The Future of a *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*

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In a previous post, I noted some advantages of electronic relative to print resources for the study of ancient Hebrew. I will drive the point home again here, this time in reference to *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (DCH). The dictionary is a treasure-trove of data. One can only hope that someday, DCH in its entirety will be available online, with hotlinks to all references, biblical and extra-biblical. It would then be revisable and updateable by a community of scholars of the editor's choosing. At the most fundamental levels, that of data presentation and coverage, it needs both, as I now demonstrate. אכל's statistics, according to DCH, are 809 (Hebrew Bible); 11 (Ben Sira); 100 (Qumran and related non-Biblical texts).

Not without its quirks and omissions, DCH's presentation of paradigmatic contexts is nonetheless its most delectable feature. The Logos Bible Software's *Grammatical Relationships* in its *Bible Word Study* by comparison provides more raw data and less analytical interpretation.[1] I would buy DCH for this reason alone if I had the money, though I would rather supply *x* number of omissions and point out *y* number of errors to DCH's editor for the purposes of a future electronic edition in exchange for the printed volumes. [*That's a slimy way to get your hands on the set* – ed. And if it works?]

As long as one remembers to wade through the entire entry for a lemma before beginning to piece together a typology of paradigmatic contexts that cuts across the not always convincing semantic subdivisions (based on categories connatural to English, not Hebrew, as the introduction to DCH states), DCH's data presentation makes an excellent point of departure.

DCH, of course, is an improvable resource. Occurrences of אכל in Ben Sira may illustrate. DCH claims 11 occurrences. With CATSS' help (in the Scholar's Library), I count 10. To be sure, searches in CATSS are a bit hit and miss,[2] and in the morphological section of DCH, it is intimated that 2fs perfect ואכלת is attested in Ben Sira. If so, I failed to locate it.

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[1] The raw data is useful, but it would be helpful if the analytical dimension of *Grammatical Relationships* were beefed up. For example, the referents of pronominal suffixes might be disambiguated; a grouping algorithm based on semantic content applied; and verb-preposition combinations listed analytically.

[2] It would be nice if CATSS were revised so that accurate concordances were derivable from it. The searches need to be made bracket-insensitive.

DCH claims an occurrence of the verb אכל in 36:18 [36:23] with the meaning 'eat' and גְּרְגֶּרֶת 'throat' as subject. DCH adds: (mg [כר]ש stomach). But the form in question, אוכל, doesn't work as a subject of גרגרת, which is feminine. It is best to take אוכל as a noun (אֹכֶל = אוֹכֶל in biblical Hebrew) and construe and reconstruct as follows:

כל מאכל אוכל גרגרת   אך יש אוכל [מאוכ]ל [נע]ים   3:(2:2)

All food is fare for the gullet,
but some fare is more pleasant than other fare.

The reading [כר]ש in the right margin of MS B to which DCH refers is uncertain. Ben-Hayyim reads [כ]רֹשׁ and treats it as a textual alternative to גרגרת; Beentjes reports a mere פֿ. The reading in the left margin, cited in part by DCH sub אֹכֶל, is reconstructible as follows:

כל [מאכל] תסוגר ב[כרש]   אך יש מאכל ממאכל תנעם   3:(2:2)

All food gets shut up in the stomach,
but some food pleases more than other food.

מאכל is feminine, as in Hab 1:16. Beentjes reads [--] before תסוגר (תְּסַגֵּר in biblical Hebrew). I follow Ben-Hayyim in reading [---] כל. One hopes that digital photographs of the ben Sira fragments will soon be available to all.[3]

If 36:18 [36:23] is eliminated from consideration, perhaps we have an agreed-upon corpus: אכל is attested in 6:2 [3], 19; 11:17 [19]; 15:3; 30:19; 31:16 [34:16] (2x: אכל in the body of MS B, and ואכול in its margin); 36:21 [23]; 45:19, 20 [21] (ditto Barthélemy-Rickenbacher; except that they also take אוכל in 36:18 to be a participle). Morpho-geeks will be disappointed, of course, that אכל forms with paragogic *nun* (30:19: 45:20) are not listed in DCH's morphological section. Ideally, instances of אכל with paragogic *nun* would be listed and the word following also provided, so as to know right off whether a particular instance fits in with Böttcher's theory or not.[4]

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[3] The Penn/Cambridge Geniza Fragment Project's website contains fabulous photographs of select holdings of Penn and Cambridge. A few photographs of Cairo Genizah ben Sira fragments are viewable online at the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit site.

[4] According to Friedrich Böttcher, the *nun* is used "fur lautlich bequemen Anschluss vor א, ע, ה, נ, מ" (*Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache* [ed. Ferdinand Mühlau; 2 vols.; Leipzig: Barth, 1866-68]) 2 §§930a). Based on Sir 30:19 and other passages, one might add ו to the list. 45:20 is in pausal position, the other context which seems to trigger the preservation of the *nun*. The matter remains debated. See W. Randall Garr, "Paragogic *nun* in Rhetorical Perspective," in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting:*

These are small details. Of greater concern is DCH's presentation of paradigmatic contexts, its strongest suit. DCH would be far more useful if the paradigmatic contexts in which a vocabulary item occurs were reported in slightly more detail. An example or two may illustrate.

Sir 6:1-3 (verses according to Beentjes; 6:2-4 in most translations) is a delightful passage. I present it in full according to its poetic form, with pointing and accents, along with a translation:[5]

3:2	וְתִעֲבָה חֵילֶךָ ‹עָלֶיךָ›	אַל־תִּפּוֹל בְּיַד נַפְשֶׁךָ
(2:2):3	וְהִנִּיחַתְךָ כְּעֵץ יָבֵשׁ	עָלֶיךָ תֹּאכַל וּפְרִיךָ תְּשָׁרֵשׁ
(2:2):3	וְשִׂמְחַת שׂוֹנֵא תַשִּׂיגֵם	כִּ֯י־נֶפֶשׁ עַזָּה תְּשַׁחֵת בְּעָלֶיהָ

‹עָלֶיךָ› a dittography. It lacks an equivalent in the Greek.

Fall not into the grip of your desire;	2 Sam 24:14
it will defile your strength:	Ezek 16:25
your foliage it will eat,	Ps 1:3; Jer 17:8
your fruit destroy;	Job 31:12
it will leave you a withered tree,	Isa 56:3
for fierce desire devastates its owners,	Isa 56:11; Hos 11:9
the glee of a foe will overtake them.	Ex 15:9; Isa 14:29

Mic 7:8; Ps 35:19; Prov 24:17; Deut 28:15, 45; Isa 35:10; 51:11; 59:9

NB: The וְ-coordination of the first two clauses is noteworthy. וְ is sometimes used where a כִּי would have made the logical connection between clauses more precise (compare Prov 23:3 and 6; 1 Chr 14:10 and 2 Sam 5:19).[6] The

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Typological and Historical Perspectives (ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Publication of the Institute for Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006) 65-74; and references there.

[5] Those wishing to find fault with the practice of vocalizing and accenting non-biblical texts are misinformed. As Israel Yeivin notes (*Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* [ed. and tr., E. J. Revell; SBLMS 5; n.p.: Scholars Press, 1980] 160), the occasional verse in the Geniza fragments of ben Sira is pointed and accented. In some manuscripts, liturgical poetry (*piyyuṭ*) is pointed and accented. The pointing and accenting of a non-biblical text is to be understood as an act of devotion, and implies no disrespect for the biblical text.

[6] It is disappointing that AFPMA parses Prov 23:3, translated in NJPSV by 'Do not crave for his dainties, for they are [lit., it is] counterfeit food,' as if the two clauses it contains are unrelated. The וְ is correctly tagged as "discourse level," but the discourse structure of which it is a part is not described by AFPMA. Prov 23:1-3 is a six-clause sentence of considerable complexity and beauty. The division into *pesuqim* in MT adheres to the text's prosodic structure at the cost of obscuring its syntactic structure: 23:1a is the protasis; 1b-2b a first apodosis; 3 a second apodosis. The sentence grammar of ancient Hebrew is a neglected

וְ makes the speech less heavy. For the form and spelling of עָלֶיךָ, see GKC §93ss. There are more examples of ms nouns with pseudo-plural suffixes than GKC allows for. Cf. מעשיך after מה נורא in Ps 66:3, misparsed in Mandelkern and Even-Shoshan; מעשיו before טוב in 1 Sam 19:4 (noted already by Driver), again misparsed in Mandelkern and Even-Shoshan.

A drawback of DCH, as noted above: in its presentation of paradigmatic contexts of vocabulary, subjects and objects are not always fully specified. In the case of Sir 6:2, the 'foliage' is that of 'my son' so addressed in context (4:1, 20; 10:28). Under <OBJ> in the second of four semantic subdivisions of אכל (**1. eat**; **2. destroy, devour**; **3. use, use up, enjoy**; 4. **experience**), DCH specifies עָלֶה *leaf*, alongside occurrences of *cedar* and *stubble*. It might be better to list it under objects of **eat**, alongside occurrences of *grass* and *straw*, and to reference it as עָלֶה *foliage* of *my son* (the addressee of instruction). נֶפֶשׁ (Sir 6:2) would then be listed alongside another occurrence of it in the sense of *desire* under subjects of **eat**, with (|| שֹׁרֶשׁ [poel]) in parenthesis, followed by: (alt. אכל = destroy) (אכל || שֹׁרֶשׁ; cf. Job 31:12).

Another delightful proverb is found in Sir 36:21 [23] as preserved in MS B. It does not appear in translations of ben Sira found in Bibles, an omission dictated by the fact that Greek ben Sira has a different proverb in its place.

3:(2:2)   כל נכס תאכל חיה   אך יש מכה ממכה תנעם

A whole herd a wild animal may devour,
but one kill pleases more than another kill.

NB: with Ben-Hayyim, I read נכס, not נבד (Beentjes). נכסא in Aramaic and נכס in later Hebrew means 'herd of cattle, flock, property' as eHALOT notes sub נְכָסִים, and apparently here. The kill that pleases more than another: when the wild animal that kills is killed in turn.

Under **eat**, DCH lists the subject of this occurrence of אכל as "perhaps חַיָּה *wild animal*." The 'perhaps' is unnecessary. It would have been better to include the following: (|| מַכָּה *killing*). Since נכס is the reading of ben-Hayyim, נֶכֶס *herd of cattle, flock* ought to show up among objects of אכל. If it's there, I've been unable to pick it out among the mass of data. One more reason why an electronic version of DCH would be more useful than the print version.

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topic. AFPMA is an improvable resource in terms of supplying a tagged database on the basis of which one might research the subject matter.

On another subject, let me repeat: the above proverb preserved in Hebrew ben Sira does not appear in translations of the book in Bibles. Is this right? I think not, as I discuss in another post.

My purpose in discussing DCH was to point out how welcome an updateable electronic version would be. I concentrated on examples of אכל in ben Sira. I might also have zeroed in on occurrences in the Dead Sea Scrolls. DCH gives a count of 100. ABC lists 179! An update to include the occurrences missed the first time around is obviously a desideratum. That might easily be done electronically.

If DCH does not enter the ranks of updateable and improvable resources, its greatest strength, the presentation of paradigmatic contexts of Hebrew vocabulary items, will have to become the strong suit of some other, yet to be published, resource. It is already instructive to compare DCH's presentation of data with data presented in the *Grammatical Relationships* module in Logos Bible Software's *Bible Word Study*. Another Logos product, the *Andersen-Forbes Phrase Marker Analysis* (AFPMA), provides a check from another angle.

The future belongs to electronic media, even if at present they do not always fare well in a comparison with equivalent print media.

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