

Electronic Dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew: A Demonstration Part Two

Hebrew Dictionaries and the Field of Text Criticism

Text-critical research is on a new footing thanks to [eGELS](#) and databases like [The Parallel Aligned Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Texts of Jewish Scripture](#) (hereafter: CATSS) and those of the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (CAL). Their integration into the Libronix system makes them that much more useful. Commentary series with strength in the area of text criticism, such as [ICC](#), [WBC](#), [JPSTC](#), and [Hermeneia](#), are also available in Libronix format. A combination of background knowledge and intuition are irreplaceably important in the search for text critical discussions of interest relative to a particular study. At the same time, the value of keylinks across multiple resources is immense. A resource designed specifically for the work of text criticism merits development, but I would digress too much if I discussed the matter in this post.

The student of ancient Hebrew fools herself if she thinks that MT as it stands is a serviceable basis for serious study of the language or the texts it transmits. MT is a point of entry, not a final destination. The texts MT contains were copied many times before becoming a part of it. A goal of text criticism is the identification of inadvertent errors and conscious changes introduced into the text over the course of time.

A foray into the field of text criticism is an essential component of a serious word-study. In this section, sixteen אכל occurrences of text-critical interest are reviewed. In ten cases, MT is upheld. In six cases, MT is held to reflect a miniscule corruption involving a single or single cluster of syllables or letters. אַ became אָ in Ps 81:17 via assimilation to the preceding line. אַכָּל became אָכָל and אַכָּלִים became אָכָלִים in Hos 13:8 via assimilation to the preceding context. אַדָּל became אָדָּל in the course of Ps 22:30's transmission. אַכָּלִי became אָכָלִי by assimilation with the following line in Job 18:13. By aural misapprehension, אַכָּלִי became אָכָלִי in Hos 11:4-5. אַכָּלִי became אָכָלִי via assimilation perhaps to the stress pattern and syllabics of אַכָּלִי preceding in Gen 47:24. In two cases, arguments in favor of reading a form of אכל outweigh those opposed, but not decisively: אַכָּלִים/אָכָלִים in Exod 32:10 and אַכָּלִי/אָכָלִי in Exod 33:3.

To be sure, scribal errors have sometimes become the foundation for a rich history of interpretation. The same goes for conscious changes made at

Psalm 22:30 and Job 18:13

eHALOT lists ten cases of **אכל** as reported in MT “to be read as” something else. eHALOT is right, it seems to me, in two instances: Ps 22:30a, where we should read, with BHS, Craigie, NRSV, and NAB: **אָד לֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ כָּל־יְשֻׁנֵי־אָרֶץ** ‘to him shall all who sleep in the earth bow down’ in place of **אָכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ כָּל־דְּשֻׁנֵי־אָרֶץ** ‘all the fat ones of the earth shall eat and prostrate themselves’; and Job 18:13, where we should read (similarly, Driver, Dhorme, NRSV, and Clines; for **דָּו***, cf. **גָּ** from $\sqrt{\text{גוי}}$; and the Canaanite noun *dw* in the phrase *y'kl dw* in KTU 4.767=TT 433, if that is the correct reading²) **יֵאָכֵל בְּדוֹ עוֹרוֹ** ‘his skin is eaten away by disease’ in place of **יֵאָכֵל בְּדֵי עוֹרוֹ** ‘he eats the tendons of his skin.’ A compelling defense of MT **אכל** is offered by Driver pro 1 Sam 1:18; Greenberg pro Ezek 33:27, Allen pro Ps 105:35; Clines pro Job 34:3; Fox pro Qoh 5:16; and Tov (*Septuagint*, 142) pro 2 Chr 30:22. In Deut 32:13, the reading sustained by eHALOT assimilates to context and is probably derivative. In Prov 31:27, the proposed emendation is odd. It has failed to attract support and does not deserve mention in a work of reference.

It is a drawback that lexica fail to register construals alternative to their own in a consistent fashion. The case of **אוכל** in Hos 11:4 may illustrate.

Hosea 11:4

The form is unique and occurs in a difficult passage. As Macintosh points out, **אוכל** was understood as a noun by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and by Ibn Ezra and Kimchi. OG Hosea has $\delta\upsilon\nu\eta\sigma\omicron\mu\alpha\iota\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\ \text{‘I will prevail with him.’}$ Whether **אוכל** **לֹא** (MT) or **אוכל** **לֹא** stood in its Vorlage is not known, but the translation reads as if it were the latter (so eGELS, example 2.c. in the Introduction, II. B). On this construal, **אוכל** (י) is a verb derived from **יכל**. Targum Jonathan, Peshitta, and Jerome, on the other hand, derive **אוכל** from **אכל**. With BHS, eHALOT, NJB, REB, and NRSV, the text to prefer is probably **אוכל** **לֹא**, in which **אוכל** is taken as equivalent to **אֶאֱכֵל**. A truly helpful lexicon in a case like this would note and reference alternative construals. In the case at hand, at a minimum that would mean noting that $\alpha\ \sigma\ \theta$ construe **אוכל** as a noun.

² The reading *y'kl dw* ‘el infermo lo consumirà’ is found in Olmo and Sanmartín sub *dw*. Translate rather: ‘sickness will consume.’ [eUDB](#), however, reads *yhtkl dht*.

eBDB, eHALOT, and DCH do well to alert the reader to difficult and possibly corrupt passages which have exercised the ingenuity of scholars in the past. The signaling of cases in which MT attests to one thing and one or more versions attest to another is especially welcome. eHALOT does so in the case of Qoh 5:16, but not in the case of Deut 32:13; 1 Sam 1:18; Ezek 33:27; or 2 Chr 30:22. E.g., OG Ezek 33:27 translates as if לאכלה was in its Vorlage, the reading eHALOT prefers. The fact deserves note.

In an ideal world, every instance of lexicographical significance in which an ancient version appears to have worked from a base text at odds with MT, or interpreted the same consonantal skeleton in a different way, would be noted in a reference lexicon of biblical Hebrew. eGELS is a step in the right direction. Its relevant notes, however, are incomplete and not always reliable. E.g., in OG Mal 3:11, באכל is translated εἰς βρωσιν ‘for food.’ The translator read באכל. A note to this effect is lacking in eGELS. In OG Ps 100 [=MT 101]:5, אתו לא אוכל is translated τούτω οὐ σινησθιον ‘with him I would not eat’ (translation following NETS). The translator read אוכל (spelled the same way in MT Ps 50:13), not אוכל as eGELS has it. This last case deserves note. It is not surprising that Mowinckel (91) and NEB follow OG and Peshitta’s lead in Ps 101:5 and read אוכל against MT אוכל. ‘With him I will not eat’ fits the larger context (vv. 2, 6-7). But MT’s ‘him I will not endure’ is stronger and fits the immediate context better (vv. 4-5).

Genesis 47:24b

וְאַרְבַּע הַיָּדָת יְהִיָּה לָכֶם לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֶאֱכֹלְכֶם וְלֶאֱשֶׁר בְּבֵתֵיכֶם וְלֶאֱכֹל לְטַפְּכֶם:

MT וְלֶאֱכֹל via assim perhaps to the stress pattern and syllabics of וְלֶאֱשֶׁר

‘and the [remaining] four parts will serve as field seed for you and as your food and for those in your house, and as food for your children.’

WHM 4.2 and AFAT mistakenly parse לֶאֱכֹלְכֶם as a suffixed infinitive construct. eHALOT, DCH, and WIVU parse it correctly as a suffixed noun. DCH notes a proposed emendation of לֶאֱכֹלְכֶם to לֶאֱכֹל לָכֶם. Vocalizing וְלֶאֱכֹל as וְלֶאֱכֹל alleviates the text’s difficulties in less invasive fashion.

The clause contains a string of ל-introduced items in coordination. הִיא sq. ל pred. + ל. pers. structures occur often in biblical Hebrew, in which the predicates consists of nouns and/or noun phrases (see eBDB הִיא II. 2 f). It is natural to construe accordingly here, with both לֶאֱכֹלְכֶם and לֶאֱכֹל read as nouns rather than infinitive constructs. הִיא sq. Inf. c. ל structures are also

well-attested, but not + ל. pers. (see eBDB היה III. 5 b). MT לְאָכַל may have arisen via assimilation to preceding לְאָכַלְכֶם understood as an infinitive construct (*לְאָכַלְכֶם; cf. Targum Onkelos (וּלְמִיכּוֹן) [against CAL; but note CAL's double tag on Targum pseudo-Jonathan's (וּלְמִיכּוֹן)]. Among the versions, Targum Neofiti correctly read וּלְאָכַל as a noun (וּלְמִזּוֹן).

It is rare that MT's vocalization is less probable than a conceivable alternative. But MT לְאָכַל in this verse counts as an example.

Exodus 32:10 and 33:3

According to a note in *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (DBH), a masoretic note associates with the “East” the reading פֶּן־אֶכְלֶךָ in Exod 33:3. There is something to be said for this vocalization, and for reading וְאֶכְלֶם in place of וְאָכַלְכֶם in Exod 32:10. In both cases, Yahweh is the subject, who is elsewhere spoken of as a devouring fire (Exod 24:17; Deut 4:24; Isa 33:14; etc.). His anger is said to be about to חרה ‘burn’ against his people. For Yahweh then to say that ‘that I may devour them’ and ‘lest I devour you’ would be vivid and harsh. The harsh word, according to Exod 33:4, is precisely what got the people’s attention. To be sure, the verb כלה is securely attested in 33:5 and is elsewhere used with God as subject in equivalent contexts (e.g., Num 16:21; 17:10; 25:11; Josh 24:20; Jer 14:12; Ezek 22:31; Job 9:22). But on two occasions the verbs אכל and כלה co-occur (Jer 10:25; Hos 11:6). It is possible that Exod 33:3-5 also contains a co-occurrence. It is easier to imagine original וְאֶכְלֶךָ and וְאֶכְלֶם being assimilated to the more common וְאָכַלְכֶם and אֶכְלֶךָ in Exod 32:10 and 33:3, respectively, than vice versa. The chief obstacle to this line of reasoning is the weak to non-existent attestation of וְאָכַלְכֶם and אֶכְלֶךָ in ancient witnesses. On the other hand, that may only go to show that the assimilation was ancient and almost universally received.

In the next post, eight passages which according to some but not all exegetes contain the verb אכל are discussed.