Three Interrelated Factors in the Semantic Study of Ancient Hebrew

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Among the problems met in the semantic analysis of ancient Hebrew, three seem to be interconnected: the question how far meaning belongs to the "root" or to the actual lexeme, the problem of distinguishing between homonymy and polysemy, and the perception of diachronic change in meaning.

(1) Root and Lexeme

Under what conditions may we speak of a root having a meaning, and how does this relate to the meaning of the lexeme which contains, or belongs to, that root? And how can this be handled in a modern database designed for advanced semantic study?

Some of the problems are practical ones that have arisen from the nature of printed dictionaries and their users. Some dictionaries like BDB are organized (at least for the most part) by roots: to look up *mōṣā'* you have to know, or guess, that it belongs to the root *y-ṣ-'*, and there you will find it. Other dictionaries are organized in alphabetic order of the actual lexemes: thus you look up *mōṣā'* under the letter *mem*, and there it is. Each of these approaches may have some advantages and some disadvantages.

A. Advantages of organization by roots:

1. It may be thought that an understanding of the importance of the roots is vital for the appreciation of the Semitic language-type: organization of the dictionary in this form guides the user, and especially the student user, to understand this.
2. The organization of the lexicon by roots may be thought to fit with the fact that identification of roots is an essential element in morphological analysis and thus in the way in which we teach Hebrew to language learners: to understand *way-yakkū* they have to know that it contains an *n*, i.e. that the root is *n-k-h*.
3. Organization by root brings together in contiguity the various lexemes that belong to the same root, and this makes it easier to see at a glance the spread of the root through the variety of lexemes in which it appears.

B. Disadvantages of organization by roots:

1. Many words become difficult to find, because it is not obvious what the root of the word is.
2. The system does not work with words that do not have a real root within Hebrew, e.g. loanwords like *melṣār*, where one would be lost in looking for a root *l-ṣ-r*. In a case like this BDB abandons its own principle and lists alphabetically (p. 576).

C. Advantages of organization by lexemes:
1. It is easier to locate any word looked up, since it is to be found in its straightforward alphabetic location. [Even this, however, is not always so easy, for the obvious reason that many forms as actually found do not begin with the first letter as required by the "citation form" – in verbs the perfect 3 m.s. – this fact somewhat supports organization by roots.]
2. By concentrating on the actual lexemes of the language as found, this organization may reduce the danger that one should attribute excessive dominance to a "root meaning" which would then control the possibilities of actual meanings of the lexemes.

D. Disadvantages of organization by lexemes:
In many words it creates a problem of the spelling adopted, since the choice between plene and defective spelling affects the alphabetical position and the ease of finding the word: e.g. in KBL[3] *ša*ᶜ*ar* "gate" is on p. 1491ff. but *šō*ᶜ*ēr* "door-keeper", because it is spelt plene, is on p. 1342. One can of course say: follow the numerically dominant spelling for each case. But that does not solve the problem: firstly, the user usually does not know in advance what the dominant spelling is, and, secondly, there are problems because the dominant spelling as found when the word is (say) in the absolute singular commonly ceases to be dominant when it is plural or with suffixes.

Problems of this kind are mainly practical: they affect usage, especially by students, and the practicalities of publication. But for serious semantic study they are elementary rather than profound. One compromise approach is to provide registration both of roots and of actual lexemes. Thus one would provide an entry for the root *l-*ᵓ*-k* as well as for the actual lexemes *mal*ᵓ*āk* and *m*ᶜ*lā*ᵓ*kāh*. This is nothing new and is done in some traditional dictionaries. It is significant where past literature is recorded, for a scholar may have written about a root or may have written about some lexemes. Both could be incorporated.
Nevertheless there could be a case in favour of organization under roots, with certain limitations which will be mentioned. The question how far the root contributes to the semantics of the actual words is part of the basic research. Under these circumstances the bringing together of the group of lexemes recognized as belonging to a particular root would seem to be a convenience.
On the other hand the possibility should be faced that for many lexemes of Hebrew the idea of "root" is semantically ineffective, so that research into root meanings may be without value or indeed actually distorting. And this leads on to what may be the real "root-lexeme problem" that requires discussion. I suggest that "roots" can be identified either in formal terms or in semantic terms. Identification in formal terms will be discussed later. For the present we note only: unless they can be identified in semantic terms, "roots" are not necessarily significant or relevant for semantic study. Thus take a few examples:
A common traditional view suggested that the root had a basic meaning which could be expected to extend through the various lexemes which incorporated that root. It seems to me that this traditional view was built upon certain conspicuous but limited cases: notably those where the "root" morpheme was identical with the

consonantal structure of a verb, sometimes a noun, which also both (1) was active and productive as a noun or verb in Hebrew, and (2) continued to have this sense in all other forms which contained this root morpheme. Thus *yāšab* is "sit, dwell", and the same or closely related senses are clear in *mōšāb, tōšāb* etc. *G-b-r* "be strong, mighty" may make sense as "root" for *geber, gibbōr, gᵉbūrāh, gᵉbīrāh, gᵉberet*. But there are many cases where this does not work.

For example, from *malʾāk* and *mᵉlāʾkāh* by normal morphological patterns we can disengage the "root" *l-ʾ-k*. But *l-ʾ-k* does not "mean" anything in Hebrew. It does not function as a root except as part of these two lexemes, and no serious semantic common ground can be seen between them, one meaning "messenger" and the other meaning "work". We can of course figure out what it may have meant through comparison with other languages such as Arabic: no doubt the meaning was "send". But these considerations were not known to actual Hebrew speakers. To them *l-ʾ-k* did not mean "send", indeed it did not mean anything. The "root" was not active in Hebrew except as an element in these two lexemes. Diachronically, of course, the lexemes must have been "derived", as one says, from that root, but it did not, synchronically, "contribute" anything to them, on the contrary, it is only from these lexemes that any sort of intelligibility came.

Similarly in the case of *l-ḥ-m*; the root is found in lexemes having the two very distinct senses of "food" and "war", possibly also the rather scarce case of "intestines", Zp 1:17, Job 20:23. Nothing is achieved by building upon a supposed common component of "squeeze together". From a semantic point of view, these two or three are separate units. The "root" may have had a semantic influence, but only in a diachronic prehistoric sense: in actual Hebrew usage it was insignificant as an indicator of meaning in any of the lexemes actually found.

To this one must add the considerable number of significant words for which no "root" is known. Sometimes these may be loanwords: *bᵉrīt* has no root that is meaningful in Hebrew. But this is not the case for loanwords only. Many important words, within Hebrew itself, may have no real "root" at all in a semantically significant sense. Take *gᵉbūl* "frontier". The meaning of this is familiar and seldom involves problems. The form is of a familiar Semitic kind and cognates are well known, e.g. Ar. *jebel* "mountain".[1] But there is not really a "root" which has any meaning of its own to furnish to the Hebrew word. The verb *g-b-l* is, doubtless rightly, taken as a denominative and thus derives from "frontier", similarly *gᵉbūlāh*. Attempts to classify it as the same root with *gablūt, migbālōt* (BDB 148) lead towards fancies like Gesenius's original meaning of "twist, wind", hence "cord" and so "boundary-line", and are surely remote from probability. KBL^3 166 reasonably concludes that there are two homonymic roots, so Ges^{18} 192, 194f., if I understand them rightly.

What this seems to mean – and I am not sure if this has been said before – is that "root" is semantically significant, in a synchronic sense, usually only where the root morpheme is active and productive, usually as a rather basic verb or noun, in the Hebrew of biblical times. In other words, we cannot for semantic purposes deduce

[1] If there is also a Hebrew form meaning "mountain", as Driver, Dahood and others have suggested (KBL^3 164, Ges^{18} 192), this makes no difference to the present question.

"root" from purely morphological criteria, e.g. by looking at a word pattern such as maqtal, extracting the corresponding consonants and considering this to be the root. Semantically this may be insignificant. In other words, we can usefully diagnose the semantic significance of a root only where we can see some degree of compatible semantic component running through the series of words we attach to this root. As we most commonly use it, the term "root" implies this sort of semantic community. Thus we would say that *miṭṭah* and *maṭṭeh* "belong to the same root" because they contain the semantic component "stretch out", but we would not say that *ḥ^{a}nīt* "spear" belongs to the root *ḥ-n-ḥ* "camp". – even if we did not count it an Egyptian loanword with KBL^{3} 320 – because suggestions of a common semantic component seem too fanciful[2]. We cannot see any way in which *šāmīr* "a. thorn-bush; b. flint" has common components with *š-m-r* "keep" and so we decide it "does not belong to the same root" or is a case of homonymy.[3] Where there is no semantic common ground, the term "root" ceases to be efficient. This will be significant when we turn to questions of homonymy and polysemy.

Meanwhile however there is another point to make. Statements about the "meaning" of a root may be of two kinds. They may be synchronic statements, as when we say that *y-š-b* means "dwell" or *š-m-r* means "keep". In this case we are saying: this meaning runs through all relevant cases, at least as a component, within biblical Hebrew usage. Some statements about roots, however, are of a different kind: they are really identifications in the terms of comparative philology. The meaning they ascribe to the root is not a meaning existing within biblical Hebrew at all: it is a meaning arrived at by the process of triangulation from historical meanings, and if it ever existed it existed at some remote prehistoric time, perhaps 3000 BC or so. Thus when KBL^{3} identifies II *d-b-r* "summen" or "buzz" (?), that is a meaning deduced by triangulation from two actual meanings in Hebrew, namely the verb *dibber* "speak" and the noun *d^{c}bōrāh* "bee". Theoretically it is a possible reconstruction. But there is no evidence that any word with this root actually meant "buzz" in Hebrew. The meaning is a prehistoric one, deduced in order to bring together two known meanings of known forms and thus create a distinguishable root. There is no reason to prohibit this procedure, which may at times be necessary, though its hypothetical character is sometimes very obvious. But the main point is: there should be a clear system of marking which would distinguish root meanings actually found in Hebrew and active in it from root meanings discovered or hypothesized through comparative philology and thus by their nature entirely prehistorical.[4]

(2) Homonymy and Polysemy

Strictly speaking one should distinguish between homophony and homography, but in the conditions of work on ancient Hebrew this is not so often of practical importance and for the most part we can use the general term homonymy.

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[2] BDB 333b mentions a suggestion "as flexible", fortunately with question mark.

[3] KBL^{3} 1445 classifies both of these as "Primärnomen", in effect saying that neither of them "comes from" any root at all.

[4] I return to this point below, p. 41.

Nevertheless the difference should be observed.[5] Thus, to take a familiar example, though we generally talk as if *q-r-ʾ* is "call, read" and *q-r-h* is "meet, happen", overlaps occur at least from one side: certainly in MH a verb form which by morphological rules belongs to *q-r-h* can mean "read", and commonly forms written as *q-r-ʾ* function as "meet, happen", especially in the frequent infin. form *lqrʾt* "to meet", where this spelling is standard. Thus BDB recognizes two ("homonymic") roots *q-r-ʾ* but only one root *q-r-h*. The "homonymy" however is only partial: only limited forms of the paradigms are found which are fully homographic, e.g. the niphal *nqrʾ*, and this would also be homophonic if we suppose the *aleph* to have been unpronounced, which is a likely explanation of the phenomenon anyway. Conversely, one may have cases where individual forms are, or seem, homographic: e.g. *yrʾw* may be "they will see" or "they will fear"; and in this case the forms are not fully homophonic since the vocalization is different and the shewas function in different ways respectively. For us in our philological situation no doubt homography is the aspect usually paramount; for the actual language in ancient times one has to think more of homophony. For the purposes of the present paper the general term "homonymy" will be adequate. And when we are thinking of roots, which for the most part were never pronounced or pronounceable, "homonymy" is particularly suitable as a term. In a language like Hebrew, one effect of talking about roots is that it at once increases the extent of homonymy. We may begin therefore by looking at what happens in homonymic roots.

Here we can perhaps go the other way and start out from a formal or morphological statement. Seen this way, the root is a morpheme, commonly and characteristically discontinuous,[6] like *d-b-r*, which combines with a "pattern" (vowels plus formative consonants like *y-, n-, -t* etc.) to form actual Hebrew words. It is sometimes said, in reaction against an older habit of over-emphasizing the root, that the root "is an abstraction". But this is not always or entirely so. When formally defined, the root is as concrete an actuality as the lexeme or the word is. The root tends also to be made conspicuous through the writing system, since in unpointed text the root consonants are normally marked (or, if omitted, omitted under certain familiar rules).

Because the root thus functions semantically, it is common to go a step farther and think that it marks a "root meaning". If this were so, all words containing the (formally expressed) root consonants *d-b-r* would carry something of the same meaning. This however is very often not the case. Not all lexemes containing *d-b-r* can be seen to have related meanings. When this is so, we are forced to suppose that there are two or more "homonymic" roots *d-b-r*, or that the one root *d-b-r* has several meanings so remote from one another that they cannot be considered as mere differences of nuance or, in componential terms, as addition or subtraction of one or two components. Either we have homonymy, or polysemy of serious

[5] See already J.H. Hospers, Polysemy and Homonymy, ZAH 6, 1993, 114-123.

[6] I say "commonly" discontinuous rather than "normally" or "always", since some root morphemes can include vowels and be continuous, thus one might include *qūm* or *mūt* in this way. Nevertheless the discontinuous type is highly characteristic of Hebrew: so *y-n-q, z-k-r* etc. A large proportion of the vocabulary, at least of the nouns and verbs, has root morphemes of this kind.

dimensions. Thus no one can seriously suppose that all words containing the root *d-b-r* share some one "root meaning". Just for a start, we have *deber* "pestilence", *dober* "pasture", *dōbrōt* "rafts", *dᵉbōrāh* "bee", *dᵉbīr* "inner room of sanctuary", *midbār* "wilderness", plus the rare homonymic form *midbār* "mouth, as organ of speech" (Ct 4:3; can this really be the meaning?), plus some personal and place names. It is unlikely that this is "all one root". Yet BDB still registers only one root (though it probably did not think that the entire group could be related semantically). KBL[3] 201f. registers three: 1. "be behind, drive"; 2. "buzz, speak"; 3. "have offspring", Pr 21:28, Sir 41:5.[7] But are three enough to include the rafts and the pestilence? Perhaps we need four or five, maybe six?

In what way then does the root function semantically? One might summarize in this way: paradigmatically, in any form, the root functions as that which distinguishes this form from any other form which is paradigmatically the same but has a different root. Thus in *yišmōr* the root functions to distinguish this from *yidrōš*, *yizkōr* etc. This distinction is a basic indicator of meaning. The presence of this particular root means: *not* the meanings of some other root. To say *yišmōr* means: *not yidrōš*, *yizkōr* etc. (this way of expressing it helps to fit with the idea of the language as a "fairly closed system"). In this respect meaning is expressed by the choice of one root morpheme, rather than any other, from the available morpheme stock.

This however only gets us started. Complications follow at once. Even though the presence of one root is a clear choice as against other possible roots, there is not a one-to-one relationship between root (formally expressed, as above) and meaning. One particular root morpheme sequence may mark quite different areas of meaning, just as different as if a different root had been employed: thus we have homonymic roots, and this is quite common. Indeed one might guess (I have not tried to count) that there are more roots that are semantically homonymic than roots that are absolutely semantically univocal. Also it is likely that there are roots which have a different formal composition, e.g. a partially different consonant sequence, but are in effect synonymous: it is sometimes said that one is a "by-form" of the other, or one might say that they are complementary. This happens quite a lot with first root consonant *y* or *n*: *n-q-p* is "go around" but *tᵉqūpāh* "circuit, period" suggests a root *qūp*. Thus from both sides we see that there is no strict concord between one root (formally defined) and one meaning.

We concentrate, however, according to our mandate, on the homonymic roots. What happens with these is that the function which a root normally exercises, as depicted above, does not work. In *yišmōr* the root marks clear distinction from *yizkōr*, *yidrōš* etc. But in *yaᶜᵃneh* the root does not make a distinction as between the various homonymic forms, for the root in formal terms is the same in them all. In this respect one may say that a homonymic root is partially defective as a semantic indicator in comparison with roots that are not homonymic.

The point is: the recognition of something as "one root" depends not on formal characteristics (i.e. identity of consonants etc.) but on the semantic question: can

[7] This third root and meaning will come as a surprise to most Hebraists. Is it – so very isolated are the examples – really credible? This question, however, does not concern us here.

the meanings be perceived as having something sufficiently in common? If not, one has to postulate "more than one root", i.e. homonymic roots. Further, the semantic assessment involved seems to be at the best probabilistic: scholars seem to depend on plausible common components or analogies in other known languages (and these analogies are often remote, sometimes involving Latin, Greek, German, English, etc.!).

It is clear that a study of roots will produce more homonyms than a study based on lexemes or actual forms found. Roots that are homonymic will often not be realized in the same forms: e.g. even if there are four homonymic roots *ᶜ-n-h* only one of them forms the noun and adjective *ᶜᵃnī*, only another forms the noun *maᶜᵃneh* etc. We simply mention, without elaborating it, the obvious point that in many cases of homonymy there is a wide disparity between a common form, frequently found and familiar, and a homonymic form which is rare or unique. *Midbār* "wilderness" is common and familiar, *midbār* "mouth" is a hapax legomenon. The same is the case with the rare term *kōaḥ*, something like a lizard, while the homonymic word "strength" is frequent and well-known. This I take as obvious and familiar. Thus, in this respect, a root indicates meaning through non-choice of another root: this enables us to avoid commitment to the idea, commonly held, that roots actually in themselves have a meaning. In this respect, I have suggested, one case differs from another.

At this point we should consider the possible factors which have led to the existence of homonymy in Hebrew:

1. Phoneme merger,[8] which causes two (or more) forms that at an earlier stage were phonologically different to become alike.
2. Polysemy followed by semantic change, where a lexeme at an earlier stage had (let us say) three distinguishable but related meanings, 1, 2 and 3: but 2 drops out of use, and without it the relationship between 1 and 3 becomes unintelligible.
3. Loanwords from another language, which come to coincide in form with a term already existing.
4. Homonyms which were simply "original" and are not to be accounted for through some causative factor. Just as language was always polysemous (one sign having several senses) it was always homonymic (several different terms having the same sign).

A few examples for illustration:

1. Phoneme merger. IV *ᶜ-n-h* "sing",[9] if correct, would be a clear example of homonymy resulting from this. Proto-Semitic *ᶜ* merged with PS *gh* to produce the homonymy. This being so, explanations on the grounds of "sing responsively", giving a common component with the common *ᶜ-n-h* "answer", though perfectly reasonable in theory, are to be rejected. Similarly *ḥ-l-l* "pierce" is distinct from *ḥ-l-l* "profane" (by merger of PS phonemes *ḥ* and *ḥ*). This type can be fairly easy to demonstrate, provided that the necessary comparative philological evidence is

[8] Cf. Hospers, ibid., p. 3.

[9] For these roman figures marking different roots I follow the numbering of BDB except where otherwise stated.

known. Even then it works well only when the meanings in Hebrew and in the comparative source are quite close; otherwise it remains very uncertain.

2. Polysemy leading to eventual loss of connection and thus to homonymy. It is familiar that the root *z-k-r* represents two widely distinct areas of meaning: "male" and "remember". Other Semitic languages have the same situation. Few are inclined to posit two roots. Yet they might as well be counted as two roots. Nevertheless we may suppose there was a series of connections, which are lost to us. So also with *b-ś-r*, where the noun is "flesh" and the verb is "bring good news". Again with *m-š-l*, where we have the very remote meanings "be like" and "rule", classified as different roots by BDB 605 and KBL^3 611f., probably because they just cannot see any plausible connection. Similarly with *gālāh*, where we have the (totally?) unassociable meanings "be uncovered" and "go into exile". In effect they are homonyms though dictionaries do not usually separate them in that way. The roots counted as II *š-m-r* and even III *š-m-r* (BDB, 1038; KBL^3 1464, 1466) might – if connections now long lost were known – be part of a polysemy which *š-m-r* "keep" once had. It is probable that many cases where homonyms have been recognized, and separately registered, belong to this category. It is never, however, easy to prove, because in the nature of the case the connections have been lost. Sometimes analogies from other languages help a little, but these also are precarious.

3. Loanword adoption. II *ʿānāh* "be occupied, busy" (Qo 1:13, 3:10) may well be explained thus, as loanword from Aramaic. In Esther 1:13 *dīn* is probably from Iranian *daēna*, means "religion", and is a homonym with the Old-Semitic *dīn* "judgement". With *m-l-k*, we may consider that the rare meaning "advise", niphal *wayyimmālek libbī ʿālay* Neh 5:7, is a homonym produced by adoption from Aramaic. Even if we take this sense as part of an original polysemy with the common sense "king" etc., the actual adoption into Hebrew comes not by direct descent from the ancient etymological sense, but by adoption from Aramaic. Cases of this kind are reasonably straightforward; but it is not likely that they will account for a large part of the biblical Hebrew vocabulary.

4. Cases like I *ʿ-n-h* "answer" and III *ʿ-n-h* "be humble" are left as true indigenous homonyms *so far as we can see*. The same may be true of the three (?) verbs *g-w-r* "sojourn", "stir up strife, quarrel", and "be afraid", to say nothing of the root of *mᵉgūrāh* "barn" in Hg 2:19, noted by KBL^3 177, 517 (left without a root by BDB 158). It is very difficult to provide any explanation of how so many homonymic terms could have come into existence, other than that they were indigenous.

An interesting illustration is *š-k-ḥ*. Since the discovery of Ugaritic *tkḥ* it has been common practice to see this, as at Ps 137:5, as a different verb from the familiar Hebrew "forget": it means "be limp, sink down". On the other hand, it could still be a case of original polysemy of the one same root: one could imagine that "sink down, be limp" could have a common component with "forget". It is, after all, not dissimilar from the situation with the root *z-k-r* with its two widely different meanings "male" and "remember". It is interesting that, after the strong impression that has been made by the "discovery" of II *š-k-ḥ* through Ugaritic, KBL^3 1382 goes back in the end to the older tradition of emending the text!

What then does this add up to? It seems to be agreed that there is no absolute distinction between polysemy of one item and recognition of several homonyms.

Polysemy, as I have suggested, is one of the causes which can produce later homonymy.
Only in certain cases can definite demonstration be achieved, e.g. with phoneme merger and loanword adoption as stated above; and even these do not work unless semantic elements are close enough between the Hebrew term in question and the terms assembled by comparative philology or known from Aramaic, Akkadian etc. And apart from these cases the distinction between polysemy and homonymy depends on an estimate of semantic relationships. The difference seems to lie in a sense of semantic compatibility - though I confess I find this hard to define or to give good grounds for it. Thus I think that I *ḥ-l-l* with its remarkable combination of meanings "pollute" and "begin" (if this really is all one word) counts as polysemy, because I can somehow see how these could be connected. On the other hand *g-l-h* with its combination of "be revealed" and "go into exile" ought, I think, to count as two quite different, homonymic, verbs – even if, as I suggest above, they may go back to some original polysemy.
Mention should be made of one suggestion put forward, namely that "each verbal stem" of any particular root should be treated as a separate lexeme.[10] If this were done, it might substantially reduce the incidence of polysemy, and of homonymy of lexemes, though it would not reduce homonymy of roots.

(3) Diachronic Aspects

There seem to be three things for discussion here:
1. Prehistoric indications known through comparative philology;
2. Tracing of diachronic changes through stages within the classical period of Hebrew;
3. Differences between what "they knew then" and what we, with a different consciousness, know now.

1. Comparative philological operations are often regarded as "diachronic" but I have already suggested above that they really belong to a separate category which I have called "prehistoric".
This is so whether our reasoning has its base within Hebrew (triangulation from forms and meanings known within Hebrew) or has its base in various cognate languages (triangulation from form and meaning in Hebrew, in Arabic, in Akkadian etc). Thus for the familiar case *ʾ-d-m* we may discuss whether "man" was derived from the colour "red" or "red" from the substance "earth", etc., but we cannot put a date or even, usually, a sequence to these developments: all we can say is that they belong in an unmeasured past and no sort of diachronic development can be traced. Similarly, no doubt with sufficient time and ingenuity we might be able to explain the connection between Hebrew *y-š-b* "sit" and Arabic *wathaba* "jump",[11] but what

[10] This possibility was mentioned, in one of the preparatory papers for the Network, by J. Hoftijzer.

[11] On this situation, "enantiosis", similar to that of *ʾaḍdād* in Arabic, see Hospers, ibid., p.8, and his Das Problem der sogenannten semantischen Polarität im Althebräischen, ZAH 1, 1988, 32-39; also J. Barr, Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament, Oxford 1968, 173ff.

we achieved would be too far in the past to count as being really diachronic.
For the term "diachronic" surely implies the existence of a time scale. The features constructed through comparative philological methods are not unreal and not to be despised: but they do not possess temporal reality. There is no time at which all of them existed together: for each piece of comparative reconstruction rests upon the accident of the several features taken as basis for triangulation.
"Original" features and semantic components, as identified through comparative reconstruction, should therefore be marked as such and distinguished from actual diachronic changes, existing within Hebrew texts and having a historical existence.
2. Truly diachronic changes have already been briefly discussed by me.[12] There would be little difficulty in establishing the recognition of "LBH", i.e. "Late Biblical Hebrew", on the basis of agreed "late" books like Esther and Qoheleth. I would myself desire the recognition of two earlier periods, one which might be called "Classical" and would embrace the main portion of the central biblical material, and one which I would think of as "Archaic" and might include some very early materials. For example, under "Archaic" I would think of including poems like Gen. 49, Ex. 15, Judg. 5, Ps. 68. The problem, however, is that the dates of texts are now very much more controversial than was the case thirty or forty years ago. I am inclined, nevertheless, to use a traditional analysis of the J, E, D and P style, even if it is now controversial, because even those who do not accept it can use it and understand its implications. To this one should add indications for various literary categories, certainly for poetry, for prophetic texts, for conversation, for Wisdom literature. In historical texts there should be an indicator which would separate editorial frameworks (e.g. Deuteronomic) from the (usually older) material contained within these frameworks. In some prophetic books we need to indicate different strata, certainly Isaiah 40-66, or 40-55 and 56-66; but even with that I doubt if 1-39 can count as a single block, and we need to separate out some other strata like 24-27, maybe also 32-35. Admittedly all this will be questioned by some: but if one does not have any distinctions of date at all, then one can make no diachronic remarks at all before the beginning of LBH.
One other general impression: I feel it is uncertain whether a great deal of diachronic semantic change is to be found within the biblical period. I mentioned the cases of *minḥāh* and *bᵉrīt* in my previous paper[13] but it is not easy to make a very long list of similar cases. Perhaps the amount of literature is not large enough. There may also be a conservative tendency within the Bible, so that vocabulary (especially of religion) continued long in use without much change and was favoured by archaizing tendencies. What seems easier to show is not diachronic change of meaning within particular lexemes, but entry of new lexemes into the used vocabulary, or much greater frequency of some that had in earlier times been rare, and dropping away of older ones. This appears clearly in LBH, and still more in MH. Incidentally, the inclusion of MH evidence would substantially strengthen any future project for semantic study in ancient Hebrew.
3. When we with our acute linguistic consciousness and sophisticated training look

[12] See ZAH 6, 1993, 12.
[13] ZAH 6, 1993, 12.

at the language we may be able to see elements of meaning which are quite real and valid but which were nevertheless not so perceived by the people of the time. They had, of course, an acute consciousness of words and associations of meaning, but often it was guided by forces and principles which we would not consider acceptable, while we by our methods of research may uncover elements of which they were quite unaware.

Thus for instance the language depended for its working on the existence of the morphemes we call "roots", and it is easy to suppose that there was a high awareness of these and their value and meaning. But this is not necessarily the case. The writers had a significant "popular etymological" sense but it worked by associations that were closer to assonance and association of ideas than to the comparative-historical enterprise that we call etymology. Thus they could explain the name Noah as from *n-w-ḥ* and see Samuel reflected in *š-ʾ-l*, just as they could see meaningful associations in *šaʾᵃlū šᶜlōm yᶜrūšālayim yišlāyū ʾohᵃbayik* (Ps 122:6). Their creativity in that sort of etymology does not mean that they could see how *bāśār* was connected with the piel verb *biśśer*, or even notice the fact at all. Thus, even if we as modern semanticists could explain what that latter connection was, it is possible that we might be uncovering a connection or a "meaning" that in the actual language as used did not exist.

And similarly, even if we were sure of an "etymology" for *bᶜrīt*, it might well be semantically irrelevant: for the Hebrews, this noun was more like a "primitive noun": like *ʾāb* "father", it was not "derived" from anything – and I suspect this may be true, purely philologically, in any case. For *minḥāh* the suggestion of Arabic and Tigre cognate verbs *m-n-ḥ* (KBL^3 568) is at best precarious and in any case probably semantically irrelevant: no Hebrew speaker, so far as we know, knew this verb. Such a speaker, if he ever thought about it, might well have been more likely to associate the word with the familiar root *n-w-ḥ*, prolific in similar-looking words like *mānōaḥ, mᶜnūḥāh*.

The ordinary speaker is unconscious of much of the structure of his or her language. In ancient Hebrew this may well have been the case with much of the element we call "root". It was, after all, well on in the Middle Ages before the principles of the Hebrew root were worked out by Jewish grammarians themselves, and this is so especially of the triliteral root. If ancient speakers had been asked what was the root element of the verb for "strike", I would not be surprised if they had answered that it was *-kk-* rather than *n-k-h*, for the former is what is obvious in *yakkeh, makkeh, hukkāh, yakkū, makkōt* and so on, while *n-k-h* was rather rare and out of the way, as it seemed.

All I am saying here is this: that a major project studying ancient Hebrew semantics must expect to make some striking discoveries. If it does so, it will require to make some distinction between relations and connections that can now be seen by us, to our profit, and those that were operative in the actual working of the language in ancient times.