tuer, etc. L’une de ces racines est ḥāqara a le sens de empêcher quelqu’un d’approcher.

Dans un nombre inférieur—mais qui reste significatif—de ces mêmes racines, il se trouve un ou plusieurs substantifs qui désignent la pierre ou un objet assimilable à la pierre.

L’une de ces racines est ḥāqara sous laquelle on trouve le substantif ḥaǧar, le terme le plus usuel pour désigner ce minéral.

On peut raisonnablement penser qu’il en va de la paire ḥaǧar // ḥaǧara comme de rūpēs // rumpō et saxum // secō : c’est un même rapport sémantique pierre // couper qui relie, dans chacune de ces paires, un terme à l’autre. La perception de la pierre est la même en latin et en arabe : c’est un fragment détaché de la roche.

Voyons ce qu’il en est de nos autres mots vedettes.

2.2. ḥaṣan/ḥaṣā pierraille, cailloux

2.2.1. Morpho-sémantisme de la racine ḥaṣan/ḥaṣā pierraille, cailloux ; calcul, gravelle, pierre dans les reins ou dans la vessie ḥaṣā jeter des cailloux contre qqn
Cette racine, qui se trouve être non ambigüe, relève de l’étymon {ḥ,ṣ}. Et notre parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup y est patent.

Avec plusieurs autres racines non ambigües, et dont certaines présentent notre parallélisme, elle est en bonne compagnie :

ḥuṣāṣāʾ terre, sol // ḥaṣṣa raser le poil, les cheveux
ḥāṣa i s’écarter, s’éloigner de la ligne droite ; éviter, fuir qqn
ḥāṣā u retenir, empêcher qqn d’approcher de qqch
ḥiḥiḥ terres ; pierres
waḥṣ petits boutons qui viennent sur visage d’une jeune et jolie fille
Une affection de la peau...
ṣāḥaẗ sol nu, stérile – ṣawḥ berge, bord d’une rivière, bord élevé comme un mur // ṣāḥa fendre
Notons ce ṣawḥ berge, bord d’une rivière, nous en reparlerons.

2.2.2. Racines ambiguës probablement apparentées

On verra que la plupart des items ci-après se passent de commentaires.

– Groupe ḥ-ṣ-b

ḥaṣāb cailloux – ḥaṣabaṯ caillou ; rougeole
Une autre affection de la peau...

ḥaṣaba joncher, couvrir de petits cailloux ; jeter, lancer des petits cailloux sur qqn ;
frapper qqn ; abandonner qqn, se séparer de son compagnon

ṣaḥaba écorcher, dépeuiller de sa peau

– Groupe ḥ-ṣ-r

ḥuṣr constipation
Dureté du ventre.

ḥiṣār enclos
Cf. ḥuǧraṯ enclos pour les chameaux

ṣaḥrāʾ champ dépourvu de végétation ; au pl. Sahara
ṣuḥraṯ fente, crevasse dans un rocher
ṣarḥaṯ sol dur

ḥaraṣa fendre, percer (la peau), casser (la tête)

– Groupe ḥ-ṣ-f

ḥafṣ noyau
ḥafaṣa jeter, lancer

ṣuffāḥ tablette mince en pierre (ardoise) – ṣafīḥ rocher en mer
ṣaḥiḥ sabre à large lame

ḥaṣafa éloigner, mettre à une grande distance ; ṣaḥifa être galeux
Une autre affection de la peau...

– Groupe ḥ-ṣ-m

ḥaṣim petits cailloux
ḥaṣama casser, briser

ṣimḥā sol dur et raboteux – ṣamūḥ dur (sabot) – ʾaṣmaḥ fort, brave, hardi

– Racine isolée

ḥaṣana être fort – ḥaṣīn fort, fortifié ; solide (cuirasse)
ʾaḥṣinaṯ fers, pointes des lances
2.3. qaḍḍ petits cailloux, gravier

2.3.1. Morpho-sémantisme de la racine

qaḍḍ sable et petits cailloux, gravier – qiḍḍaï grosse pierre informe ; sol jonché de petits cailloux
qaḍḍa percer, perforer une perle ; amincir un pieu, le tailler à l’extrémité

Cette racine, qui se trouve être non ambigüe, relève de l’étymon {q,ḍ}, ce qui est confirmé par sa présence au sein de la matrice 5 ([coronal],[dorsal]) porter un ou des coups de Bohas.

Notre parallélisme sémantique y est patent.

Avec plusieurs autres racines non ambiguës qui présentent toutes notre parallélisme, elle est en très bonne compagnie :

qaḍqāḍ sol égal et uni
qaḍqaba fermer la main en contractant les doigts ; resserrer le ventre, causer une constipation – qubbaḍ sorte de tortue
qubḍān crocs enfoncés dans le murailles pour y accrocher qgch
qaḍaba et qardaba couper
qaḍaʿa couper

qaḍāb gros, épais ; robuste, fort
qaḍābā déraciner, arracher

Cette racine quadrilatère peut aussi figurer dans le groupe suivant selon l’infixe considéré. Nous l’y répétons pour qu’elle accompagne la seule autre racine qui s’y trouve.

– Groupe q-ḍ-ʿ

quṣʿa gravier, morceaux qui se détachent du bas des murs
qaṣʿa couper

En fait nous aurions pu écrire “la séquence qd” car, comme on le constatera, le corpus de cette partie ne contient aucune racine apparentée construite sur la séquence dq.

18
Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique

– Groupe q-ḍ-m

qaḍīm tout ce qui est sec et craque sous les dents
qaḍīma grignoter, croquer du bout des dents
qarḍamaï couper

– Racines isolées

qaḍaf pierres minces – qaḍafaï munticule sablonneux ; tertre formé par les pierres et l’argile

√qḍf – VII. être ôté de sa place et porté ailleurs (se dit des grains de sable)

naqāyiḍ morceaux de coque d’un oeuf cassé ; fragments, morceaux cassés

naqada disjoindre, détraquer ce qui était joint ; rompre (un contrat)

qarāyiḍ rognures, coupures
qaraḍa couper, rompre, couper en rongeant

Nous ne sommes qu’à mi-chemin et déjà cette étude devient monotone et répétitive. Les moins sceptiques de nos lecteurs sont sans doute maintenant convaincus que le lexique arabe de la pierre présente de fortes similitudes sémantiques avec son homologue latin. Mais rappelons que nous avons également la prétention d’éclaircir par cette deuxième partie des points restés obscurs dans la première. Au risque de susciter l’ennui, il nous faut donc poursuivre pour réduire par le nombre la part du hasard dans les coïncidences. La présentation de moins en moins commentée des données—sauf nécessité absolue—nous permettra d’avancer plus vite.

2.4. raml sable

2.4.1. Morpho-sémantisme de la racine

raml\(^{19}\) sable – ramala enrichtir un tissu de perles, de pierres précieuses

ʾarmūlaï chicot d’une branche qui a été séparée du tronc – ʾarmal veuf, veuve

Du point de vue de la forme, nous bénéficions d’un travail de recherche précédent effectué pour notre étude sur le nom arabe de la pyramide.\(^{20}\) Nous savons donc déjà que la racine √rml relève de l’étymon \{r,m\} et que l’une des charges sémantiques de cet étymon est justement pierre.

On constate dans la racine √rml la présence du parallélisme sémantique pierre // couper à partir du sens de ʾarmūlaï. On notera en passant que le veuvage est perçu comme une coupure du couple par l’arrachement définitif d’un de ses membres à l’autre.

On dispose de trois racines non ambigües construites sur cet étymon :

raym et raymaï colline, tertre ; tombeau
rāma se séparer de qqn, s’éloigner (Voir annexe n° A.1.S.3.)

marw silex

\(^{19}\) D’où l’espagnol rambla.

\(^{20}\) J.C. ROLLAND 2017.
marà I donner à qqn des coups de fouet
Où l’on voit, incidemment, que les deux glides n’en font qu’un.

marmar marbre
marmara être en colère (Voir annexe, A.6.4.)

2.4.2. Racines ambiguës probablement apparentées

– Groupe r-m-
’aram cailloux – ’iram grosse pierre destinée à indiquer le chemin dans le désert – Pl.
’urûm pierres sépulcrales des Adîtes
’arama mordre à qqch, enfoncer les dents dans qqch
’amaraṭ petite pierre qui indique la route
Cette racine n’a pas l’élément porter un coup > couper, mais on peut penser que le sens premier de ’amara ordonner était trancher aux sens propre et figuré. (Cf. fr. ciseau, décider).

– Groupe r-m-g
Les consonnes r et m étaient présentes dans les racines du groupe g-r-m que nous avons rencontrées plus haut (2.1.2.) dans le cadre du chapitre consacré à ḥaǧar. Ces racines sont donc le résultat du croisement des étymons {g,r} et {r,m}. Il était inutile de reproduire ici ce groupe en extenso.

– Groupe r-m-h
ḥūram rochers crevassés
ḥarama couper de manière à séparer une chose d’une autre
ruḥām marbre
vrḥm – II. adoucir la prononciation d’un mot en retranchant quelque son dur

– Groupe r-m-ḍ
raḍim pierres de bâtisse (avec lesquelles on bâtit en les posant les unes sur les autres)
raḍama jeter violemment à terre
ramḍaṭ sol jonché de cailloux, cailloux
ramāḍāṭ tranchant, état de tout ce qui est tranchant, aigu
ḍumruz sol dur – ḏamrazaṭ pays dont le terrain est raboteux et où l’on évite de voyager la nuit

– Groupe r-m-h
hamir grande masse de sable ; gras et gros – yahmūr masse de sable
hamara frapper avec violence le sol avec ses sabots (cheval) – III. enlever, emporter tout
haram pyramide
Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique

- Racines isolées

ḥimārāt en gên., grosse pierre ; de là, grosse pierre qui ferme un réservoir d’eau et l’empêche de s’écouler au dehors, et grosse pierre qui masque la retraite du chasseur ; grosse pierre dont on ferme le tombeau

ḥamara gratter et oter la peau extérieure ; écortcher (un mouton) ; raser (la tête)

raṭmaīt gros rocher noir
raṭama briser, casser

sāmūr diamant
samara crever l’ail ; lancer une flèche

šammūr diamant
šamara lancer une flèche

šarimaīt monticule de sable
šarama couper, retrancher en coupant

kurtum ou kurtūm rocher, grosse pierre
kirtum hâche, cognée pour abattre et couper du bois

murād monticule de sable
marada couper, retrancher en coupant

2.4.3. Racines ambiguës avec le seul sémantisme pierre

- Groupe r-m-ʿ

ʿrmʿ – yarma pierres plates, molles et friables
šamʿar sol dur et raboteux
ʿirmis pierre
ʿamraṯ petit bijou que l’on met entre des perles enfilées pour les séparer

- Racine isolée

mart ou nirt désert, nu et humide (lieu)

2.5. šaḥr roc, rocher

2.5.1. Morpho-sémantisme de la racine

šaḥr roc, rocher, pierre énorme et très dure

Cette racine, qui n’offre pas d’autre sémantisme que celui de la roche, relève très probablement de l’étymon ʪʫ. 21 Cette hypothèse se vérifie par le sémantisme des quatre racines ci-dessous dont trois sont non ambiguës :

21 Au sujet de cet étymon, on lira dans BOHAS & BACHMAR 2013: 146: « Des réalisations sont attestées dans les deux sens [c’est-à-dire : ʪʫ ou ʫʪ] mais il est impossible d’établir une relation entre elles. » Cette partie de notre étude apporte la preuve que cela est au contraire bel et bien possible.
ṣaḫḥa frapper un corps dur, cogner
ṣayḥād dur (rocher) – ṣayḥādūn dureté d’un rocher
Ce quadrilatère est naturellement ambigü mais il semble bien n’être qu’une extension par suffixe d’une racine ṣwḥ ou ṣyḥ non ambigüe sous laquelle on trouve ṣaḫḥāt tumeur sur l’os causée par un coup ou une morsure

ḥuṣyaṭ testicule
ḥaṣā i couper, châtrer (un cheval entier) – ḥaṣiyy châtré, coupé ; castrat, eunuque
L’examen de ces trois racines nous permet non seulement de déterminer l’étymon de ṣaḥr avec un fort pourcentage de probabilité, mais il confirme aussi la présence du parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup dans une nouvelle famille, celle de l’étymon {ḥ,ṣ}. Ce n’est pas une famille très nombreuse mais on y trouve tout de même quelques racines ambigües probablement apparentées. Le parallélisme y est si explicite que nous pourrons nous passer de commentaires.

2.5.2. Racines ambiguës probablement apparentées

– Groupe ṣ-ḥ-r
Aux côtés de notre mot vedette, on trouve dans ce groupe, avec radicales permutées :
ḥiṣ ḍigue ; chameau grand et robuste – ḥarīṣ bord d’un fleuve ; île
ḥiṣ ḍigue ; chameau grand et robuste – ḥarīṣ bord d’un fleuve ; île
ḥarbaṣīṣ pierre très petite et luisante qu’on rencontre dans le sable ; coquillage (conque de Vénus)
ḥarbaṣa séparer plusieurs choses les unes des autres
À noter tout particulièremment :
– La présence d’un nouveau coquillage.
– Une nouvelle apparition du bord ou rivage.

– Groupe ṣ-ḥ-m
ṣamḥāṭ sol pierreux
ṣamaḥa blesser qqn à la cavité de l’oreille ; donner un coup de poing sur qch de creux
ṣaḥmāʾ terrain pierreux
хаṣama – VIII. couper (se dit d’un sabre qui coupe son fourreau)

– Racine isolée
ṣaḥuṣa être une masse – ṣaxīṣ dur, désagréable (parole)
ṣāḥṣ – IV. effrayer, épouvanter qqn (Cf. annexe, A.1.S.4.) ; manquer le but en lançant une flèche (Cf. annexe, A.2.6.)
Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique

2.6. ġundul ou ġandal pierre, rocher

2.6.1. Morpho-sémantisme de la racine

La racine √ḏndl de notre dernier mot vedette est quadrilitère. Sous cette racine, on trouve également le verbe ġandel jeter par terre. Du point de vue morphologique, elle peut être considérée comme une extension par infixe nasal de la racine √ḏdl sous laquelle on trouve le verbe ġadala qui signifie lui aussi jeter par terre. Et jeter quelque chose, c’est s’en séparer, comme nous l’avons déjà vu à plusieurs reprises dans les pages précédentes. On constate donc dans la racine √ḏndl la présence du parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup. Reste à déterminer l’étymon de cette racine.

La première combinaison théorique, [ḏ,d], est assez fructueuse pour que nous puissions nous passer d’examiner quels résultats donneraient les deux autres, d’autant plus en sachant que dans la théorie de Bohas, cet étymon, doté de la charge sémantique porter un coup, relève de la matrice 5 [[coronal],[dorsal]] porter un ou des coups.

Construites sur cet étymon, on dispose effectivement de deux racines non ambiguës :
– La racine sourde √ḏdd

\[
\text{ḡadad} \quad \text{terrain uni et dur} \quad \text{ḡudd, ġiddaï, ġuddaï bord, rivage d’un fleuve ; littoral ; Djedda}
\]

Notons cette troisième apparition du bord ou rivage (cf. 2.1.2. groupe ġ-r-f, p. 385; 2.5.2. groupe ˢ-h-r, p. 394).

\[
\text{ḡadda} \quad \text{couper, retrancher, tailler}
\]

– La racine quadrilitère à redoublement √ḏḏḏ

\[
\text{ḡadḡad, ġadḡadaï sol plat et dur}
\]

\[
\text{ḡudḡud} \quad \text{inflammation de l’œil, pustule qui naît à la naissance de la prunelle}
\]

Troisième apparition de la pustule, symptôme d’une maladie de la peau (cf. 2.1.2. groupe ġ-r-m, p. 386)

Dans les deux racines, le parallélisme sémantique pierre // porter un coup est patent.

2.6.2. Racines ambiguës probablement apparentées

La plupart des items se passent de commentaires.

– Groupe ġ-ḏ-d-

Aux côtés de notre racine vedette, on trouve d’abord dans ce groupe la racine √ḏdl dont on a vu qu’elle en est probablement à l’origine :

\[
\text{ḡadil} \quad \text{dur ; totemau – ġadil} \quad \text{dur ; fort, robuste – ġadālaï terre couverte d’un sable fin}
\]

\[
\text{ḡadala} \quad \text{jeter, renverser par terre}
\]

Cette racine fertile est aussi probablement à l’origine d’une autre racine quadrilitère par insertion d’un infixe guttural :

\[
\text{ḡahdal} \quad \text{ou ġuhdul grand et gros ; fort, robuste}
\]

\[
\text{ḡahdala} \quad \text{renverser, jeter par terre}
\]

Avec radicales permutées :

\[
\text{ḡalada, ġalida éprouver une forte gelée et en souffrir (sol cultivé) – ġaluda être fort, robuste, dur – ġalad cuir, peau ; dureté, endurcissement ; terrain uni et dur – ġalid} \quad \text{gelée}
\]

17 (2017): 377-406
araméen gilda testicule
galada frapper sur la peau et l’endommager, fouetter qqn ; écorcher une pièce de bétail ; renverser, jeter qqn à terre

Quant au nom quadrilitère ḡalmad ou ḡalmūd grosse pierre, rocher, apparemment sans correspondant verbal, il peut être associé aussi bien à ce groupe (√ḡld + infixe m) qu’au suivant (√ḡmd + infixe l).

– Groupe ḡ-d-m
ḡamd gelée, glace, solide (non liquide) – ḡumd sol élevé et dur – ḡamad glace, sol élevé et dur
ḡamada couper
ḡalmad, ḡalmūd grosse pierre, rocher
dimāḡ ferme, solide

– Groupe ḡ-d-r
ḡadara avoir des pustules, s’en couvrir ; contracter des callosités
ḡadara faire élever une muraille autour de qch – ḡadr mur, muraille – ḡadīraẗ enclos fait de pierres pour les bestiaux
ḡurdaṯ sol uni et nu, où rien ne croît
ḡarada oter, enlever (p. ex. les feuilles des arbres, la peau, etc.)

Nous avons déjà rencontré ce groupe en 2.1.2. On peut en déduire que ces deux racines résultent du croisement des étymons synonymes {ḡ,r} et {ḡ,d} porter un coup.

– Racines isolées :
ḡadaf tombeau
ḡadafa couper un membre du corps
ḡahād sol dur et stérile
ḡihād lutte, combat (Cf. annexe, A.6.1.)
ḡadb qui souffre de la stérilité (lieu, pays, sol) akkadien (a)gadibb- soc – éthiopien gadb hache

2.6.3. Racines ambiguës avec le seul sémantisme pierre

– Groupe ḡ-d-s
ḡādis dur et ferme ; terrain sec, dur, inculte
‘asḡad perles ; chameau gros, épais

– Groupe ḡ-d-n
ḡanad terrain inégal et rocailleux
danaḡa fixer, raffermir solidement
– **Racines isolées** :

'āğad solide  
ūghadaš sol dur

Nous voici enfin arrivés au terme de cette partie de notre étude consacrée aux dénominations arabes de la pierre. Avant de faire la synthèse de nos observations, il nous a paru utile d’ajouter quelques racines supplémentaires dans lesquelles on observe le même parallélisme sémantique que nous avons relevé dans nos six mots vedettes et leurs apparentés :

barada limer  
barad grêle

Les deux mots sont toujours usuels.

balāt pavé

Mot usuel. L’arabe classique a connu balāta frapper qqn à l’oreille avec le bout de l’index  
– III. se battre au sabre ou au bâton

ṣawt ‘āğašš voix rocailleuse

Mot usuel. L’arabe classique a connu ḡašš endroit pierreux, inégal et dur – ḡaššā’ sol semé de cailloux // ḡašša briser, casser, broyer

a’hal rocher blanc, granit

Mot usuel. L’arabe classique a connu a’bala couper, retrancher

ʿalaba couper, retrancher, abattre  
ʿulb sol dur et stérile

Les deux mots sont obsolètes.

faḍda casser, rompre, briser

Mot usuel. L’arabe classique a connu faḍdaẗ terrain rocailleux

mahw petites pierres minces, brillantes et transparentes ; perles  
mahā u porter à qqn un coup violent

Les deux mots sont obsolètes.

2.7. **Synthèse de nos observations**

Dès notre introduction, sans être géologue ni minéralogiste et sans pousser jusqu’à la lune,\(^22\) la simple connaissance du monde nous avait permis d’enumérer, du grain de sable au rocher, divers types de pierre en fonction de leurs volumes, de leurs formes ou de leurs usages, depuis la meule du meunier jusqu’à l’édification des digues, routes, murs, tombes et pyramides. Il semble qu’avec les six mots arabes que nous avons mis en vedettes et leurs apparentés respectifs nous en ayons fait un honnête inventaire. Ces six mots du langage usuel nous ont même amené à rencontrer en route des termes plus spécifiques comme le charbon, le marbre, le silex et le granit.

\(^22\) Nous aurions pu : dans l’Univers, la lune n’est qu’un gros grain de sable, une “poussière d’étoile” ; on peut considérer le nom qamar comme construit sur l’étymon {r,m}. (Voir 2.4.1.). Voir aussi en 3.2. la racine BDR.
Nous avions également énuméré divers objets pouvant être assimilés ou comparés à des pierres : noyaux, dents, fragment d’os, coraux, coquilles d’œuf, coquillages, testicules... Ils ont tous apparu, plus quelques autres auxquels nous n’avions pas d’abord pensé :

- en premier lieu le sol dur, sec, stérile, où rien ne pousse ; ce n’est pas de la pierre mais c’est tout comme ; le désert, en somme ;

- les surfaces gelées, la glace, le verglas ;

- les perles, la carapace de la tortue ;

- les callosités de la peau, le poing fermé et même le ventre constipé.

Nous savions que la pierre était symbole de dureté, plus encore en arabe—elle est omniprésente dans le monde arabophone—qu’en indo-européen où l’arbre en général et le chêne en particulier lui disputent ce rôle. Nous avons découvert que cette caractéristique naturelle se déploie en un faisceau de dérivation sémantiques d’ordre physique ou moral : solidité, force, robustesse, grosseur, grandeur, épaisseur, hauteur ... Les hommes et les chameaux qui “en imposent” sont définis par des mots évoqueurs d’un nom de la pierre ; on dit bien en français “Cet homme, c’est un roc.”

Quant au rapport sémantique de la pierre avec l’action de porter un coup, qui parcourt toute cette étude, il faut bien reconnaître qu’il n’est pas très surprenant : nous avions d’emblée rappelé que la pierre taille et surtout qu’elle est taillée. D’où, semble-t-il, le peu de cas fait de ce rapport par l’étymologie traditionnelle dans la paire ṭūpēs // ṭumpō, sans doute considéré comme une évidence ne méritant pas une attention particulière.

Ce rapport n’alla pas forcément de soi pour l’arabe ; sauf à avoir lu quelque part et il y a bien longtemps que si le nom arabe de l’île est dérivé d’une racine ayant le sens de couper, c’est parce qu’une île est ou semble coupée du continent. Mais une île n’est pas une pierre, ce n’est qu’une métaphore de la pierre. Le nombre de fois où nous avons pu vérifier ici la réalité du rapport pierre // porter un coup en arabe confirme son existence à la fois en sémitique—où le cas de l’île est loin d’être le plus flagrant—et en indo-européen pour la paire gréco-latine lapis // λέπω. Nous savons maintenant que, depuis les origines du langage, la pierre a dû être considérée comme le résultat d’une fragmentation : les hommes ont très vite compris que le destin du rocher était un tas de sable.

Mais l’intérêt de notre étude pour l’étymologie indo-européenne ne se limitera pas à cette confirmation. Nous avons en effet la hardiesse de penser que nos observations pourraient aussi apporter quelque lumière sur les origines des mots grecs λίθος et πέτρᾱ sur lesquels, un peu moins démunis qu’au début de notre recherche, nous allons maintenant revenir.

---

23 Le français dur et l’anglais tree sont issus de la racine IE *deru- « dur ».
Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique


3.1. grec λίθος [lithos]

Puisque le grec λίθος est sans famille dans sa propre langue, le cas du couple lapis // lēpto nous incite à aller voir du côté du latin. On y tombe d’emblée sur un mot qui s’en rapproche fort, du moins dans la forme : litus, -oris rivage de la mer, côte, littoral. Et c’est sans grande surprise qu’on lit à son propos dans le DELL : « Aucun rapprochement sûr ».

Et pourtant, rappelons ces paires que nous avons trouvées pour l’arabe :

reveal. guruf berge, bord rongé par l’eau
garafa enlever, emporter tout, en balayant, d’un coup de balai ou de pelle
hāris bord d’un fleuve
hāris fer de lance
gudd, guddā, guḍḍāi bord, rivage d’un fleuve ; littoral
gadda couper, retrancher, tailler
šawh berge, bord d’une rivière, bord élevé comme un mur
šāḥa fendre

À quoi nous pouvons ajouter le tigré gərgər rocher, falaise et au moins une racine arabe associant clairement la pierre au bord :

šibr ou šubr marge, bord // šubr ou šubur ou šabbāraī terrain couvert de petits cailloux – šabar glace, eau gelée – šibāraī ou šabbāraī pierres ; éclat, morceau de rocher ou de fer – šubrai pierres dures – šabīr colline rocailleuse

À l’évidence, l’arabe perçoit la rive comme une coupure. Tel le vent frappant les pics des sommets, l’eau des oueds et des océans, repue d’une terre friable promptement engloutie et dissoute, se heurte à la roche des rives ou des rivages, la longe, la ronge et lentement la façonne. Le lexique arabe apporte la preuve qu’il y a bel et bien un lien sémantique fort entre les mots qui désignent la pierre et les signifiants de la rive, entre les noms de la dune ou de la digue et ceux du littoral. Et donc, très probablement, en indo-européen aussi, entre le grec λίθος et le latin litus.

Reste à savoir d’où viendrait le couple λίθος // litus. Certainement d’un mot unique, seul ou rare vestige d’une langue méditerranéenne depuis longtemps disparue, à moins qu’il ne soit issu de la branche celtique d’une racine indo-européenne en *pl- comme *ple- déchirer ou *pel- peau, peler dont le thème *pel(i)-s- rocher—au vu de ce que nous savons maintenant—n’est probablement qu’une extension. Notons avec prudence que l’hypothèse celtique pourrait convenir pour les mots germaniques désignant le plomb, tels l’anglais lead, également d’origine incertaine. En glosant πέλλα [pella] par λίθος, Hésychios nous donnait peut-être sans s’en douter la clef de leur commune origine.

Notons que l’ordre *pl- de ces racines est exactement l’inverse de celui que nous avons retenu plus haut comme étant à la source de lapis et des ses apparentés grecs et latins. Comme nous l’avons constaté à plusieurs reprises en d’autres occasions, on voit une fois de plus que le non ordonnancement des consommes radicales n’est pas propre au domaine sémitique.
3.2. grec πέτρᾱ [pétrā]
Le cas de πέτρᾱ est plus problématique. Ce mot est non seulement sans famille grecque mais on ne voit pas quel mot latin pourrait lui être apparenté. Watkins le pense dérivé de la racine *per- 2 conduire, passer par-dessus via une forme suffixée *per-trā mais le lien sémantique proposé par cet auteur est forcé et peu convaincant.

Dans ces cas-là, notre réaction habituelle est de nous tourner vers le sémitique, ne serait-ce que pour vérifier s’il n’y aurait pas quelque possibilité de rapprochement possible, qu’il soit savant ou naïf. Notons que nous avons en cette matière et sur le même thème d’éménants modèles :
- Chantraine opte pour une origine sémitique du grec ḫîzakîx[în] petits cailloux dont l’étymon pourrait être l’araméen bizqā débris, petite pierre ;
- Michel Masson propose de rapprocher le grec χάλιξ kaîlîx caillou, gravier et ses variantes κάχληξ [kákhlēks], κόχλαξ [kókhlaks] petit caillou dans une rivière de l’hébreu ḥalluq caîlou dans une rivière.

Nous voilà doublement encouragé à proposer une origine sémitique du mot grec πέτρα.

Nous allons dire sur quoi nous fondons cette hypothèse.

1. Phonétiquement, nous savons par d’autres cas d’emprunts similaires,
   - qu’un π- initial correspond généralement à un p- en akkadien et à un f- en arabe ;
   - qu’en deuxième position, une dentale ou une interdentale peut alterner avec une sifflante ;
   - que cette deuxième radicale peut être sourde, sonore ou emphatique.

2. Sémantiquement, nous savons maintenant qu’un nom sémitique de la pierre a de fortes chances de relever d’une racine dont le sens premier est porter un coup.

À la fin de la sous-partie 2.6., nous avions relevé une paire correspondant aux critères que nous venons de poser :

faḍḍaẗ terrain rocailleux, élevé // faḍḍa casser, rompre, briser

En poursuivant notre cueillette, nous en avons glané d’autres :
fatta écraser, broyer qqch entre ses doigts ; fendre (les pierres)
fada – 2L. se casser, être brisé, cassé en petits et grands morceaux – fādirāt rocher détaché au haut d’une montagne
fadfas sol uni et dur // fasfas sabre émoussé (sabre)
√fṣl – mafṣil monceau oblong de sable ; tas de silex // faṣala séparer

25 À moins d’être très audacieux et de reconnaître dans πέτρα mais dans un ordre différent les mêmes consonnes que celles du radical latin rupt- de certaines formes dérivées du verbe rumpo...

26 “With possible earlier meaning bed-rock (< what one comes through to)”. Notons au passage que ce mot présente toutes les qualités requises pour être intégré à ce que nous appellerons plus loin la famille élargie de πέτρα : il a une labiale à l’initiale suivie d’une sifflante et est dérivé d’un verbe b’zaq qui a le sens de briser, broyer.

27 CHANTRAIN 2013: 207.

Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique

faṣan/faṣà pépin de raisin sec // faṣà détacher, séparer
faṣīṣ noyau // faṣa ṣ séparer, disjoindre
faṣīṭ pelures de dattes, rognures d’ongles

Voilà donc un ensemble non négligeable de neuf racines—dont six non ambiguës—où il est question à la fois de pierres (ou d’objets assimilés à des pierres) et de coupures. Ces racines ne sont pas construites sur le même étymon mais leurs étymons relèvent tous de la matrice phonique nº 1 \([\text{labial},\text{coronal}]\) : *porter un coup ou des coups*.

En poussant la recherche, on trouve encore cinq racines non ambiguës mais orphelines de l’élément pierre :

faṭṭa – VII. être cassé, brisé
faḍḍa être tout seul, isolé, séparé des autres
faẓza faire déflection et se séparer de qqn
fazfaza donner la chasse à quelqu’un et l’éloigner
faṭā donner une chasse vigoureuse à un animal

… et une trentaine de racines ambiguës, elles aussi orphelines de l’élément pierre :

fata’a casser
fataḥa ouvrir – IV. trancher (dans une dispute)
fatraṣa couper
fatafa fouler avec les pieds au point d’écraser
fataqa fendre, rompre ; séparer, défaire, découvrir
faṭaḡa casser, briser
fadaḥa casser, briser, écraser avec une pierre
fadaṣa casser, briser, écraser
fadaḡa casser, briser, écraser
faduma être raboteux, avoir la surface couverte d’aspérités
faḍḥa – V. écartier les jambes
fazara rosser, donner des coups de bâton sur le dos ; déchirer un habil
faẓa’a – II et IV. effrayer
fasa’a déchirer, lacérer ; donner à quel-

Ces racines, on le voit, ne nous offrent pas de dérivé “pierreux” mais il serait bien étonnant, au moins pour certaines d’entre elles, qu’un tel vocable n’apparaisse pas dans une forme dialectale ou dans une autre langue sémitique. Notons déjà les racines *fadara, faṭara* et *fatraṣa* ; dans notre recherche d’éventuels cognats sémitiques du grec πέτρα, ce sont de bons candidats.
Venons-en à l’akkadien. Nos glanures y sont moins nombreuses mais on trouve tout de même :

- **pasāsu** effacer, oblitérer ; détruire, aplatiser, raser
- **paṣādu** trancher, couper, tailler, entailler
- **patāğu** percer (mur, four, partie du corps), crever, piquer, ouvrir, forer, sonder ; (bétail) poignarder, enfoncer un couteau, frapper (et tuer) avec un couteau
- **patarru** masse, masse d’arme en cuivre ou en bronze
- **patru** épée, dague ; couteau de boucher, de tanneur, ...
- **patu** frontière
- **pattu** défaire ; (orge) enlever la balle, décortiquer, enlever les écales ; percer
- **paṭāru** détacher, défaire ; quitter (un lieu) ; découvrir (une partie du corps) ; disperser (des troupes) ; rompre (un contrat) ; dissiper ; annuler, interrompre ; dételer ; séparer, découper ; écarter, enlever, disperser ; démonter, desserrer, défaitre
- **pāṭu** frontière, limite

Nous n’avons pas de commentaires à faire ici autres que ceux que nous avons déjà faits pour l’arabe. Comme bons candidats à une éventuelle et plus proche parenté avec πέτρᾱ, notons les noms **patarru** et **patru**, et le verbe **paṭāru**, qui est d’ailleurs de la même racine sémitique que l’arabe faṭara.

Pour tenter de convaincre les plus sceptiques, nous pourrions aligner des listes similaires avec la labiale b- à l’initiale au lieu du f-. En arabe comme en akkadien, pour certaines des racines ci-dessus, il existe en effet des variantes en b-\( \text{C}^{2}\)-\( \text{C}^{3}\). Nous nous contenterons, pour donner un peu plus de corps à ce que nous pensons être la famille nucléaire de πέτρᾱ, de signaler quelques racines sémitiques en b-\( \text{C}^{2}\)-\( \text{r}\) où \( \text{C}^{2}\) est une dentale ou une interdentale. Notre référence sera le fascicule 2 du Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques :

**BDR** (p. 46)

“Pour Dillmann, le sens premier est couper”. On y retrouve incidemment la lune, mais ici sous la forme badr. Cf. qamar, 2.7., note de bas de page.

**BDR** (p. 47)

**baḏara** disperser, disséminer

**BṬR** (p. 61)

**baṭara** fendre, ouvrir une plaie, percer un ulcère, etc.

al-Baṭrāʾ (nom de la ville de) Pétra

On est en droit de se demander si ce toponyme est bien un emprunt au grec, comme le veut la tradition, ou un simple dérivé de \( \text{vbtr} \).

**bayṭār** médecin-vétérinaire

27 Pour certains, ce mot serait issu du grec ἰατρός [hippatrós], littéralement « médecin spécialiste des chevaux ». Pour d’autres, du latin veterinarius, « relatif aux bêtes de somme, vétérinaire ; médecin-vétérinaire ». Mais le rapport sémantique entre veterinarius et vētus, « vieux » n’est pas évident. Columelle, célèbre agronome romain du 1er siècle, utilise deux fois le mot veterinarius dans son oeuvre. Après quelques années passées dans l’armée, où il occupe le poste de tribun en Syrie en 35, il se con-
Probable extension de √bṭr par infixation du glide.

**BDŘ** (p. 78)
La dentale de cette racine se réalise en sifflante emphatique dans plusieurs langues sémitiques, d’où

bashara couper, retrancher // buṣr pierres dures et blanches ; marge, bord ; écorce –
baṣraṭ pierres dures et blanches ; terrain dur, pierreux et dont on tire les pierres – al-
Baṣraṭ Basra ou Bassorah.

Dans les textes anciens, les noms de Pétra et Basra sont souvent associés, comme s’ils avaient plus ou moins le même sens.
akkadien baṣāru couper, déchirer
hébreu biṣṣēr couper

En sud-arabique, on trouve diverses formes avec dentale et le sens de couper, déchirer.

NB : Il n’aura pas échappé aux plus attentifs de nos lecteurs qu’une racine rencontrée plus haut présente, au prix d’une métathèse, de forts signes de parenté avec celle-ci. Rappe-

lons-la :

ṣībr ou ṣubr marge, bord // ṣubr ou ṣubur ou ṣabbāraṯ terrain couvert de petits cailloux –
ṣabar glace, eau gelée – ṣibāraṯ ou ṣabāraṯ pierres ; éclat, morceau de rocher ou de fer –
ṣubraṯ pierres dures – ṣabīr colline rocailleuse

En veut-on une autre, proche de cette dernière ?

zabrā eroigner, repousser qqn de qqch // zabr pierres dures – zubraṯ morceau,
fragment ; morceau de fer

**Bétr** (p. 90)
batara couper la queue d’un animal, l’écourter
akkadien butturu mutiler
amharique bättər bâton
araméen b’tar, bitrā morceau

**Bétr** (p. 91)
baṭara être couvert de pustules, de boutons // baṭr terrain sablonneux parsemé de pierres
blanches

Nous espérons, par ces quelques pages, avoir apporté notre pierre à la recherche étymolo-
gique ; l’avenir dira si ce travail s’apparente plus au sable qu’au rocher.

sacre à l’agriculture. Cela ne suffit sans doute pas pour prouver que le mot est un emprunt à une langue parlée aux frontières de la Syrie à l’époque de Columelle mais on n’a pas d’autres attestations. Nous penchons donc plutôt pour un emprunt par le latin à une langue sémitique d’un cognat de baṭṭār.
Bibliographie


Dictionnaire akkadien → ASSOCIATION ASSYROPHILE DE FRANCE.


ETYMONLINE : abréviation usuelle de Online Etymology Dictionary (en ligne).


Indo-European Lexicon, Pokorny Master PIE Etyma, The College of Liberal Arts, University of Texas, Austin.


—. 2013b. « Perles, coraux et bilitères ». Semitica et Classica, 6: 269-278.


Éclats de roche : une étude étymologique


© Jean-Claude Rolland, Meaux / France
jc.rolland@hotmail.com
Annexe : Le réseau sémantique de « porter un coup »
(extrait de BOHAS & SAGUER 2012: 220 sq.)

A. Porter un coup ou des coups (sans spécifier l’objet)
   A.1 Frapper avec un objet tranchant, de là :
      A.1.1 l’objet ou une partie de l’objet (sabre, lame, hache, etc.)
      A.1.2 spécification : fendre, déchirer, inciser, mordre, ouvrir, etc.
      A.1.3 résultat de l’action : la partie par rapport au tout :
         A.1.3.1 raccourcir, tronquer
         A.1.3.2 tuer, massacrer > mourir, achever, terminer, fin, bout...
         A.1.3.3 raser, peler, racler, écorcher, dépouiller, enlever, arracher
         A.1.3.4 couper, séparer une partie du tout, emmener une partie
            A.1.3.4.1 petite quantité, portion, tranche
            A.1.3.4.2 être mis à l’écart, isolé, seul. Cette orientation donne lieu à une
               masse de sens qui tournent tous autour de l’idée “séparer, se
               séparer, (se) disperser” que nous appellerons A.1.S., qui se ramifie
               de la manière suivante :
                  A.1.S.1 (se) disperser, (se) répandre, semer
                     > divulguer un secret
                     > dilapider ses biens
                  A.1.S.2 éloigner, repousser, détourner
                  A.1.S.3 réfléchi : se séparer, s’éloigner
                     A.1.S.3.1 modalité de la séparation : marcher, fuir,
                                    courir > rapidité
                     A.1.S.4 causativité : faire partir, chasser, effrayer
   A.2 Frapper avec un objet pointu
      A.2.1 l’objet ou une partie de l’objet (lance, flèche, pointe, etc.)
      A.2.2 donner un coup de lance, percer, pénétrer, ...
      A.2.3 sortir de, émerger, pousser, être saillant, être au sommet
      A.2.4 sonder
      A.2.5 ficher, planter dans la terre
      A.2.6 se planter dans l’objectif, atteindre ou manquer le bat ; de là : avoir tort ou raison
   A.3 Frapper avec un fouet, un bâton, un objet quelconque
      A.3.1 l’objet
   A.4 Blessures diverses consécutives à des coups
   A.5 Préparation de l’action : aiguiser, affiler...
   A.6 Réciprocité
      A.6.1 se battre, attaquer
      A.6.2 faire la guerre
      A.6.3 victoire ou défaite
      A.6.4 s’irriter, être violent
   A.7 Frapper avec la main, le pied ou diverses parties du corps
      A.7.1 pousser, repousser
      A.7.2 protéger, conserver, garder
   B. Conséquence immédiate de A
      B.1 Briser, casser, pilier
      B.2 Détruire, périr, faire périr, perdre
Notes on the Emergence of New Semitic Roots in the Light of Compounding

LUTZ EDZARD (University of Erlangen-Nürnberg / University of Oslo)

Abstract
Independently of the question as to whether bi- or triradical roots have historical preponderance in Semitic, there are clear cases of Semitic verbal and nominal roots that have emerged through a process of compounding or integration of additional elements (verbal or nominal affixes and even prepositions). In this paper, an attempt will be made to establish a hierarchical typology of such processes of morphophonological re-analysis, in both historical and modern times.

Key words: affix, re-analysis, root, compounding

1 Introduction
It has long been recognized that new roots in Semitic can emerge through the re-analysis of verbal or nominal affixes. On the one hand, there has been the theory of “matrices et étymons”, propagated notably by Georges Bohas (e.g., BOHAS 2000) and a number of his pupils, which builds on the observation that roots with two common consonants and a homorganic, but different third consonant, often share a common semantics. Christopher Ehret (notably EHRET 1995) has developed this theory even further, in trying to reconstruct uniconsonantal semantic core elements at an early stage of Afroasiatic. This well-known line of thought will not be pursued here (for an overview of the pros and cons, cf. e.g., ZABORSKI 1991). Rather, with a focus on Arabic and Hebrew, I will give an overview of various processes that can be described as “compounding”, which involve either the integration of grammatical morphemes—verbal and nominal affixes, including prepositions—or the creation of new roots by exploiting acronyms or the conjunction of clipped elements, captured by the Arabic term naḥt, literally ‘sculpture’.

2 Root formation through compounding
2.1 Integration of grammatical morphemes
Adam MEZ (1906) was among the first to present relevant examples in Arabic, an example being the root √ s-b-q in Arabic sabaga ‘to leave behind’, which was explained as resulting from the compounding of the causative affirmative s- (also present in the Arabic form X,
Lutz Edzard
together with the reflexive afformative -t- and the root √ b-q-y in Arabic baqiya ‘to remain behind’. The productivity of such processes can also be demonstrated by a modern Arabic neologism. Next to the form IV of the root √ s-l-m ʿaslama (IPF yuṣlīmu) ‘to render oneself in security, become a Muslim’, a verb ʿaslama (IPF yuṣlīmu) with the meaning ‘to islamize’ has emerged (in possible analogy to verbs such as ʿamraka ‘to americanize’), which synchronically represents the root √ ʿ-s-l-m.

This kind of re-analysis is not specific to Arabic. HUEHNERT (2014: 14), based on Kurlyłowicz (1973: 7) and others, adduces the common-Semitic verb √ ʾ-s-k-n, Akkadian šakānum ‘to place, put, set’. As the Central Semitic cognates of šakānum, Hebrew šāḵan/ šāḵēn, Aramaic š Kensington and Arabic sakana ‘to dwell’ are intransitive, HUEHNERT assumes two roots in this context: the transitive Akkadian root can be explained to derive from an š-causative form of the verb √ k-w-n ‘to be firm, fixed’, whereas the intransitive Central Semitic verbs with the meaning ‘to dwell’ derive directly from a root √ s-k-n (Ugaritic features both roots). I would suggest that “to dwell” could also be rephrased in a transitive way as “to make a living” or the like and thus could also be explained as an original causative. Another example of this kind offered by MEZ (1906) is the Arabic verb √ r-t-m raṭaṣa ‘to graze’, derived from form VIII of the common Semitic root √ r-t-m-y. The same phenomenon surfaces in the nominal form taqwā ‘belief’, derived from form VIII ittaqā of the verbal root √ w-q-y. A comparable Hebrew case is presented by the secondary root √ h-l-l, attested in the hifšīl-binyan as hēḥēl ‘to begin’, ultimately deriving from the root √ h-l-l with the same meaning in the attested in the hifšīl-binyan as hēḥēl. Diachronically, a comparable process can be observed in the re-analysis of the Arabic noun madīnā ‘city’, which historically constitutes a noun of the pattern /maCtC3aC1a/ based on the root √ d-y-n, and which synchronically functions as a noun of the pattern /C3aC1aC2C1/ based on the root √ m-d-n. Accordingly, the historical plural form is madāʿīn, whereas the modern plural form is muddun. HUEHNERT (2014: 10) cites the Biblical Hebrew plural form ḏīlāṭ ‘doors’, which was generated by re-analyzing the final feminine i of the singular deleṭ ‘door’ as a root consonant.

In modern Hebrew, such processes are especially productive. USSISHKIN (1999: 407) lists, among others, the following examples, in which nominal affixes are integrated into new expanded roots. In most cases, quadrilateral roots emerge, which are fitted into the pīṭēl or hitpāʿēl binyanim: in the case of the noun (tertiae infirmae) qaṣe (√ q-ṣ-h), the hifšīl binyan is used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>root</th>
<th>surface</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ q-m-ṣ</td>
<td>hitqames</td>
<td>‘to be a miser’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ q-ṣ-h</td>
<td>qaṣe</td>
<td>‘edge’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ m-ṣ-h</td>
<td>miṣa</td>
<td>‘to treat exhaustively’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ s-z-q</td>
<td>biyyiq</td>
<td>‘to hold’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ s-p-r</td>
<td>safar</td>
<td>‘to count’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 WEHR’s dictionary lists the noun madīna under both √ d-y-n- and √ m-d-n.
Next to verbal and nominal affixes, prepositions also can be integrated in newly emerging roots. Among the more prominent cases figures Arabic ǧāʔa (√ ǧ-y-ʔ) ‘to come’ +bi- ‘in, with’, which in Arabic dialects surfaces as ǧāb (√ ǧ-y-b) ‘to bring’. A similar case already occurred in Classical Syriac, where the verbal root √ n-t-n ‘to give’ is typically construed with the dative marker lə- ‘to’, resulting in a new root √ n-t-l ‘to give’ (cf., e.g., EĐZARD 2011).

### 2.2 Root formation by exchange of a root consonant

Both new nouns, adjectives and verbs can emerge as the result of blending and (preceding) clipping (see below section 2.5). Of special interest is the case, where only one letter of one part of the blend replaces another letter in the other part, thus creating a new root. In the case of tapuax̱ ‘apple’ (√ t-p-x̱) + zahav ‘gold’ > tapuz ‘orange’ (“gold apple”), the first letter zayin of zahav replaces the last letter x̱ et of tapuax̱, thus creating the new root √ t-p-z.

In the case of pele(ʔ) ‘wonder’ +ṭelefon ‘telephone’ > pele(ʔ)fon ‘smart phone’, the first letter pe of pele(ʔ) replaces the first letter ṭet of ṭelefon. And in the case of yadid ‘friend’ + zayin ‘penis’ > yaziz ‘lover’ (“penis friend”), the first letter zayin of zayin (in itself historically a “polite” form using just the first letter of the word zanav ‘tail’) twice replaces the letter dalet of yadid.²

### 2.3 Root formation via acronyms

Acronyms as new roots occur in modern Arabic, notably in religious, political, and technical context. As in many European languages, one can observe a tendency to create acronyms that simultaneously have a meaning of their own. The following two political examples are prominent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fatḥ (,&lt;f-t-ḥ,&gt;)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Harakat at-tahrir al-filastiniya</th>
<th>‘Palestinian liberation movement’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ḥamās (,&lt;ḥ-m-ā-s&gt;)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harakat al-muqāwama al-ʔislāmiya</td>
<td>‘Islamic revolt movement’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first example ḍafṭh, the order of the constituents (,<ḥ-t-f>) is reversed, in order to yield the meaning “conquest” and to avoid the meaning “slow death”.³ The second example ḡamāṣ in itself means “rage, enthusiasm”.

---

² Cf. BOLOZKY 1999: 217.
Lutz Edzard

Religion constitutes another realm where a number of new roots based on acronymity have emerged. The following list of nouns is due to LARCHER (2010):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>root</th>
<th>surface</th>
<th>base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ ฏ-ผ-宵/</td>
<td>งาชาดา /</td>
<td>งุ่นตุิฟิadv-ka ‘may I be made your ransom!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ฏ-ผ-.Session</td>
<td>งาชา /</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵/</td>
<td>ะชั่วала /</td>
<td>ะชั่ว-ยำ แวด ‘God suffices me!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>หาววาแล /</td>
<td>หาว-วา แวด QA ผิริล แวด ‘power and force is only in God’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>หฉัยาแล /</td>
<td>หฉัยา แวด แวด-แวด, หฉัยา แวด แวด ‘come to prayer, come to salvation!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>ะฮัะอะล /</td>
<td>ะฮัะ-ยำ ส-แวดตี, ะฮัะยำ แวด แวด ‘come to prayer, come to salvation!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>หมาลา /</td>
<td>หมาห้า ‘may God make endure your power!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>นะหาลา /</td>
<td>นะห้าห้า ‘glory be to God!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>ส่งยะท้า /</td>
<td>สง-ยะท้า แวด ‘peace be with you!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>ทะลากา /</td>
<td>ทะ-ลากา แวด QA ทะลากา-แวด ‘My God extend your life!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>ะกับท้า /</td>
<td>ะกับห้าห้า แวด QA ผิริลแวด (or ผิริลแวด-แวด) ‘may God crush the/your enemy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>มะซารา /</td>
<td>มะซารา ‘what God will (obtains)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>มะสำกานา /</td>
<td>มะสำกานา ‘what God will (obtains)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ</td>
<td>ยะลากา /</td>
<td>ยะ-ลากา แวด QA ยะลากา ‘there is no god except God’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acronyms likewise abound in modern Hebrew. military-political as well as cultural terms in general often follow this pattern. Even the most famous philosopher in Jewish history, Maimonides, is mostly referred to under the form of an acronym, rambam (ṣ-r-מ-b-מ”), reflecting the initial letters of rav moše ben maymon ‘Maimonides’. Here are a few well-known examples:

- tanax (<ץ-ן-כ>): תניִּאָם קֶתְוִים ‘Tora-Propheṭs-Scriptures’
- ḥeṣel (<ץ-ש-ל>): ยวงุณ ฀เซา ‘National Armed Organization’
- ḥaṣaf (<ץ-ץ-ס>): حوا-ยวงุณ ฀สิกรี ไทลี ‘PLO’
- rambam (<ץ-ר-מ-ב-מ>): ระวาโมเสเบ่ยม ‘Maimonides’

Acronyms can develop to fully productive roots, as happened in the case of √ ผ-ร-宵-ลแจ duax ‘report’ (properly din ve- xešbon ‘law and accounting’), from which one can derive the verb divay ‘to report and dažav ‘reporter. A comparable example is the English noun tip (reward for good service), an acronym derived from ‘to insure promptness’, from which one has derived the verb to tip.

---

2.4 Root formation via clipping and blending

In Arabic, root formation via clipping and blending has been an age-old phenomenon known under the term naḥt, literally ‘sculpture’. The grammarian ʕAbd al-Qādir al-Magribī, for instance, suggests the following classification of hybrid forms in his treatise al-iṣṭiqāq wa-t-taṣrīḥ (cf. STETKEVYCH 1970: 49 f.):

- **an-naḥt al-fīlī (verbal):** سمعل (‘to say as-salām ʕa ʕalay-ka’)
- **an-naḥt al-waṣfī (adjectival):** صبّط ‘to hold fast’ > ضبطر ‘strong’ (said of a lion)
- **an-naḥt al-ismī (nominal):** جلمو (‘big rock’)
- **an-naḥt an-nisbī (relational):** طبارخزي ‘belonging to Tabaristan and Khwarizm’

Modern counterparts include examples such as kahrabā’ ‘electricity’ + maġnāṭīs ‘magnet’ > kahratās ‘electro-magnetism’. An especially interesting case is the neologism ṣayġam ‘phoneme’, derived by blending ṣīġa ‘form’ + ṣawt ‘sound’, in which the European morpheme -eme is imitated, as in the more usual form ṣawtam ‘phoneme’.

The term ra(?s)māl ‘capital’ represents an interesting case, an annexation synchronically re-analyzed as a compound, having a precursor already in Qurʾānic raʕūsu ʕamwāli-ku ‘your wealth’ (Q 2:279). The re-analysis as a compound is clearly established by the attested modern plural form rasāmil ‘estates’, reflecting a new root √r-sm-l.

The formation of new roots through a process of clipping and blending is especially productive in modern Hebrew. Here is a selection of examples (cf., e.g., EDZARD 2006):

**noun + noun ([NN]N):**
- qol ‘sound’ + noaʕ ‘motion’ > qolnoaʕ ‘cinema’
- migdal ‘tower’ + ʔor ‘light’ > migdolor ‘lighthouse’
- midraxa ‘pavement’ + reyov ‘street’ > midreyov ‘pedestrian street’
- kadur ‘ball’ + regel ‘foot’ > kaduregel ‘football’
- rakevet ‘train’ + kevel ‘cable’ > rakevel ‘cable car’

**number + noun ([NumN]N):**
- tlat (aram.) ‘three’ + ʔofan ‘wheel’ > tlatʔofan ‘tricycle’

**noun + adjective ([NAdj]N):**
- șay ‘living creature’ + daq ‘tender’ > șaydaq ‘bacterium’

---

5 Cf. also GRÜNERT 1893.
adjective + noun ([AdjN]N):
ram ‘loud’ + qol ‘sound’ > ramqol ‘loud-speaker’

adjective + adjective ([AdjAdj]Adj):
šmanman ‘fat’ + namux ‘short’ > šmanmux ‘stout’

verb + verb ([VV]N):
dayaf ‘push’ + šafar ‘dig’ > daspor ‘bulldozer’

verb + verb ([VV]V):
hištaxən ‘boast’ + hitxəef ‘be insolent’ > hištaxəef ‘be boastful and insolent’

integration of blends by clipping into common noun patterns
ben-leʔumi ‘international’ > binʔum ‘internationalization’

Both older and more recent varieties of Aramaic feature re-analysis of annexations as compounds. In Syriac, the annexation bēṯ qḇūrā ‘[house-of] tomb’ is assigned a plural form marked at the right edge, bāṯ qḇūrē ‘tombs’, and the annexation šeṭessṭā (status constructus šeṭ of eštā ‘base’ + essṭā ‘wall’) takes a special plural form, šeṭessē ‘fundaments’, equally marked at the right edge.7

JASTROW (1993: 190, 222) mentions a few compound formations in Ṭuroyo (modern Eastern Aramaic) as the following ones:

bar (st. cs.) ‘son’ + ḥmōho ‘father-in-law’ > barḥmōho ‘brother-in-law’

rīš (st. cs.) ‘head’ + dāyro ‘monastery’ > rəšdāyro ‘abbot’

Such compounding processes also occur in Ethio-Semitic. Amharic adjective-noun phrases occasionally function as compounds, e.g., kəft ‘open’ + ʔaf ‘mouth’ > kəftaf ‘foolish’ (“open-mouthed”). Amharic also features some true blends, e.g., dämoz ‘salary’, representing the concatenation of däm ‘blood’ and wāz ‘sweat’ (necessary ingredients for making a living).8

3 Conclusion

Compounding and blending, while being less frequent than in Indo-European languages, nevertheless have emerged as powerful mechanisms in Semitic. This observation also pertains to “compound roots” or expanded roots, i.e., newly emerging Semitic roots, in which nominal prefixes, prefixes of diatheses, or even prepositions governed by the respective verb are integrated into the new root.9 This question is touched upon here here without prejudice to the question of “original” bilateralism vs. trilateralism in Semitic roots.10

---

7 Cf. NOLDEKE 1898: 83f.
8 Cf. SHIMELIS 2014: 213.
9 Cf., e.g., MEZ 1906 and EDZARD 2011.
10 Cf., e.g., ZABORSKI 1991.
References


© Lutz Edzard, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg/Germany | University of Oslo/Norway
▶ l.e.edzard@ikos.uio.no, lutz.edzard@fau.de ▶
The Arabic Lexicographer Ibn Sīdah and the Notion of Semantic Field

FRANCESCO GRANDE (Venezia, Università Ca’ Foscari)

Abstract

Etymological investigation may resort to the semantic field in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects that underlie the origin and historical development of a given word. Modern scholars tend to regard the semantic field as a notion developed in Western linguistic thought around the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, Arabists tend to assume that this notion was already known in the Arabic lexicographical tradition. The present paper empirically grounds this idea in three conceptual steps. First, it clarifies the modern Western notion of semantic field by investigating the theoretical contexts in which such a notion evolved, morphing into different manifestations. Second, it focuses on the dictionaries al-Mukham and al-Mukhassas authored by the Andalusian lexicographer Ibn Sīdah (d. 458/1066) and offers a close reading of some of the passages in which Ibn Sīdah reflects on the notion of bāb. Finally, it draws a narrow parallel between bāb and a mid-nineteenth-century manifestation of the Western notion of semantic field.

Key words: bāb, Ibn Sīdah, lexicography, semantic field

Introduction

Etymology is the investigation of the origin of a given word, of its historical vicissitudes, as well as of the phonological and semantic changes undergone through them. Etymological investigation may also pave the way to a deeper understanding of the cultural setting in which the investigated word originated and evolved, especially if the domain of inquiry is broadened to encompass other words that share with the investigated word the reference to a socio-cultural aspect of human life (Lebensform). For instance, an overall study of the etymology of the Mesopotamian theonyms Ālum, Apsum, Ishum, Nārum, and Padan reveals not only that they originally meant ‘city’, ‘ocean’, ‘fire’, ‘river’, and ‘path’, respectively, but also that, taken as a whole, they all probably point to a social process of sedentarization by Semitic nomadic groups in Mesopotamia.

2 As remarked by Pisani 1938: 10, 40-2.
Linguists usually associate the common reference of several words with a Lebensform and, more generally, with a major concept such as a semantic field. Given the importance of this linguistic concept for culturally-oriented etymological studies, as has just been illustrated, the present paper will provide a thorough epistemological discussion of it, informed by an Arabistic approach. In fact, it will take into account the manifestation of the concept in the Arabic lexicographical tradition, particularly in the lexicographical work of Ibn Sīdah (d. 458/1066), in addition to the manifestations of this linguistic phenomenon in Western linguistics.

The Notion of semantic field in Western linguistic thought

The first known attestation of the technical term ‘semantic field’ dates to 1924, when the Indo-Europeanist Gunther Ipsen coined the compound Bedeutungsfeld in his paper Der alte Orient und die Indogermanen.\(^4\) At the core of this German compound is the felicitous metaphor of the field (-feld), which conveys the notion of a group of elements of semantic nature (Bedeutung).\(^5\) Ipsen fine-tuned this notion by means of the following definition: a Bedeutungsfeld is obtained when a given word or lexeme is associated with another like the pieces in a mosaic, (“die ganze Gruppe ein «Bedeutungsfeld» absteckt […] wie in einem Mosaik fügt sich hier Wort an Wort”) and both of them refer to one and same major concept (“alle zusammen in einer Sinneinheit höherer Ordnung”).\(^6\) Ipsen’s definition provides the descriptive basis for the recognition of a semantic field in the present paper: the semantic field is a linguistic entity that groups together two or more words on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept.

However, Ipsen only touched very briefly upon the notion of semantic field in his paper, providing no fully-fledged examples or case-studies, except for the cursory mention of the two semantic fields of sheep raising and metal in some Indo-European languages.\(^7\) By contrast, the Germanist Jost Trier devoted his entire monograph Der Deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes\(^8\) to the notion of semantic field, which has led some scholars to credit him, rather than Gunther Ipsen as the real founder of this notion.\(^9\) In his monograph, published in 1931, a few years after Ipsen’s paper, Trier concretely investigated many sets of German lexemes related to intellectual life, such as the lexical set referring to the German system of school marks (Leistungsbewertung),\(^10\) and gave a more nuanced

\(^4\) IPSEN 1924: 225, CLARKE & NERLICH 2000: 133.
\(^5\) A similar expression, based on the same metaphorical process, is found in hard sciences, e.g., Magnetfeld. The possible epistemological link between Bedeutungsfeld and Magnetfeld etc. will not be further explored here. See CLARKE & NERLICH 2000: 139 for further details.
\(^6\) IPSEN 1924: 225.
\(^7\) IPSEN 1924: 224.
\(^8\) TRIER 1931.
formulation of the notion of semantic field by decomposing it into a lexical field (Wortfeld) and a conceptual field (Begriffsfeld).11

Apart from these empirical and theoretical details, Trier is largely indebted to Ipsen for the notion of semantic field, since he shares with his predecessor the ‘visual’ representation of this notion in terms of a mosaic, as is easily gleaned from a simple intertextual comparison between Ipsen’s definition of semantic field, as summarized immediately above, and Trier’s: “Die Stelle an der es [i.e., a word], von ihnen umdrängt, in dem grossen Mosaik des Zeichenmantels als kleiner Stein sitzt, entscheidet über seinen Gehalt”.12 Recent intertextual research therefore reveals the presence of new technical terminology (Bedeutungsfeld and the related terms Wortfeld, Begriffsfeld) as well as of definitions in Ipsen’s and Trier’s studies, which make it possible to ascribe the codification of the notion of semantic field to both scholars.13

Furthermore, recent intertextual research has revealed that the codification of the notion of semantic field on the part of Ipsen and Trier is the result of a long process of theoretical reflection, the roots of which reach back to about a century before Ipsen’s and Trier’s work. By way of illustration, Ipsen and Trier derive their notion of semantic field in part from the notion of inner linguistic form (innere Sprachform), first formulated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1836.14 In greater detail, Ipsen remarks that his notion of semantic field is intrinsically holistic in that it consciously avoids the semantic investigation of words in isolation: “ferner die eigenwörter stehn in einen sprache nie allein sondern sind eingeordnet in Bedeutungsgruppen”.15 Trier too subscribes to a holistic notion of semantic field when he maintains that “No spoken word is as isolated in the consciousness of the speaker and the hearer as one might conclude from its phonetic isolation.”16 Moreover, according to Trier, the empirical basis of the holistic nature of the semantic field is, inter alia, the fact that virtually any word implies a word of opposite meaning (antonymy or Gegensinn): “Every spoken word calls forth its opposite sense.”17 In later work, Trier himself recognizes that he draws the notion of semantic field thus characterized from the semantic studies carried out by the Egyptologist Karl Abel at the end of the nineteenth century.18 However, Abel is responsible only for singling out antonymy as an empirical basis for the notion of semantic field, whereas he is aware of the holistic nature of this notion because of his interest in Humboldtian thoughts about inner linguistic form. The gist of the Humboldtian notion of inner linguistic form is that while two languages can incidentally express a given

12 Trier 1931: 3. Cf. also Geeraerts 2010: 54.
13 On the coinage of new technical terms and/or definitions as epistemological criteria of a stage of theoretical codification in modern Western science, see Peled 1999: 54. The codification of the notion of semantic field foreshadows a subsequent proliferation of technical terminology and definitions, such as lexical field, conceptual field, word field, etc. Cf. Geeraerts 2010: 56.
15 Ipsen 1924: 225.
meaning in the same manner, they will never be identical when expressing a given complex of meanings, as is shown by the expression of the color spectrum, which typically varies from one language to another.\textsuperscript{19} This applies even more if we look into the \textit{entire} complex of meanings they express: their inner linguistic form. It follows, according to Humboldt, that the real understanding of a given language’s semantics proceeds from the investigation of its holistic nature (inner linguistic form) rather than from an atomistic approach, which tries to find the meanings of single words.\textsuperscript{20}

This brief intertextual overview reveals that the interpretation alluded to above, according to which the older notion of inner linguistic form is the ancestor of the modern notion of semantic field, is empirically grounded in the essential feature shared by both notions, namely the holistic nature of meaning.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, recent intertextual research traces two other essential features of the semantic field back to inner linguistic form: the negative nature and cultural relevance of meaning. The negative nature of meaning is a sort of corollary of its holistic nature. Not only Trier and Ipsen, but also Humboldt are aware that if the meaning of a given word can only really be understood by means of (an)other word(s) rather than in isolation, no word meaning can be posited independently of others, i.e., no positive word meaning pre-exists that complex of word meanings conceived by Humboldt as an inner linguistic form and, later on, by Ipsen and Trier as a semantic field.\textsuperscript{22}

Also the cultural relevance of meaning is an essential feature of the notion of inner linguistic form prior to that of semantic field. The very titles of the works in which Humboldt, Ipsen and Trier introduce the notions of inner linguistic form or semantic fields testify to the cultural relevance they ascribed to these notions, be it related to material or intellectual culture: \textit{Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menscheneschlechts}, \textit{Der alte Orient und die Indogermanen}, \textit{Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes: Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes I: Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 13. Jhds.}, respectively. The cultural relevance of meaning, not unlike the negative nature of meaning, is deeply interlocked with its holistic nature. Effectively, the ultimate aim lying behind the investigation of meaning as a whole is to gain insight into the material or intellectual culture referred to (whereas the same aim could hardly be attained through the investigation of a single piece of meaning, e.g., an isolated word).\textsuperscript{23}

In this theoretical scenario, the notions of semantic field and inner linguistic form are both characterized by two purely linguistic features, namely the holistic and negative nature of meaning, which are actually upon closer scrutiny a particular instance of a more general phenomenon. In present-day linguistics, the holistic and negative nature can be defining features of any linguistic complex which, technically speaking, qualifies as a structure. This state of affairs has recently led some scholars to interpret the semantic field and its ances-

\textsuperscript{19} \textsc{Anttila} 1989: 9-11.
\textsuperscript{20} \textsc{Clarke} & \textsc{Nerlich} 2000: 128-9, \textsc{Geeraerts} 2010: 18-9.
\textsuperscript{21} \textsc{Clarke} & \textsc{Nerlich} 2000: 126.
\textsuperscript{22} \textsc{Geeraerts} 2010: 51.
\textsuperscript{23} \textsc{Clarke} & \textsc{Nerlich} 2000: 129, \textsc{Geeraerts} 2010: 19.
Ibn Sīdah and the notion of ‘Semantic Field’

...tor, i.e., the inner linguistic form, as a semantic structure. This structuralist interpretation should be accepted cum grano salis, provided that it does not deny the notion of semantic field and its ancestor, i.e., the notion of linguistic form, the original context of linguistic reasoning they developed out of, which we can identify with the so-called comparative method. Humboldt himself provides an interesting clue to determining the comparative method as the theoretical context of the notion of semantic field, when he offers a case-study in inner linguistic form, which relies upon data collected by the Indo-Europeanist Franz Bopp, namely the Sanskrit and Ancient Greek infinitives. At this point, in order to understand the original theoretical context of the notion of semantic field and of its ancestor, i.e., the inner linguistic form, a brief illustration of the comparative method is in order.

Semantic field and comparative method

In his comprehensive study on the subject of comparative method, Anttila defines it as follows: “comparative linguistics has two tasks: establishing the fact and degree of relationship for two or more languages [...] and reconstructing earlier (prehistoric) stages, called protolanguages”. According to Anttila’s definition, the comparative method is reducible to two more primitive theoretical ingredients: the comparison proper of two or more languages, and their historical investigation. Once the comparison of two or more languages is explicitly distinguished from an investigation into their history, it becomes desirable to re-conceptualize (and re-label) the comparative method as a ‘historical-comparative’ method or, alternatively, to dismiss the terms ‘comparison, comparative’, which a long scholarly tradition has incorrectly burdened with historical implications, in favor of the more neutral terms ‘syncrisis, syncritical’: “A serious terminological difficulty has arisen from the fact that genetic linguistics has preempted the term ‘comparative’. [...] Sometimes the words ‘typological’ or ‘contrastive’ serve this purpose (nonhistorical comparison), but often they are not inclusive enough. The Greek counterpart to ‘contrast’ and ‘comparison’, syncrisis, has been proposed for this task. Others, in order to avoid confusion, use the compound ‘historical-comparative’ for the highly technical notion of ‘comparative’ in genetic linguistics”.

Anttila’s bipartite definition of the (historical)-comparative method has a bearing on the definition of its object, which also becomes bipartite. The object of historical investigation is change (“historical linguistics treats changes of various kinds”), whereas the object of comparison, or syncrisis, is variation (“syncrisis is a generic aspect of the study of varia-

24 See, e.g., GEERAERTS 2010: 51.
25 HUMBOLDT 1836: 93.
and especially the kind of variation manifested by two or more languages, e.g., within a language family. Another important kind of variation is the one manifested by a single language, in the form of different dialects, situations etc. (“there is even more variation between two speakers, and so on, until we reach the whole language, or even a language family”). Developing Anttila’s terminology, which defines the kind of variation manifested by a single language as intralinguistic, we will refer here to the kind of variation manifested by two or more languages, which is the proper subject of investigation of the historical-comparative method, as interlinguistic.

On these grounds, a balanced analysis of the notions of semantic field and inner linguistic form should highlight their features—such as aspects of interlinguistic variation and change—building on the historical-comparative method, in addition to the features related to structuralism, such as the holistic and negative nature of meaning (cf. the previous section). It is instructive in this respect that Ipsen subsumes under the semantic field of metal (Metalle) nouns meaning ‘silver’, ‘copper’, ‘axe’, which are attested in several Indo-European languages (interlinguistic variation) and take on different phonetic forms in time (change). Similarly, the Trierian semantic field aims at capturing the evolution of the terminology for mental properties from Old High German up to the beginning of the thirteenth century (change): Trier makes this aim clear right from the very title of his book: Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes: Die Geschichte eines sprachlichen Feldes I. Von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn des 13. Jhds.

Finally Humboldt, in his discussion of inner linguistic form, compares the different ways in which Sanskrit and Ancient Greek express the infinitive (interlinguistic variation) and asserts that the expression of infinitive in the former language is less developed than its expression in the latter (change).

In sum, the long process of theoretical reflection that we have outlined in the previous section shapes a notion of semantic field that qualifies as semantically holistic and semantically negative from a structuralist perspective; as diachronic and interlinguistic from a historical-comparative perspective; and as culture-oriented. A major stage in this process of theoretical reflection is the formulation of the notion of inner linguistic form: intertextual evidence supports an interpretation of this notion, which considers it to be the ancestor of the notion of semantic field. However, this is not the whole story. The long process of theoretical reflection to which Humboldt, Ipsen and Trier made key contributions is not the only factor responsible for the emergence of the notion of semantic field, another decisive factor being the practical work of lexicographers, especially in the domain of stylistics. The next section addresses this issue.

30 Anttila 1989: 47.
31 Anttila 1989: 11.
32 Ipsen 1924: 234.
33 Ipsen 1924: 226.
34 Cf. also Geeraerts 2010: 53.
35 Humboldt 1836: 93.
Semantic field and stylistics

According to some linguists, the notion of semantic field originates in nineteenth-century lexicography, which placed particular emphasis on matters of style, such as synonymy and antonymy. This interpretation finds its raison d’être in the peculiar arrangement informing a dictionary with stylistic purposes, known as the Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases, Classified and Arranged so as to Facilitate the Expression of Ideas and Assist in Literary Compositions and published by Peter Mark Roget in 1852. Roget establishes six major ideas on a conceptual level then arranges the English words exhibiting a meaning related to one of these ideas into a group, labeling this kind of word ‘correlative’, and the group a ‘class’. It was precisely the tendency of Roget’s class to group two or more words together on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept that allows it to be assimilated to the modern notion of semantic field in the first instance (cf. the definition of Bedeutungsfeld at the beginning of this paper). In Roget’s own words: “The idea being given, to find the word, or words, by which that idea may be most fitly and aptly expressed. For this purpose, the words and phrases of the language are here classed, not according to their sound or their ortography, but strictly according to their signification,” thus establishing six primary Classes of Categories, “the whole group of correlative words.”

More accurately, the Rogetian notion of class can be assimilated to Ipsen’s notion of Bedeutungsfeld because of two specific features. On the one hand, the notion of class avoids as far as possible considering words in isolation and, to this aim, also includes words with the opposite meaning to the major idea conveyed (“There exist comparatively few words of a general character to which no correlative term, either of negation or of opposition, can be assigned”). This feature of Roget’s notion of class is in essence identical to the holistic nature of meaning, which is a key feature of Ipsen’s notion of Bedeutungsfeld. On the other hand, Roget remarks that “The study of correlative terms existing in a particular language may often throw valuable light on the manners and customs of the nations using it,” thereby clarifying the cultural implications of the notion of semantic field.

---

36 See, e.g., CLARKE & NERLICH 2000: 128. Not all linguists are sympathetic to this interpretation, since the notion of semantic field formulated within the context of stylistics-oriented lexicography crucially lacks one of the two epistemological criteria determining a realistic stage of codification in modern Western science, i.e., the coinage of a new technical term: cf. the beginning of the first section and references therein. For instance, GEERAERTS 2010 makes no mention of Roget’s Thesaurus in his review of the many manifestations of the notion of semantic field.

37 See HÜLLEN 2003 for a comprehensive recent study on Roget’s Thesaurus.

38 ROGET 1852: xiii.

39 ROGET 1852: xvii.

40 ROGET 1852: xiv.

41 ROGET 1852: xxii.

42 ROGET 1852: xix.
class (“correlative terms”), which to a great extent correspond to the feature of cultural relevance typical, again, of Ipsen’s notion of *Bedeutungsfeld*.

But the parallel between the Rogetian notion of class and Ipsen’s notion of *Bedeutungsfeld* cannot be extended further. In fact, the Rogetian notion of class, albeit also useful for cultural purposes, as illustrated immediately above, pursues primarily stylistic purposes, such as the retrieval of synonyms or antonyms. This is shown by the presentational design of the notion of class: whenever possible, Roget divides the words belonging to it into two columns, one of which lists the synonyms and the other the antonyms. Roget clearly states this point as follows:

> For the purpose of exhibiting with greater distinctness the relations between words expressing opposite and correlative ideas, I have, whenever the subject admitted of such an arrangement, placed them in two parallel columns in the same page, so that each group of expressions may be readily contrasted with those which occupy the adjacent column, and constitute their antitheses. By carrying the eye from the one to the other, the inquirer may often discover forms of expression of which he may avail himself advantageously to diversify and infuse vigour into his phraseology. Rhetoricians, indeed, are well aware of the power derived from the skilful introduction of antitheses in giving point to an argument, and imparting force and brilliancy to the diction.

In this sense, the Rogetian notion of class is stylistics-oriented, whereas Ipsen’s notion of *Bedeutungsfeld* and the like are not.

Furthermore, Roget remarks that his work only describes the variety of English in use at his time (“Words which have, in process of time, become obsolete, are of course rejected from this collection”), thus implicitly characterizing the notion of class as intralinguistic and synchronic, in sharp contrast to the interlinguistic and diachronic nature of Ipsen’s notion of *Bedeutungsfeld* and the like. Last but not least, when Roget makes interchangeable use of the technical terms ‘idea’ and ‘signification’ (“its signification, or the idea it is intended to convey”) or when he asserts that “such classification of ideas is the true basis on which words, which are their symbols, should be classified,” he follows a long-standing tradition of philosophical and linguistic thought, which considers word meanings merely as linguistic reflexes of pre-existing ideas. This is tantamount to saying that the positive nature of meaning is a fundamental feature of Roget’s notion of class, which neatly distinguishes it from the Ipsenian notion of *Bedeutungsfeld*, founded instead on the negative nature of meaning, as shown in the previous sections. The similarities (in italics) and differences between Roget’s class and Ipsen’s *Bedeutungsfeld* and the like are schematized in Table 1 (see next page).

---

43 ROGET 1852: xix.
44 ROGET 1852: xxvi.
45 ROGET 1852: xiii.
46 ROGET 1852: xxxviii.
Ibn Sīdah and the notion of ‘Semantic Field’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>‘Historical-comparative’</th>
<th>‘Stylistic’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Innere Sprachform, Bedeutungsfeld</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main proponent(s)</td>
<td>Humboldt, Ipsen, Trier</td>
<td>Roget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td><em>Semantically holistic</em></td>
<td><em>Semantically holistic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semantically negative</td>
<td>Semantically positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interlinguistic</td>
<td>Intralinguistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diachronic</td>
<td>Synchronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Culture-oriented</em></td>
<td><em>Culture-oriented</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Stylistics-oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – The Notion of Semantic Field and Its Features

Roget himself acknowledges that in developing his “systematic arrangement of Ideas,” he drew inspiration from a long-standing tradition of philosophical and linguistic thought, which began as early as the late fourth century CE, when the Sanskrit lexicographer Amarasimha authored the *Amarakośa*, a thesaurus that organizes the Sanskrit words according to general themes such as divinities, natural elements, etc. The influence that Sanskrit lexicography exerted on Roget’s thesaurus widens the perspective of our epistemological investigation concerning the notion of semantic field in lexicographical traditions other than the Western one. In this spirit, the remainder of the present paper will explore the possibility that the Arabic lexicographical tradition was aware of such a notion. Before proceeding further, however, a word of caution is needed: as discussed at length in the previous sections, the Western notion of semantic field grew out of two different linguistic approaches, manifesting itself in two different versions.

The former, which is deeply interlocked with the (historical-) comparative method and will accordingly be referred to here as the ‘historical-comparative version’ of the notion of semantic field, is exemplified by Ipsen’s *Bedeutungsfeld*. The latter, which is deeply interlocked with the nineteenth-century lexicography focused on stylistics and which will, for the sake of convenience, be referred to here as the ‘stylistic version’ of the notion of semantic field, is exemplified by Roget’s class. The bipartite manifestation of the modern Western notion of semantic field is summarized in Table 1. It is important to bear this in mind in the following investigation of a possible manifestation of the notion of semantic field within the context of Arabic lexicographical tradition.

**Semantic field and Arabic lexicographical tradition**

In their reference works on Arabic lexicographical tradition, Haywood and Baalbaki find the equivalent of the notion of semantic field in many thesauri authored by renowned lexi-

---

47 ROGET 1852: xxviii (capital “T” is Roget’s).
cographers, such as al-ʿAṣmaʾī (d. 216/831) and Ibn ʿSīdah (d. 458/1066), to mention but a few. In his studies specifically devoted to Ibn ʿSīdah’s life and work, Cabanelas takes an analogous position. These scholars all observe that the two fundamental composite units of these thesauri, notably the kitāb ‘book’ and the bāb ‘chapter’, actually group several words, which all refer to a major concept. For instance, the early Arabic lexicographer Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830) groups the words ʾidāḥ ‘great thorny trees’ and shirs ‘small thorny trees’ into a kitāb dealing with the asmāʾ al-shajar, ‘the names of trees’. Because of this semantic condition, as illustrated at the beginning of the present paper, Haywood, Cabanelas and Baalbaki all hold that the kitāb and bāb found in the traditional thesauri of Arabic can be likened to the modern Western notion of semantic field.

That said, this valuable interpretation requires further elaboration, as it is seemingly saddled with two epistemological drawbacks. The first epistemological drawback is that a compositive unit is not a fully-fledged notion. The practical task of grouping two or more words on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept may not have necessarily been the object of theoretical reflection on the part of the Arabic lexicographers. Even conceding that an intuitive perception of the semantic field informs the thesauri authored by them, the fact still remains that an intuition of this sort does not automatically result in their awareness of the semantic field in the form of a real notion. On a constructive note, according to Owens the stable designation of a fixed class of items throughout time, e.g., from one generation of grammarians and lexicographers to another, is considerable evidence for the existence of a self-aware notion in Arabic linguistic tradition. In the case of the possible manifestation of the notion of semantic field within the context of Arabic lexicographical tradition, Owens’ argument can be construed as follows. First, two or more words arranged into a group on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept can be intended epistemologically as a fixed class of items. Second, the terms bāb and kitāb indeed signify a group of this kind. Third, they will qualify as manifestations of the notion of semantic field if it can be proven that either term was circulated with this exact meaning by several generations of Arabic lexicographers.

The second epistemological drawback is that the terms bāb and kitāb do not unambiguously mean ‘semantic field’, which may be considered a specific technical interpretation of bāb and kitāb co-existing with their general sense of ‘chapter’ and ‘book’, respectively, so in principle Arabic lexicographers may have used these words in their general sense rather than in their specific technical sense. The researcher is thus confronted with a situation of interpretive ambiguity arising from the lack of a clear-cut differentiation between a specific

---

48 See the following footnotes for detailed references.
50 BAALBAKI 2014: 137.
52 This is why BAALBAKI 2014: 199 cautiously sometimes translates bāb as ‘semantic field’ and sometimes as ‘thematically arranged chapter’. Cf. also HAYWOOD 1960: 65, who renders the same term not only as ‘restricted vocabulary area’, but also as ‘subject heading’.
technical sense and a general sense, which according to Peled is not confined to bāb and kitāb, but widespread throughout the entire technical terminology of Arabic linguistic tradition.54 The ultimate cause of this interpretive ambiguity is the fact that the Arabic grammarians and lexicographers were not inclined to coin new terms for the grammatical and lexicographical notions they introduced in their treatises and dictionaries, preferring instead to link these technical notions to words already in use with a general sense. A simple criterion has been proposed in the literature to determine whether, in the absence of a clear definition, a given Arabic term conveys a general sense, or has been assigned a new, specific technical meaning linked to a grammatical or lexicographical notion: the presence of a metalinguistic discussion, such as an intellectual controversy, about the term in question, or lack thereof.55 In this light, the traces of a controversy among the Arabic lexicographers concerning the ability of the term bāb and kitāb to group two or more words on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept can support an interpretation that assimilates either term to the modern notion of semantic field. To summarize, for the term bāb and kitāb to be construed as a notion akin to that of semantic field, it must convey the sense of a group of two or more words all referring to a major concept, a sense which is at once intergenerational and subject to an intellectual controversy in the Arabic lexicographical tradition.

The next section discusses both these aspects with particular reference to the term bāb as used by the Andalusian lexicographer Ibn Sidah in his two dictionaries al-Muḥkam and al-Mukhāṣṣās. As known to modern scholars, in fact, in his introductions to these works Ibn Sidah embarks on metalinguistic discussions of a lexicographical nature, which involve, inter alia, two terms etymologically related to bāb, i.e., mubawwab ‘a dictionary arranged into bāb s’, and tabwīb, i.e., ‘the arrangement of a dictionary into bāb s’.56 Consequently, these introductions constitute a promising domain of inquiry for a possible interpretation of the term bāb along the lines of the modern Western notion of semantic field.

The notion of semantic field in Ibn Sidah’s linguistic thought

Ibn Sidah is traditionally recognized as the author of two dictionaries, entitled al-Muḥkam and al-Mukhāṣṣās deliberately arranging virtually the same lexical material57 according to two different criteria: in the Muḥkam he adopts a peculiar alphabetical order inspired by the phonetic-permutative system of al-Khalīl (d. 175/791) to present the lexical material;58 whereas in the Mukhāṣṣās he resorts to a thematic criterion to this effect.59 It is precisely the thematic criterion adopted by Ibn Sidah in the Mukhāṣṣās that shapes the latter into the compositive units bāb and kitāb introduced in the previous section. In all likelihood, Ibn

54 PELED 1999: 53, 78.
55 PELED 1999: 79.
56 See, e.g., BAALBAKI 2014: 323.
Sidah authored both dictionaries simultaneously, which explains why in his Introduction to the Muḥkam he sometimes alludes to the Muḥḥaṣṣas and vice versa. Keeping this in mind, we can now turn our attention to the introductions to these dictionaries and to the passages which can justify an interpretation of bāb as a notion akin to that of semantic field. To begin with, let us consider the following passage, drawn from the Muḥkam:

Among the features of this dictionary is [...] the preservation of a huge amount of meanings, but expressed in a simple fashion. In fact, [what I found] in the dictionaries of other lexicographers [is that] many times they were verbose when writing a bāb, so as to assign a given attribute of this [bāb] to many species, whereas I assigned it to a genus [overarching the species]; in this manner I dispensed with mentioning specific cases, mentioning the general case only. Indeed, if a given attribute is assigned to an animal, it is automatically assigned to a lion, a horse or a man, and to any other species that turns out to have the animal as its genus. In consequence of this, what has been written in many lines in the dictionaries of other lexicographers is often condensed into one line in my dictionary. To state it briefly: as fragmented this, what has been written in many lines in the dictionaries of other lexicographers [is that] many times they were verbose when writing a...

A key factor to understanding this passage is the parallel that the Andalusian lexicographer posited it to a genus; in this manner I dispensed with mentioning specific cases, mentioning the general case only. Indeed, if a given attribute is assigned to an animal, it is automatically assigned to a lion, a horse or a man, and to any other species that turns out to have the animal as its genus. In consequence of this, what has been written in many lines in the dictionaries of other lexicographers is often condensed into one line in my dictionary. To state it briefly: as fragmented this, what has been written in many lines in the dictionaries of other lexicographers [is that] many times they were verbose when writing a...
tributes of the genus, e.g., any attribute of an animal; and the singular words *dhu’nīn*, *ṭurṭūth* behave as the species of the genus, e.g., *lion, horse, man*. There are at least two aspects to the parallel under scrutiny. In the first place, by interpreting the two plural words *dha’ānīn* and *ṭarāthīth* as attributes of a genus, and the *bāb* consisting of a plural pattern *fa’ālīl* to the genus, this parallel explicitly construes the *bāb* as an entity capable of grouping (cf. the *bāb*’s resemblance to the genus) two words (cf. *dha’ānīn*, *ṭarāthīth*) on the basis of their shared phonotactic sequence a...ā...ī and, what is more relevant here, on the basis of their semantic reference to a major concept, i.e., the sememe [plural] (cf. their plural nature and the equally plural nature of the *bāb*). It thus becomes evident that the term *bāb* encodes a philosophical taxonomical condition that, except for its phonotactic facet a...ā...ī, is highly reminiscent of the basic content of the semantic field, as outlined at the very beginning of the first section. Secondly, the parallel drawn by Ibn Sīdah occurs within the broader context of a metalinguistic discussion, in which he also mentions his predecessors, the so-called *ahl al-lughah*, which include the like of Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 224/838). The Andalusian lexicographer explicitly states that the lexicographers preceding him in principle assigned a similar specific technical sense to the term *bāb*, i.e., a genus having semantic and phonotactic properties; and yet he blames them for having ‘fragmented’ this *bāb* into species in their lexicographical practice—a point to which we will return in due course (‘ādat abwābhum li-abwābi shuṭūran...akhadhīt maḥmūla-hu [i.e., al-bāḥīt] ‘alā anwā’īn jammatin wa-akhadhtu-hu anā’ ‘alā ’l-jins). In other words, the specific technical sense that Ibn Sīdah assigns to the term *bāb* is at once intergenerational and subject to an intellectual controversy in the Arabic lexicographical tradition, which substantiates the impression that the specific technical sense in question distills a real notion.

In other words, the marked similarity noted above between Ibn Sīdah’s *bāb* and the present-day semantic field with respect to their basic descriptive content is even stronger than initially apparent: the former term underpins a fully fledged notion just as the latter does. On the whole, the passage of the Introduction to the *Mukḥamas* analysed thus far can serve as a *locus probans* for the hypothesis put forward by Haywood, Cabanelas and Baalbaki, which regards *bāb* as an early manifestation of the modern notion of semantic field within the context of the Arabic linguistic tradition, with the caveat that this manifestation is richer than its modern Western counterpart, in that it provides the major concept also with a phonotactic description. Having ascertained that a notion highly reminiscent of that of semantic field underlies the term *bāb* in Ibn Sīdah’s lexicographical work, we can proceed to examine more closely to which version of the modern Western notion of semantic field Ibn Sīdah’s notion of *bāb* corresponds—whether the ‘historical-comparative’ or the ‘stylistic’ version.

To this end, two passages drawn from the Introduction to the *Mukḥasṣas* are particularly worth quoting. In view of the fact that the *Mukḥasṣas* makes extensive use of the notion of *bāb* as a compositive unit, as discussed in the previous section, the linguistic considerations that Ibn Sīdah formulates in these passages to illustrate this dictionary plausibly carry over to the notion of *bāb* itself. The first passage states that “in the souls, there are meanings that reside in them and can be grasped by thought (ft ʿl-nuṣūsī min-a ʿl-maʿānī ʿl-qāʾimati fi-hāʾ ʿl-mudrakati biʿl-fikrah),”62 with a perspicuous reference to a conception of

---

meaning that considers it as pre-existing in the dimension of ideas, thought or the like, i.e., a positive conception of meaning. In the second passage, Ibn Sidah explicitly asserts that the Muhkassas is “a dictionary that I arranged thematically since I saw it as more useful to the educated and literate person, to the fluently eloquent person, to the fecund orator and to the outstanding and sophisticated poet (kitāban aḍa’u-hu mubahwaban bīna ra’aytu-hu ajdā ’alā ’l-faṣihī ’l-midrahi wa ’l-balīghi ’l-mufawwahi wa ’l-khaṭībi ’l-miṣqa’i wa ’l-shā’īri ’l-majīdi ’l-midqā’).”63 Briefly, these two passages can be adduced as loci probantes for better defining the notion of semantic field encoded in the term bāb as semantically positive and stylistics-oriented.

To this, we might add that the passage of the Introduction to the Muhkam reproduced immediately above clearly testifies to Ibn Sidah’s use of the notion of bāb as a useful tool to preserve the huge amount of (word) meanings transmitted by his predecessors, e.g., Abū Ubayd (al-muhāfażatī ’alā jām’ī ’l-ma’ānī ’l-kathīrātī [...] ma-kam bāhin fi kutubih ahlī ’l-lughatī aṭālū-hu). Hence, in the passage under scrutiny, Ibn Sidah works out a notion of bāb which describes an archaic variety of Arabic to the exclusion of subsequent language stages and other languages—technically speaking, he works out a synchronic and intralinguistic notion of bāb. It is a matter of wide consensus among scholars that the main reason causing Arabic lexicographers, Ibn Sidah included, to focus on this archaic variety of Arabic is their interest in the Bedouin civilization during the rise of Islam.64 In this sense, Ibn Sidah’s use of the notion of bāb with the aim of transmitting both an archaic stage of Arabic and its universe of discourse causes the notion in question to also become culture-oriented.

In the same passage, the Andalusian lexicographer also points out that he has opted for a simplified arrangement of the huge amount of (word) meanings he has collected from his predecessors, which deliberately omits the mention of any single predictable plural form (al-muhāfażatī ’alā jām’ī ’l-ma’ānī ’l-kathīrātī fi ’l-alfāzī ’l-yasīrātī [...] idhā kāna fa’līlan fa-jam’u-hu lā mubawwaban ḥīna rā’īta fī ’l-midqā’-alīl). As alluded to above, Ibn Sidah formulates this assertion in philosophical taxonomical terms. There is no need to explicitly and analytically mention a given attribute for each of the species lion, horse, man, so his argument goes, given that such an attribute can be deduced from their genus animal; similarly, there is no need to explicitly and analytically mention the plural words dhu’ānīn, tarāthīth for each of the singular words dhu’nūn, tarāthīth, given that such a plural word can be deduced from their bāb fa’ālīl, or more accurately, from their semantic-phonotactic bāb: [plural] a...ā...ā.65 By resorting to a simplified arrangement of this sort, the Andalusian lexicographer establishes his methodological distance from his predecessors, who, on the contrary, explicitly and analytically mention virtually every plural word, e.g., dhu’ānīn, tarāthīth, for virtually

63 IBN SIDAH, Muhkassas, i: 10. See also CABANESAS 1961: 19 for a Spanish translation of this passage.
64 See, e.g., BAALBAKI 2014: 6, 409.
65 In passing, this passage brings to light a notion of bāb which cannot be mistaken for a compositive unit. In the Muhkam the bāb acts, so to speak, in absentia, since its role is making words (specifically the plural words) not recorded in this lexicographical work (in modern linguistics, this kind of bāb would therefore be regarded as a sort of default rule). The role of a compositive unit is precisely the opposite: effectively, what the bāb does in the Muhkassas is, on the contrary, to make words recorded in it.
every Arabic singular word, e.g., *dhu‘nūn, ṭurthūth*. In keeping with the philosophical taxonomical metaphor, the Andalusian lexicographer rejects the methods of his predecessors, who explicitly and analytically mention a given attribute for each species, thereby fragmenting the semantic-phonotactic notion of *bāb*. Instead, Ibn Sidah subsumes as many plural words as possible, e.g., *dhā‘ānīn, ṭarāthīth*, under the common meaning [plural] and phonotactic sequence (e.g., *a...ā...ā*), thereby consciously rejecting the separate or ‘atomistic’ treatment of any single plural word in favor of their global treatment. In this sense, he assigns a holistic meaning to *bāb*. To summarize, the passage of the Introduction to the *Muhkam* that we have discussed at length in the foregoing passage can plausibly be aduced as a *locus probans* for a better definition of the notion of semantic field encoded in the term *bāb* as synchronic, intralinguistic, culture-oriented and holistic.

These features of the notion of *bāb*, when coupled with the features emerging from an attentive reading of the Introduction to the *Mukhaṣṣas*—notably its being semantically positive and stylistics-oriented—plausibly show that this notion is almost identical to the ‘stylistic’ version of semantic field or, more concretely, to Roget’s notion of class. This state of affairs can easily be gleaned from a comparison between the features of Ibn Sidah’s notion of *bāb* and those of Roget’s notion of class, as schematized in Table 2 (identical features in italics). Remarkably, Cabanelas intuitively suggests a broad parallel between Ibn Sidah’s *Mukhaṣṣas* and Roget’s thesaurus, anticipating the narrow parallel between Ibn Sidah’s notion of *bāb* and Roget’s notion of class, which we have just established feature by feature.66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>‘Stylistic’</th>
<th>Arabic Lexic. Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Bāb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main proponent(s)</td>
<td>Roget</td>
<td>Ibn Sidah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features</td>
<td><em>Semantically holistic</em></td>
<td><em>Semantically holistic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Semantically positive</em></td>
<td><em>Semantically positive</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Intralinguistic</em></td>
<td><em>Intralinguistic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Synchronic</em></td>
<td><em>Synchronic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Culture-oriented</em></td>
<td><em>Culture-oriented</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stylistics-oriented</em></td>
<td><em>Stylistics-oriented</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phonotactics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – The Notions of Class and Bāb

The discussion thus far therefore corroborates an analysis of the term *bāb* along the lines of the modern Western notion of semantic field, and of the latter’s ‘stylistic version’ in particular, by means of a textual research that takes as its starting point the terminological

---

66 Cabanelas 1961: 30-1.
relationship between bāb and jins—indeed, one of synonymy. In this connection, it seems convenient to touch upon two other terminological relationships first observed by Cabanelas, which can further corroborate an analysis of this kind. The first terminological relationship holds between bāb and faṣāl and appears to be one of antonymy. In the Mukhaṣṣas Ibn Sīdah sometimes, though not constantly, uses the term faṣāl to group words with no semantic reference to a major concept (“A veces alguno de los capítulos aparece independiente e incluye varios faṣāl no agrupados por un tema específico”),67 in contrast to bāb, which does exactly the opposite, especially in light of the analysis carried out in this paper.

The second terminological relationship occurs twice in the Introduction to the Mukhaṣṣas. In one case, it involves the terminological pair musammān ‘nominal meaning’ / asmā’ ‘nouns’ and, in the other, the terminological pair mawsūf ‘adjectival meaning’ / awṣāf ‘nouns’ (fa-inna-hū idhā kānat lil-musammā asmā’/un kathāratun wa-lil-mawsūf awṣāfūn ‘adidah).68 In both cases, it more abstractly involves many words (asmā’ or awṣāf) and the major concept semantically referred to (musammān or mawsūf), which constitute the two basic ingredients of the notion of semantic field as illustrated at the beginning of this paper.

In this passage, however, Ibn Sīdah does not directly link such ingredients to the term bāb to create a relationship of inclusion, in the sense that he does not group the asmā’ or the awṣāf under the term bāb on the basis of their semantic reference to a musammān or to a mawsūf, contrary to his approach in his Introduction to the Muḥkam, in which he groups the words dha’ānīn, farāthīth under the term bāb on the basis of their semantic reference to the sememe [plural].69 Rather, the relationship of inclusion created by Ibn Sīdah in the case of the terminological pairs musammān / asmā’ and mawsūf / awṣāf with respect to bāb is very loose. In fact a few lines above he simply says that the poet or the orator who is in need of many words (asmā’ or awṣāf) and of the major concept semantically referred to (musammān or mawsūf) will find them within a mubawwab ‘a dictionary arranged in bābs’, a term etymologically related to bāb, without stating that this poet or orator will find them in a dedicated bāb (kitābān adā’u-hu mubawwaban hūna ra’aytu-hu ajdā ‘alā ‘l-faṣībi ‘l-midrāhi wa ‘l-balīghi ‘l-mufawwahī wa ‘l-khaṭībi ‘l-misqā’i wa ‘l-shā’iri ‘l-majīdi ‘l-midqā’i fa-inna-hū idhā kānat lil-musammā asmā’/un kathāratun wa-lil-mawsūfī awṣāfūn ‘adidatun tanāqqu ‘l-khaṭību wa ‘l-shā’irū min-hā mā shā’u).70 Nonetheless, Ibn Sīdah establishes a narrower relationship of inclusion, which the terminological pairs musammān / asmā’ and mawsūf / awṣāf entertain with respect to the term bustān ‘garden’ when, in the passage under scrutiny, he metaphorically conceives of many words all referring to a major concept as the different species of herbs growing in gardens (‘alā mithlāi mā najidu-hā nahu ‘fi ‘l-jawāhirī ‘l-mahsūsūtī kā ‘l-basāšīni ta’jamū ’anwā’ ‘l-rayāḥīn).71 In sum, the terminological pairs musammān / asmā’ and mawsūf / awṣāf entertain a relationship of inclusion both with respect to the term bustān and—albeit to a lesser degree—with respect to the term bāb (as implied by its derived form mubawwab). This state of affairs reveals a feature of the

68 IBN SĪDĀH, Mukhaṣṣas, i: 10. See also CABANELAS 1961: 19 for a Spanish translation of this passage.
69 See the beginning of this Section.
70 IBN SĪDĀH, Mukhaṣṣas, i: 10. See also CABANELAS 1961: 19 for a Spanish translation of this passage.
71 Dto.
notion of bāb, which the latter does not share with the Rogetian notion of class, notably a metaphorical conception in terms of a garden.

The next section tackles the issue of the similarities and differences between the notion of bāb and the modern Western notion of semantic field from a broader perspective, offering the main conclusions.

Conclusions

It seems safe to maintain that the modern Western notion of semantic field has an almost identical counterpart in Arabic linguistic thought, provided that both the Western notion and its medieval Arabic counterpart are accurately defined, respectively, as Roget’s class—what has also been labeled here as a ‘stylistic’ version of semantic field—and Ibn Sīdah’s bāb. The correspondence between Roget’s class and Ibn Sīdah’s bāb is almost total, in the sense that, as schematized in Table 3, the latter notion possesses all the features of the former, plus two additional features, which consist of a phonotactic aspect and a metaphorical conception in terms of a garden or, generally speaking, of an area of land (cf. the key term bustān ‘garden’). This metaphorical conception is a feature that we can also observe in Ipsen’s Bedeutungsfeld—labeled here as a ‘historical-comparative’ version of semantic field—in which the key term -feld or ‘field’ equally denotes an area of land. However, the resulting parallel between Ibn Sīdah’s bāb and Ipsen’s Bedeutungsfeld is certainly weak, as it is confined to this single feature, as schematized in Table 3. Finally, Ibn Sīdah’s bāb is semantically holistic and culture-oriented to the same extent as both Roget’s class and Ipsen’s Bedeutungsfeld, as is apparent, again, from Table 3 (see next page).

In this case too, however, the resulting parallel is rather weak, being confined to two features only. Hence, it should be stressed once more that the presence of a medieval Arabic counterpart of the modern Western notion of semantic field substantially mirrors the latter’s ‘stylistic’ version. In this connection, the question may arise as to why the ‘stylistic’ version of semantic field, i.e., Roget’s notion of class, and its medieval Arabic counterpart, i.e., Ibn Sīdah’s notion of bāb, resemble each other so strongly. In principle, two tentative answers can be suggested. The first tentative answer is that the very strong resemblance in question is the result of convergence—the coincidence favored by similar factors, such as a similar environment, similar cognitive needs, etc. The second tentative answer relies upon Roget’s admission of having been influenced by Sanskrit lexicography, as pointed out above. Interestingly, some Arabists hypothesize a similar scenario for the beginnings of Arabic lexicographical tradition: they admit the possibility that al-Khaṭṭāb borrowed the idea of arranging the alphabet letters according to their points of articulation in the Kitāb al-ʿAyn from Sanskrit lexicography, although they do not exclude a priori the possibility that this idea is original to him (in which case the similarity between al-Khaṭṭāb’s Kitāb al-ʿAyn and Sanskrit lexicography would be due to convergence).

---

72 See Anttila 1989: 390, 394.
Based on this line of reasoning, one may venture to speculate that the explanation for the very strong resemblance between Ibn Sidah’s notion of bāb and Roget’s notion of class lies in a genetic relationship, rather than a convergence. According to this hypothesis, both notions originate from a common, remote ancestor to be identified with Sanskrit lexicography and the various shared features are accordingly the result of indirect filiation (in any case, the assumption of a direct filiation of either notion from the other seems highly questionable). As is the case for the alphabetical order adopted by al-Khalil in his Kitāb al-ʿAyn, at the present research stage it is not possible to favor the hypothesis of convergence over that of genetic relationship, or vice versa, in order to explain the very strong similarities existing between the ‘stylistic’ version of the modern Western notion of semantic field, e.g., Roget’s notion of class, and its medieval Arabic counterpart, as instantiated by Ibn Sidah’s notion of bāb. However, it seems safe to maintain that, on philological and textual grounds, the hypothesis of genetic relationship is far harder to demonstrate than that of convergence.
Bibliography


© Francesco Grande, Università Ca’ Foscari, Venice, Italy □ francesco.grande@unive.it □

Page 433

• 17 (2017): 415-433
Etymology and Polysemy: 
A Non-Objectivist Approach to the Domain of Vision in the Semitic Languages

GİZEM IŞIK (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg)

Abstract
This article is an exemplary study of semantic change of polysemous words in Arabic and Semitic languages. Since words do not change their meanings by mere coincidence or acquire new ones randomly, the study of the historical evidence of groupings according to related senses can show how multiple functions of a word are related to each other and which role cognitive structuring plays in the acquisition of new senses. To show that mental categories can explain the relations of the different usages of a single word I am adopting a cognitive approach. Metaphorical change within polysemous words in the domain of vision will serve as a case in point. Following SWEETSER (1990), I will look into the historical evidence of vision-related verbs in Arabic and their equivalents in the Semitic languages.

Key words: Etymology, lexical semantic change, polysemy, cognitive linguistics, visual metaphor

In this study I will use a cognitive approach to meaning and show that it can account for facts in lexical semantic change. Cognitive linguistics has shown that the conceptual systems that humans develop from everyday human experience is the basis (alongside cultural concepts) for natural-language semantics (JOHNSON 1987, LAKOFF 1987, LAKOFF & JOHNSON 1980). If conceptual systems, i.e., our imagination and the categories within it, is the basis of semantics, it should also be accountable for lexical semantic development and change.

The cognitive framework of prototypicality developed by Eleanor ROSCH claims that there are prototypical instances of a category that appear to be more prominent. She proposes two general principles for the formation of cognitive categories that are the conceptual systems within our imagination. The first principle concerns the function of category systems. The task of a category system is to provide “maximum information with the least cognitive effort”.1 The second principle is about the structure of information. Human beings perceive the world as structured information. We do not perceive the world as chaotic and unrelated information, we structure it. The structures we use determine our language. It should be pointed out that the world we are talking about is the one we as human beings

1 ROSCH 1978: 28.
Etymology and polysemy: ‘Vision’ in the Semitic languages

perceive. “World” does not refer to an unknown, objective and unperceivable metaphysical world. So, a human being’s perception is determined by the functional needs of his/her very human interaction with the physical and social environment. A large part of language and language use is of course culturally determined. Given that I want to examine only those polysemous words that denote visual perception and their metaphorical extension to other meanings, I can restrict this study to cognitive linguistics.

These general principles of categorization have significance for the level of abstraction of the categories formed and their internal structure. We can imagine those categories as having a vertical and a horizontal dimension. In the development of thought, the sensory-motor interaction with the world plays an important role. So, the ways in which humans use or interact with the objects in the world are inseparable from what is perceived. Categorization then is a composition of perception, motor movements, functions, and iconic images. When the semantics of a word change, a historically acquired new function is either replacing old functions or augmenting them. The questions I want to answer are: What is the relationship between an acquired new meaning and the old one and, in the case of polysemy, is there a regularity determining the distribution of meanings that coexist in a single root across the Semitic languages at a given time and, if so, how can it be explained? It is an attempt to explain the semantic diversity / groups and sub-groups observed in words denoting vision across Semitic. The study will show that the structure of polysemy is depending on the categorization of human cognition, i.e., humans assemble meanings in one word or root not only in terms of shared features, that is analogy, but also according to cognitive structures, such as metonymy and metaphor. It will be shown that there are coherent concepts underlying, for instance, the polysemous expressions for physical and mental vision. In cognitive linguistics such expressions are called conceptual metaphors.

Like metaphors, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience. In fact, the grounding of metonymic concepts is in general more obvious than is the case with metaphoric concepts, since it usually involves direct physical or causal associations. The PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, for example, emerges from our experience with the way parts in general are related to wholes.

Strategies available to us to comprehend the world are analogous transfer or metonymic and metaphoric extension of a meaning. The difference between the traditional sense of metaphoric extension and the conceptual metaphoric extension of a category is that the latter is the reason for the former and also explains why analogy and metonymy work at all.

2 ROSCH 1978: 29.
3 For further elaboration on the difference between physical interaction with the world on the one hand and cultural influences on the other hand, cf. Palmer’s essay on “When does cognitive linguistics become cultural?” (PALMER 2006).
5 JOHNSON 1987.
Metaphor. I am speaking, of course, of the need for a more satisfactory theory that recognizes metaphor as one of the central projective operations by which we establish semantic connections. Traditional semantic theories treat metaphor only as a deviant or derivative function on literal meaning. On the contrary, we have seen that some kinds of metaphor must be regarded as irreducible, primary cognitive functions by which we create and extend structure in our experience and understanding.

A statement such as “The theory started to fall apart” can serve as a good example to illustrate the difference between the ‘traditional’ metaphor and the conceptual metaphor. Falling apart in combination with a word referring to something mental and not physical is a traditional metaphor and everyone will understand the meaning of this statement. But the conceptual metaphor underlying the word theory is ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE. It is the way theory is being understood, its mental categorization, that allows us to use the verb to fall apart together with the noun theory, and explains why the combination is not felt to be meaningless.

For example, the Arabic verb طَلَّ means basically to bedew sth. delicately. But in form IV the verb reveals the meaning to look down, overview; to control, and more. The thought category that is operative here and makes the polysemy possible is a vertical motion with the metaphor BEING UP ACTING DOWNWARDS. This category is a composition of the perception of BEING UP and the DOWNWARD motion. The function of this word is multiple. It can refer to light rain or serve as an iconic image of looking down, hence having an overview, which may imply controlling. SANMARTÍN (1974) and MOSCATI (1946) seem to have recognized the relationship of physical vision and mental controlling in the case of ظٌمٌرٌ (which I will further elaborate on below), but not to the extension of applying any cognitive concepts to the observation.

With JOHNSON (1987) and SWEETSER (1990) I claim that neither diachronic nor synchronic developments of meaning can be appropriately explained within an objectivist semantic theory. Objectivism is a term introduced by JOHNSON to refer to the philosophical tradition that excludes imagination from reality and assumes an objective “God’s-Eye-View”. The world is understood as consisting

of objects that have properties and stand in various relationships independent of human understanding.

Since linguistic forms and functions are reflexions of human cognitive structures and conceptual organisation, their detailed description should provide us with an adequate method to understand a given language. In contrast, traditional truth-conditional semantics associated with Donald DAVIDSON focuses on sentential meaning and only analyses logical relations, neglecting the question why a word can have different meanings. To traditional truth-conditional semantics, polysemy is problematic. The relatedness of the meanings cannot be

---

8 GIBBS 2015: 172.
9 See SANMARTÍN 1974.
10 JOHNSON 1987: x.
analysed in terms of their components because this method fails to specify the number and kind of the components two senses must share to meet a mutual condition. In the SAUSSUREian tradition, structural linguistic analysis is done from an “arbitrariness of the sign” point of view, converging with logical semantics in the FREGEian tradition, hence polysemous uses of the same sign and the relationship among the multiple meanings are presumed to be irrelevant. While SAUSSURE himself never neglected polysemy, using the “arbitrariness of the sign” as an argument, it seems objectivists did so combining arbitrariness with FREGEian rationality. For the purposes of formal language, the objectivist approach is of great value. But for a proper understanding of natural language, mental categories have to be included. An examination of polysemous developments cross-linguistically can reveal such categories. We can find here meanings that regularly appear together, forming a group. And even diachronically we can observe that some meanings frequently represent the basis of later developments—a phenomenon that can be observed also in the Semitic languages, as I will show below. The fact that there are words that assume new functions due to an extension of the mental images originally connected to them, as, e.g., words of visual perception whose meaning is extended to the domain of mental activity, is, of course, not specific to Semitic, but can count as a typical human phenomenon.

Pointing out the existence of a relationship among the multiple uses of the same sign, it was probably nevertheless necessary to establish the “arbitrariness of the sign”, in order to give linguists dispensation from the duty of having to find an onomatopoeic root for every word. Of course, SAUSSURE’s approach in Course in General Linguistics (1916) is right; but since polysemous signs do not have shared objective truth-conditions, no theory should just eliminate cognitive organization from the linguistic system either. To a philosopher concerned with an objective world and an abstract truth, human cognitive organisation may seem irrelevant. But natural language is neither something objective nor is it abstract. Therefore, as long as “world” means its perception by humans, natural language should be described via an analysis of cognitive organization, not only as a system of word-to-world signs.

For example, in أنا أرى شجرًا I see trees, it is arbitrary that رأى refers to vision in Arabic (although some linguists of the Arab language might disagree with SAUSSURE). However, it is not arbitrary at all that verbal derivatives of رأى also can mean ‘to think, consider’, as in ترى ماذا نفعل؟ What do you think we should do? Intuitively, we are certain that, to express the notion of thinking, رأى is a better choice than, say, جلسي or شرب; so it is not simply a random choice; obviously, the word’s basic meaning, to see, is somehow ‘appropriate’ to be extended and give the meaning of thinking and considering. The reason why رأى can mean to see and to consider is our conceptual organization. It seems to be a widespread, if not universal phenomenon that vision and thinking are related. Sweetser (1990) proofs this to be true at least in the case of Indo-European languages. In the present study I will argue that her findings can be extended not only to Arabic, but also to other Semitic languages.

There may be many reasons to analyse language as being separate from human cognition. However, both philosophical reasons and the fact that language can answer many other purposes suggest that only a theory of semantics that takes conceptual organization into account can explain why words for vision are also used to express processes happening in the mind, and more. The purpose of the study at hand is to provide evidence that corroborates this idea. One reason why linguists might be reluctant to include imagination, i.e.,
human cognitive activity, in their concept of rationality is their understanding of imagination in Platonist terms, that is, as an imagination that

is taken to be too tied to the body; it is held to be too particular, concrete, subjective, and idiosyncratic to achieve the status of objective rationality.\textsuperscript{11}

It is such a concept that made Frege state that two people could not share the same imaginative representation. Moreover, imagination is also often understood in a Romantic way, where it is

taken to be too unconstrained, arbitrary, and fanciful to achieve the status of objective, rule-governed, rationality.\textsuperscript{12}

Another reason might be the problem of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.\textsuperscript{13} Sapir’s Language (1921) and Whorf’s essay “The relation of habitual thought and behaviour to language” (1941) suggest that the relation between language and thought is bidirectional, an idea that today seems to be a rather naïve approach to linguistics and leaves the same impact on cognitive linguistics. Objectivists seem to mistake metaphorical use for literal use. In contrast, a forceful argument for the inclusion of imagination is made by Hilary Putnam (1981) and George Lakoff (1987). Putnam tries to break the long-lasting dichotomy between subjective and objective truth and reason by rejecting a metaphysical realism. Analysing the history of philosophy, he argues systematically for “putting the body back into the mind”\textsuperscript{14} by explaining that “the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world”\textsuperscript{15} and thus giving a new account of realism and objectivism. Lakoff, on the other hand, is led to the cognitive model by a survey of empirical studies of the nature of human categorization. Today, research in metaphor is multi-disciplinary, dominated by cognitive linguistic approaches. In spite of the theory multi-disciplinary nature of the topic, metaphor theory has evoked controversy regarding its methods, data, and theoretical conclusions about language, minds, and bodies.\textsuperscript{16}

This being said, words do not change their meanings by mere chance or acquire new ones at random. A study of the historical evidence for groupings of lexical items in related senses can enable us to find out how multiple functions of a word are related to each other historically and which role cognitive structuring plays in acquiring new senses.\textsuperscript{17} Lexical semantic change obeys to certain rules, or principles.\textsuperscript{18} Given that I am applying a cognitive approach, the focus in the following will be on metaphorical change, in line with Sweetser (1990), who demonstrated that there are historical semantic changes in Indo-European languages that can only be explained as the result of metaphorical projections of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Johnson 1987: 194.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Johnson 1987: 194 f.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Sweetser 1990: 6.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Johnson 1987: XXXVI.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Putnam 1981: XI (my emphasis, G.I.).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Gibbs 2015: 168.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Sweetser 1990: 23 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Keller 2003.
\end{itemize}
human conceptual systems which are designed by bodily experiences in the world. Accordingly, I will look into the historical evidence of vision-related verbs in Arabic and their equivalents in the Semitic languages.

In polysemy, a word has several systematically related meanings, as in the case of “to see”, which can mean both to “to look” (I see a dog) and “to understand” (I see, what you mean). Studies show that polysemy involves the metaphorical extension of a main sense to other senses directed by human cognitive organisation—or image-schematic structures, i.e., imagination.

Polysemy. The key to understanding polysemy is to see that we are not dealing merely with multiple meanings for a single word but rather with multiple related meanings. On the hypothesis of image-schematic structures that can be metaphorically and metonymically extended, we can explain these relations in a manner not available to standard views. We are not left with the inexplicable fact of multiple meanings, as Objectivism alleges; instead, we have a basis for explaining the connections among the related senses. 19

An examination of the data I have assembled in the following two tables will allow the reader to observe that, and how, vision verbs commonly develop senses of abstract mental activities. The domain of vision is a main source for expressing abilities of mental focusing not only in Indo-European but also in the Semitic languages.

### Table 1  n-w-r / ʔ-m-r

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th>√ n-w-r</th>
<th>√ ʔ-m-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb:</td>
<td>√  ʔnawar I ‘to shine, gleam; to see fire in the distance; to brand an animal; to be frightened and flee’;  II ‘to blossom (tree); to light (dawn, lamp); to illuminate; to enlighten (god); to brand mark; to tattoo (the arm) with a needle greenish’;  III ‘to revile sb.’;  IV ‘to shine, gleam, see fire in the distance, be illuminated. receive enlightenment from God; to rub in the depilatory nūratun;  VIII ‘to rub in for depilation’;  X ‘to ask for light or fire; to search for light, enlightenment; to be illuminated; to defeat’</td>
<td>verb:  ʔumar I ‘to order sth. sth.;  II to be(come) a leader’;  III ‘to be available in abundance’;  IV ‘to have many cattle’;  V ‘to be hard, difficult’;  V ‘to ask for advice’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>√  𝚞ゎrv ‘tree blossom, blossom (esp. white)’  نړ ‘light, ray of light, glance; enlightenment, truth; gleaming substance; dual sun and moon, eyes’  نړ ‘depilatory’  نړ ‘blossom’;  ‘burning mark’; ‘pitch to coat the camels against scabies’; ‘sth. to rub into the skin for depilation (undissolved lime and arsenic) or for tattooing’; ‘lime’</td>
<td>noun:  criptor ‘order, edict, imperative, power, reign; pl. ‘business, affair’;  ʔamar ‘individual’;  ʔamar ‘so. reigning; God, Muhammad; Muharram’;  ʔmusr ‘sheep’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### AKKADIAN

**verb:**
- nabāru(m), namāru, nabīr ‘to become; bright, shine’;
- G ina namāri ‘at dawn’; of parts of the liver ‘be light’;
of eyes ‘shine (with joy)’;
of face, hear, mind ‘become cheerful, glad’;
- OB ‘celebrate (festival)’;
of confused sign ‘become clear’;
of employee ‘be excellent’;
- D ‘make bright’, of deities ‘illuminate’ lands, city;
- ‘lighten’ darkness; NB ‘uncover, expose’ foundations;
- B ‘ignite’ brazier; transf. ‘make so. glad, cheerful’;
- ‘clarify’ confusion;
- Mari ‘enlighten’ so.

**noun:**
- nāwir(a)tum, namir(a)tu ‘brightness, light’
- namāru ‘clearing, path’
- nīru, nimru(m), niw(a)rum, nūru(m) ‘light’
- nimurtu (in epēti/1 nimurti) ‘friendly doing(s), festive activities’?
- namārītu, namirātu ‘daybreak, third watch of the night’
- numīru ‘torch’
- namurratu(m), namrirru ‘awe-inspiringly radiance’
- namurratu(m), namriru ‘light of the sky, luminary’
- numwurrum ‘brilliance’
- mušanmīrtu ‘lamp’

### UGARITIC

**verb:**
- amāru(m) ‘to see’;
- ‘to see, catch sight of’;
- ‘to find’;
- ‘to locate, discover, trace (out)’;
- ‘establish (the results of a calculation)’;
- act. stat. ‘recognizes; comes to know’;
- ‘is devoted to’, ‘is keen on’

**noun:**
- amertu(m), ime/irtu(m), iwirtum ‘view, opinion’
- imīrū ‘sight, view’
- nr ‘sun’ observation’
- namāru(m) ‘mirror; watch-tower’
- nāmurtu ‘appearance’
- immenur(m) ‘sheep’

### PHOENICIAN

**verb:**
- nyr G ‘to shine’; L ‘to burn’

**noun:**
- nyr ūmm ‘The Luminary of the skies’, epithet of the ‘Moon’ god
- tīgh nyr rbh the absence of ‘the Great Luminary’,
epithet of the ‘Sun’ goddess

**verb:**
- ʾmr ‘to say’;
- ‘to say to one’s self, think, contemplate’

**noun:**
- nmrt ‘word of a language’;
- ‘word, message, communication’
## BIBLICAL HEBREW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ʼāmar 'to speak, say'; 'to give sh. An honorable mention'; 'to wish sth. for sh.; 'to name'; 'to promise'; 'to say to os., think, contemplate, brood'; 'to intend, purpose sth.'</td>
<td>נֵׁר ner 'lamp, light' מְנוֹרָה menorah 'candlestick, lampstand'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָמַר ʼ to speak, say'; 'to give sb. An honorable mention'; 'to wish sth. for sb.; 'to name'; 'to promise'; 'to say to os., think, contemplate, brood'; 'to intend, purpose sth.'</td>
<td>אֹמֶר ʼ omær 'saying, word, directive'; 'thing, something'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בּוּרָנְרָה bōrānāreh 'to rise, draw os. up proudly'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## BABYLONIAN ARAMAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>אָמַר ʼ to say, recite, tell'</td>
<td>נוּרְא nūrēr ‘fire’ מְנָרְתָא menārtā ‘lampstand, candelabrum’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָמַר ʼ to say, recite, tell'</td>
<td>אָ מוֹרָא āmōrēr ‘speaker, Amora’ אִימְרָא īmmərā ‘lamb’ אימרא ʼymra ‘bandage’ אימרא ʼymra ‘saying’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PALESTINIAN ARAMAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>אָמַר ʼ to say, state, recite'</td>
<td>נוּר nūr ‘fire’ מְנָרָה menārā ‘lampstand, candlestick’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָמַר ʼ to say, state, recite'</td>
<td>אימר īmmar ‘lamb’ אימר ʼymr ‘speech, utterance’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## SYRIAC ARAMAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נָyre nayar ‘to set light, kindle’</td>
<td>אֶמְמִר āmmērēr ‘lamb’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## MEHRI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ʰmáwər ‘to need oil on o’s hair’; ‘to need a shave, a brush-up’</td>
<td>ʼīmar ‘matter, order’ ʼīnīr ‘prince’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʰmáwər ‘to need oil on o’s hair’; ‘to need a shave, a brush-up’</td>
<td>nawr ‘light’; ‘glamour, light from the face of a beauty, of a hero’ nawrot ‘lime (powder)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adj.</td>
<td>ʼīmar ‘huge’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### JIBBĀLI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>enbér</td>
<td>‘to put lime on a house’; ‘(first crescent) to rise’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enyér</td>
<td>‘(light) to glow’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nieróg</td>
<td>‘powdered lime’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ḤARSŪSI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nōr</td>
<td>‘to treat with lime (a mangy camel)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>néreť</td>
<td>‘lime. This is extracted from the acacia and used in treating the mange’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SOQOTRGL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṗor</td>
<td>‘to order’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṗemr</td>
<td>‘matter, order’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SABAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ḥnr</td>
<td>‘offer burnt offering’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṣmrt</td>
<td>‘altars (for burnt offering?)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GӘʿAZ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṗor</td>
<td>‘to be tarnished, be infamous’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṛwζ</td>
<td>‘blemish, spot, stain, blot, disgrace, infamy, physical defect, infirmity’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AMHARIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṗoś nōra</td>
<td>‘to be ashamed, made ashamed, to be accused or charged with sth. shameful, to be, become shameful, a disgrace, to be criticized, to be hated, disliked, to be humiliated’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ṛwζ</td>
<td>‘disgrace, dishonour, scandal, infamy, ignominy, shame’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṛwʒ năršel</td>
<td>‘star of the rainy season’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Etymology and Polysemy: ‘Vision’ in the Semitic Languages

**Table 2a  Verbs of Vision (1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ُ البصر</td>
<td>√ُ الشهاد</td>
<td>√ُ البصيرة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb: بصر ‘to look, see’; شهد ‘to be a witness; to be present; to see’; شهادة ‘viewing, looking; appearance, vision; observation’</td>
<td>verb: عين ‘to individualise, specify, signify; to determine; to nominate; to eye sb.’ III ‘to inspect, view sth.’ V ‘to see; be determined; to behoove, be obligatory’</td>
<td>noun: بصر ‘sight, look; perception’ بصر ‘to look at; to think about; to see reason’ بصر ‘to have the ability to see; ‘to be insightful; to be intelligent; to think about’ بصيرة ‘insight, comprehension’ بصيرة ‘to have the ability to see; ‘to be insightful; to be intelligent; to think about’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKKADIAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ُ العين</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: عين ‘eye’ عين ‘(spy-) hole, mesh, interstice (of net)’ ‘spring, well’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGARITIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ُ عين</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb: عين ‘to see, look (at), watch, spy’ noun: عين ‘eye; spring’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHOENICIAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ُ عين</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: عين ‘spring’ عين ‘in public view’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLICAL HEBREW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ُ sehen</td>
<td>√ُ sehen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: שָהֵׁד ‘witness’ part.: עֹוֵׁן ‘to look at so. resentfully’ noun: עַיִן ‘eye; source’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABYLONIAN ARAMAIC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ُ sehen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb: sehen ‘to testify, bear witness, affirm’ noun: sehen ‘witness’ sehen ‘witness’ sehen ‘evidence, testimony’ sehen ‘witness’ seen ‘witness’ seen ‘witness’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

20 See also [http://www.hf.uio.no/jais/volume/vol17/v17_07i_isik_table2.pdf](http://www.hf.uio.no/jais/volume/vol17/v17_07i_isik_table2.pdf) for an “all-in-one” view.
### PALESTINIAN ARAMAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>VN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>š-ḥ-d</td>
<td>434-453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>šāhādā</td>
<td>‘testimony, evidence’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>šāheyd</td>
<td>‘witness, notary’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SYRIAC ARAMAIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>VN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>š-ḥ-d</td>
<td>434-453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>šāhādū</td>
<td>‘testimony, evidence’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>šāheyd</td>
<td>‘witness, notary’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MEHRI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>VN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b-ṣ-r</td>
<td>434-453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>besār</td>
<td>‘dawn’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣār</td>
<td>‘right advice’; ‘cleverness’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### JIBBĀLI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>VN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b-ṣ-r</td>
<td>434-453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣar</td>
<td>‘to see well’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣār</td>
<td>‘cleverness, good advice’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ḤARSŪSI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root</th>
<th>VA</th>
<th>VN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b-ṣ-r</td>
<td>434-453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣar</td>
<td>‘dawn’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣār</td>
<td>‘dawn’; bṣār d-āyn ‘the iris of the eye’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣār</td>
<td>‘dawn’; bṣār d-āyn ‘the iris of the eye’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun:</td>
<td>bṣār</td>
<td>‘story’; ‘moral tale’; ‘good advice’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Etymology and Polysemy: ‘Vision’ in the Semitic Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOQOTRI</strong></td>
<td>√ ś-h-d</td>
<td>verb: śéhed ‘to behold, observe’</td>
<td>√ c-y-n</td>
<td>verb: ‘cyon ‘to look at, harm with the look’</td>
<td>noun: ‘ain ‘eye’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SABAIC</strong></td>
<td>√ ś-h-d</td>
<td>noun: šhd ‘? testimony’</td>
<td>√ c-y-n</td>
<td>noun: ‘yn ‘eye, ?money, cash’</td>
<td>m’ynt ‘source, waterspring’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GĀʾƏZ</strong></td>
<td>√ c-y-n</td>
<td>verb: ḍāyyana ‘to contemplate, observe, perceive, view mentally, evaluate, examine, inspect, put in order’</td>
<td>noun: ḍāyn ‘eye, spring source, tongue (of a balance), engraving (of a seal)’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMHARIC</strong></td>
<td>√ c-y-n</td>
<td>noun: ḋēy ‘eye, sight, knot (in a board)’</td>
<td>noun: ḍēynt ‘kind, sort, species, type, nature (kind), quality, make (of merchandise)’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2b**  Verbs of vision (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Root</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ARABIC</strong></td>
<td>√ ḍ-l</td>
<td>verb: ḍal ‘to bedew’; ḍal ‘to look down, overview; reign; to tower’</td>
<td>√ l-ḥ-ẓ</td>
<td>verb: ḍalḥ ‘to look at, observe, perceive’; l-ḥ ‘to look at, notice; to watch, monitor’</td>
<td>noun: ḍal ‘dew, drizzle’</td>
<td>noun: ḍalḥ ‘glance’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>noun: ḍāl ‘appearance; view’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>noun: ḍalḥ ‘perception; observation; remark; control, monitoring’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** None of the roots is attested with extended meaning in any Semitic language other than Arabic.
**Table 2c  Verbs of vision (3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARABIC</th>
<th>√ n-ẓ-r</th>
<th>√ r-ʔ-y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَظَر ‘to see, look at, sight; to think about, examine; to judge’; II ‘to compare’, VIII ‘to wait’</td>
<td>verb: رَأَى ‘to see’; II ‘to think about, consider sth.’; III ‘to fear sb., guard against sb.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَظَر nazar ‘looking; sight; view; insight; perception; examination; theory; consideration’</td>
<td>noun: رَأْي ra’y ‘opinion; advice; decision’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AKKADIAN</th>
<th>√ n-ṣ-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَسَرَ ‘to guard, protect’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَسْرَة niṣeru(m) 1. ‘treasure’; 2. ‘secret’</td>
<td>noun: نَسْرَة niṣrum ‘protection’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UGARITIC</th>
<th>√ n-ḡ-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَغْر ‘to protect, guard’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَغْر ngr ‘guard, guardian’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHOENICIAN</th>
<th>√ n-ṣ-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَشْر ‘to protect’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIBLICAL HEBREW</th>
<th>√ n-š-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَشَرَ ‘to observe, protect, guard, watch’</td>
<td>verb: نَشَرَانَ ‘to see; to look at, after so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَشَرة nṣerate ‘looking (at)’</td>
<td>noun: نَشَرة nṣer ‘mirror’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>نَشَرة nṣer ‘mirror’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BABYLONIAN ARAMAIC</th>
<th>√ n-ṭ-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَتْر ‘to guard, wait, remain fresh’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَتْر nṭar ‘watchman, guardian’</td>
<td>noun: نَتْر nṭar ‘protection’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PALESTINIAN ARAMAIC</th>
<th>√ n-ṭ-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb: نَتْر ‘to guard, watch, keep, observe’</td>
<td>noun: نَتْر ntr ‘appearance, form’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun: نَتْر ntr ‘safekeeping’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Etymology and Polysemy: ‘Vision’ in the Semitic Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Verb root</th>
<th>Verb meaning</th>
<th>Noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syriac Aramaic</strong></td>
<td>√ n-t-r</td>
<td>‘to guard, watch, keep’; ‘to keep, observe (a covenant, command, law)’;</td>
<td>noun: nṯrt ‘guard’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ r-h-0</td>
<td>‘to watch closely, spy out, be on the look out for’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mehri</strong></td>
<td>√ n-t-r</td>
<td>verb: nṯr ‘guard’</td>
<td>noun: racy ‘opinion’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ r-y</td>
<td>noun: racy ‘opinion’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jibbālī</strong></td>
<td>√ n-t-r</td>
<td>verb: nṯr ‘guard’</td>
<td>noun: racy ‘opinion’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ r-y</td>
<td>noun: racy ‘opinion’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soqotri</strong></td>
<td>√ r-y</td>
<td>noun: rey ‘way of seeing, idea’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sabaic</strong></td>
<td>√ n-z-r</td>
<td>verb: nṣrhw ‘to protect, guard’; ‘to bethink one’s self of, remember’</td>
<td>noun: nṣr ‘protection, care’; ‘(royal) officials’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ r-y</td>
<td>verb: r_y ‘to see’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Go'oż</strong></td>
<td>√ n-t-r</td>
<td>verb: nṣṣara ‘to look, look at, look up to, look on, look toward, view,</td>
<td>noun: nṣṣāre ‘view, look, glance, gaze, viewing, sight, vision,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>watch, regard, glance at, be on the watch, observe, consider, perceive,</td>
<td>aspect, appearance’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>behold, examine, survey, turn the eyes to’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amharic</strong></td>
<td>√ n-t-r</td>
<td>verb: እንጩትር እናካታትኩ ‘to aim at, point at, aim (a gun) at’</td>
<td>noun: እንጩትር እንጩት ‘opposite, facing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>noun: እንጩትር ‘vision (sth. seen, power of sight), revelation, dream,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>apparition, sth. conceived in the imagination’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** None of the roots is attested in Ḥarsūsī
The domain of vision in the Semitic language

1. Common semantic sources for vision verbs in Semitic are:

a. The physical nature of sight (light, eyes, sight)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semitic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ħ-y-n</td>
<td>eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-w-r</td>
<td>light; to shine, light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?-m-r</td>
<td>to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b-š-r</td>
<td>to look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l-h-ż</td>
<td>to look at, observe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r-ʔ-y</td>
<td>to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-ż-r</td>
<td>to see, look at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The common semantic sources for vision verbs are primarily of a physical nature: the words for eye (ħ-y-n) and light (n-w-r) which both denote something physical, are direct references to the perception organ, the eye, and sight enabling light as well the physical action of seeing with the eyes.

b. Metaphorical extensions into and from 'vision':

- Physical motion and physical presence
  - ħ-l-l ⇒ to be up > to overlook
  - š-h-d ⇒ to be present, witness > to see

- Visual monitoring ↔ control and protection

“The basis for this metaphor is probably the fact that guarding or keeping control often involves visual monitoring of the controlled entity; and the limited domain of physical vision is further analogous to the domain of personal influence or control”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semitic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n-w-r</td>
<td>to be bright &gt; to see &gt; to order, reign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ħ-l-l</td>
<td>to be up &gt; to overlook &gt; to reign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?-m-r</td>
<td>to see &gt; to order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l-h-ż</td>
<td>to look at, observe &gt; to monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-ż-r</td>
<td>to see &gt; to guard, protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r-ʔ-y</td>
<td>to see &gt; to fear sb., guard against sb.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The metaphors of physical motion and physical presence are evident in ħ-l-l and š-h-d. Both involve a physical experience. ħ-l-l seems to have the basic meaning BEING UP ACTING DOWNWARDS. The metaphor UP generally stands for control and force, whereas DOWN indicates something subject to control and

21 Sweetser 1990: 32.
force.²² ẗ-ḥ-l extends its basic meaning within the concept of BEING UP ACTING DOWNWARDS from to bedew, sprinkle, as when light rain is falling from the sky to the surface of the earth; to overlook, as in being elevated and thus having an overview—to look upon from above; and finally, to control, ṕ-h-d, on the other hand, combines physical presence with mental awareness. The physical experience described is to witness, be present. ṕ-h-d is a good example of the concept of SEEING IS KNOWING, as in I only believe what I see, only through personal experience and witnessing, assurance of a matter is achieved.

The metaphor of visual monitoring and control can be described as OVERVIEW IS CONTROL. This metaphor combines the metaphor of ẗ-ḥ-l UP with the SEEING IS KNOWING of n-w-r, l-ḥ-z, n-z-r and r-ʔ-y. This can be understood as from the idea that someone who is guarding something is looking out, and someone who is controlling is seeing everything, having an overview, therefore exerting personal influence.

2. Target domains for vision verbs, which develop meanings of abstract mental activity

physical sight ⇒ knowledge, intellection

“This metaphor has its basis in vision’s primary status as a source of data; […] studies of evidentials in many languages show that direct visual data is considered to be the most certain kind of knowledge.”²³

ʕ-y-n ⇒ eye > to determine; inspect; idea
b-ṣ-r ⇒ to look > to think; be intelligent; comprehension
r-ʔ-y ⇒ to see > opinion; reflexion, consideration
n-z-r ⇒ insight; examination; consideration; theory

This metaphor describes understanding is a kind of seeing and ideas as light sources.²⁴

The idea behind this transfer is that knowledge is built upon visual perception and we know what we have seen. Not only is visual data a primary source for knowledge, but in this extension of meaning there is also a second metaphor, namely PHYSICAL VISION IS MENTAL VISION. It is interesting to look at this point also into the Indo-European languages.

For example, the Indo-European root *weid- ‘to see’ developed from Gk. εἶδον ‘to see, perceive, visit’, perf. οἶδα ‘to know, understand’ to the Eng. word idea.²⁵ The same development can be observed in Semitic for ʕ-y-n from “common Semitic” *ʔm - ‘eye’ to Arab. ‘see’ and ‘idea’.

²² LAKOFF & JOHNSON 1980: 15.
²³ SWEETSER 1990: 33.
²⁵ SWEETSER 1990: 33.
Summarizing the metaphors involved in the domain of vision, four depending relationships can be asserted for the extension of basic meanings to polysemous uses of a word:

- UP IS POSITIVE - KNOWLEDGE IS UP
- SEEING IS KNOWING - OVERVIEW IS CONTROL
- PERSONAL ATTENDANCE/SEEING IS PERSONAL INFLUENCE/CONTROL
- UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, IDEAS ARE LIGHT SOURCES - PHYSICAL VISION IS MENTAL VISION

Special remark on ء-م-ر

A special remark has to be made on n-w-r and ء-م-ر. I have assembled in Table 1 n-w-r and ء-م-ر together. It is only Akkadian and Ugaritic that show the meaning to see also in ء-م-ر. Among these two, only Ugaritic ء-م-ر has both to see and to order (to say). In Akkadian, the root n-w-r seems to undergo several phonetic changes, attested as n-w-r, n-b-r and n-m-r. Further attestations of ء-م-ر in Akkadian show properties with initial n- in some nominal forms. These phonetic properties and the attestation of both meanings in Ugaritic allow to ask whether these two roots might be related in the sense of polysemy. Nöldeke described the phenomenon of the change of roots with primae waw or hamza to niin, but he neither mentioned n-w-r nor ء-م-ر. Yet, both meanings are semantically related in a way that was described for other verbs. A possible phonetic development might be: n-m-r > n-b-r > n-w-r, and ء-م-ر > n-m-r. Those changed forms can begin to coexist synchronically involving meaning extension or constriction. Through an invisible-hand-process one form may replace the other or merge with them to polysemous usages of words. Leslau (1987) refers to Dillmann, who was the first to state that the basic meaning of ء-م-ر was to stand out, be conspicuous, be clear, be bright > make clear, show, say. Then again, those two roots would not be related at all. Another reference in favour of their unrelatedness is to Sanmartín (1974) by Donner, Herbert (ed.) (1987-2012). Having a deeper look into ء-م-ر, the proposals are, that there might be two or even three separate roots with one meaning to say, order and the other meaning to see and the third one to be high. Thinking in metaphors and mental concepts there doesn’t seem to be a category for the notion of talking or expressing words leading to the extension to the domain of controlling and power. Viewed conceptually and in favour of the attempt to explain polysemous words as having one common basic meaning they are deriving from, I suggest a common root with a metaphorical extension into the domain of vision. Moscati states that there is still evidence in Arabic for the meaning in the domain of vision. He refers to تأمل ta’ammul with an exchange of the liquids l and r meaning

27 Fritz 2005: 46.
28 Leslau 1987, entry on ء-م-ر.
29 Entry on ء-م-ر.
observation (among others). Although there is a still used meaning of the root ʔ-m-r denoting to sight as in, امار sign. The third meaning spoken above of to become many, much, abundant is being attested for Arabic by Lane and others. Moscati introduces UNGNAD’s hypothesis in which he explains the meaning to become much with “(mit Eindrücken) sich füllen – sehen”, but this is not sufficient enough to explain the meaning high, tall in Hebrew. Moscati himself is considering all meanings of ʔ-m-r to be polysemous uses of the main domain of vision. Although he doesn’t put his explanation in a cognitive context, his view is easily transferred. ʔ-m-r has the meanings to see, to say/order, to be big/much. Moscati’s metaphor therefore is SEEING/ BEING VISIBLE AND OVERVIEW → BEING ELEVATED → TALL, BIG, MUCH. But seeing does not per se imply the idea of being elevated. For this reason alone, I suggest a similar development for ʔ-m-r as in ʿ-l-l. For ʿ-l-l I proposed the metaphor BEING UP ACTING DOWNWARDS. But since ʔ-m-r does not implicate any vertical action/motion, the concept here is rather the condition of BEING UP → SEEING, HAVING AN OVERVIEW → CONTROLLING, BEING AN AUTHORITY.

Conclusion

What SWEETSER proved for the Indo-European languages holds also true for the Semitic languages. The multifunctional usage of words from the domain of vision have their extended meaning in the domain of mental activity. Another property of metaphors is its directionality. Which means that they have an impact in both directions and we understand one concept in terms of the other. Knowledge is seeing and seeing is knowledge. Therefore, it can be said, that abstract domains derive their meanings from more concrete domains and that there is a cognitive predisposition for a certain abstract domain to derive its vocabulary from a certain concrete domain.

To sum up, it can be said that linguistic meaning is categorized by its use of syntactic categories (e.g., verb phrase, noun phrase, particles, etc.), by its semantic categories (e.g., object, event, agent, etc.) and by its speech-act conventions. However, we have seen that at least polysemous structures have bodily correlates proven on verbs of vision developing meanings of mental activity in the Semitic Languages.

The conclusion is that the linguistic system is interwoven with our physical experience and cognition. The development of lexical meaning is in dependency to prototype theory, conceptual metaphor, polysemy and metonymy. Thus, language should be analysed in the collective light of the human sciences, which is broadly done so for many languages, but it does not seem to be case in the field of Semitic languages yet. In this study, I focused on only nine roots, but there is far more to be looked into, because this study shows how polysemy reflects human’s categorization of things and that they can be accounted for by a cognitive approach.

31 MOSCATI 1946: 124.
32 MOSCATI 1946: 124.
33 SHEN & PORAT 2017.
References


Etymology and polysemy: ‘Vision’ in the Semitic languages


© Gizem Işık, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg / Germany

▶ gizem.goezleten@fau.de ▶