

How Could a Torah Scroll Have Included the Word זעטוטי?

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The classic article by Shemaryahu Talmon on the subject of “The Three Scrolls of the Law that Were Found in the Temple Court,”¹ published in this journal more than a half-century ago,² remains unsurpassed in its treatment and remains valid unto the present day.³ In light of the biblical texts from

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- EHLL* Geoffrey Khan, et al., eds., *Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- Jastrow* Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (2 vols.; London: Luzac, 1903; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005).
- Levy* Jacob Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Theil des rabbinischen Schriftthums* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1867–1868).

¹ With attention to the rabbinic tradition embodied in *Sifre Deut.* 356; *y. Ta'an.* 4.2 (68a); *'Abot R. Nat.* B 46 (65a); *Sof.* 1:7, 6:4; *Tanh. Exod.* 22.

² Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Three Scrolls of the Law That Were Found in the Temple Court,” *Textus* 2 (1962): 14–27. A Hebrew version of this article, with some changes and additions, was published two years later: idem, “Three Scrolls They Found in the Temple Court,” in *Sefer Segal: Studies in the Bible Presented to Professor M. H. Segal by his Colleagues and Students* (ed. Yehoshua M. Grintz and Jacob Liver; Publications of the Israel Society for Biblical Research 17; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1964), 252–264 (Heb.).

³ For additional treatment of the rabbinic statement, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 176–177. For older studies, see M. H. Segal, “The Promulgation of the Authoritative Text of the Hebrew Bible,” *JBL* 72 (1953): 35–47, esp. 41; and Harry M. Orlinsky, “The Origin of the Kethib-Qere System: A New Approach,” in *Congress Volume: Oxford 1959* (ed. G. W. Anderson et al.; VTSup 7; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 184–192, esp. 189–

Qumran (less so from other sites in the Judean Desert), and in light of increased study into the text of the Samaritan Torah, no one will have trouble imagining a Torah scroll reading מעון אלהי קדם instead of MT מענה אלהי קדם (Deut 33:27). Nor will one have any problem with the fact that at least one scroll of the Torah read היא nine times, while others contained this orthography eleven times.

The main difficulty, though, lies in the question posed in the title of this article: How could a scroll of Torah have contained the reading וישלח את זעטוטי בני ישראל instead of MT וישלח את נערי בני ישראל (Exod 24:5)?⁴ The word

190. Note that the Segal essay was published in the year intervening between the English and Hebrew versions of Talmon's article; to be perfectly honest, Segal's essay has little value today, though it remains a testimony to scholarship at mid-20th century, especially in the wake of the initial discoveries in Qumran Cave 1. For a completely different approach, which denies the historicity of the rabbinic tradition altogether, see Solomon Zeitlin, "Were There Three Torah-Scrolls in the Azarah?" *JQR* 56 (1966): 269-272. Of more recent vintage, even if less relevant to the current enterprise, though with greater attention to medieval rabbinic statements on the matter, see Shlomo Zalman Havlin, "Establishing Correct Manuscript Readings: Quantity or Quality?" in *Me'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky* (ed. Ezra Fleischer et al.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 241-265 (Heb.), online: <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/toshba/mechkar/rov.htm>. I am grateful to Shamma Friedman (Jewish Theological Seminary of America) for these last two references.

⁴ Some of the rabbinic sources (e.g., *y. Ta'an.* 4.2 [68a]) mention only this single instance of זעטוטי, while others (e.g., *Sifre Deut.* 356) mention the additional variant reading ואל אצילי בני ישראל instead of ואל זעטוטי בני ישראל (Exod 24:11). For the different versions, see conveniently at *Ma'agarim: The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*, s.v. זעטוטי, online at <http://maagarim.hebrew-academy.org.il>. See also the summary in Louis Finkelstein, *Siphre ad Deuteronomium* (Berlin: Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland, 1939; repr. as *Sifre on Deuteronomy* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1969]), 423. For the purposes of this article, in order to keep matters simple, we will refer to Exod 24:5 only as the passage that contains זעטוטי—though this practical consideration should not be viewed as a preconception regarding Exod 24:11, which may or may not have included this word in the 'זעטוטי scroll'.

זעטוטי (sg. זעטוט)⁵ is clearly a rare lexeme in ancient Hebrew – perhaps part of the original Hebrew lexis,⁶ perhaps a loanword from Aramaic, perhaps a loanword from Greek.⁷ Regardless, all would agree that such a lexeme would be unexpected (at least at first glance) in the Sinai pericope.

If one were to follow the Greek path, one might begin with the observation that early Greek loanwords appear occasionally in Biblical Hebrew, for example: a) מַכְרֵה* (Gen 49:5) < μάχαιρα ‘sword’; b) לִפְיֵד (Gen 15:7, Exod 20:18, 5x in Judges, etc.) < λαμπάς ‘torch, lightning’; and c) לְשֵׁבֶה (1 Sam 9:22, otherwise late, viz., 2 Kgs 23:11, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles) < λέσχη ‘(wine-)hall’.⁸ But these three nouns all refer to inanimate items (two technological, one architectural) which were imported into a Hebrew cultural environment along with their original

⁵ The sources and manuscripts vary in their rendering of the word, with זעטוטי and זעטוט also attested. Again, see conveniently at *Ma’agarim*, s.v. זעטוט.

⁶ Note that זעטוט, with its presumed vocalization זעטוּט, belongs to a known (albeit rare) Hebrew nominal pattern; for other such forms, compare נְאֻפְוּפִיָּה (Hos 2:4), גְּבֻנָּיִם (Ps 68:16–17); see further Emil Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 234 §84^bm.

⁷ All three ideas have been proposed by scholars. In general, 19th-century scholars, such as Abraham Geiger, Jacob Levy, and C. D. Ginsburg, opined that זעטוט was a loanword from Greek, with reference to ζητητής ‘seeker, inquirer’ (cf. Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 756); whereas 20th-century scholars, such as E. Y. Kutscher, Shemaryahu Talmon, and Harry Orlinsky, understood the word as a loanword from Aramaic, with reference to Ma’lula *ez’ūt* ‘small’ and some amorphous connection to זוט ‘small’ (though in one publication Kutscher also implied that the word was a native Hebrew vocable). Ernst Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 193 (see also 201), is agnostic, with the comment “of uncertain origin.” I will address this matter in much greater detail, with full bibliographic support, in a companion article to the present essay, entitled “The Etymology of זעטוט ‘youth, young man,’” to appear in the proceedings volume of the 7th International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira, held in Strasbourg, June 2014.

⁸ For general discussion, see Gary A. Rendsburg, “Cultural Words: Biblical Hebrew,” *EHL* 1:640–642; Shai Heijmans, “Greek Loanwords,” *EHL* 2:149; and Nicholas de Lange, “Greek Influence on Hebrew: Late Antiquity,” *EHL* 2:146.

Greek designations. It would be less likely for a word like ζητητής ‘seeker, inquirer’, by extension ‘youth, student’, to have entered Hebrew at an early stage in the form of זעטוט.⁹

Equally true, if one wishes to follow the Aramaic path: for while we expect to find and indeed do find Aramaic-like features in prescribed sections of the Torah, these items occur in chapters characterized by style-switching. These include most prominently Genesis 24 and Genesis 29–30, which are geographically set in Aram, and Numbers 22–24, which focus on the prophet Balaam brought from Aram by the king of Moab.¹⁰ By contrast, the context of Exodus 24 is Mount Sinai, with no suggestion of an Aramean setting or the like.

And if זעטוט is a native Hebrew word, which remains possible, then why does it appear only in Exod 24:5 (or in at least one presumed witness thereto) within the entire biblical corpus?

Regardless of which tack one follows, the answer to the presence of זעטוט in at least one ancient witness to the Torah (assuming, for the moment, the historicity of the rabbinic tradition) at Exod 24:5 lies within the recognition of the unique aspects of this chapter within the Bible. For as is well known,

⁹ One will admit that פִּלְגֶּשֶׁתַּי ‘concubine’ may serve as a parallel, since this lexeme also refers to humans. Note its relationship to Greek *παλλακίς*, Latin *paelex*, even if neither of these words serves as the actual etymon of the Hebrew form. Rather, פִּלְגֶּשֶׁתַּי is more likely derived from another (unknown) Mediterranean source. For discussion, see Chaim Rabin, “The Origin of the Hebrew Word *Pilegesh*,” *JJS* 25 (1974): 353–364; and Saul Levin, “Hebrew {*pi(y)lēgēs*}, Greek *παλλακή*, Latin *paelex*: The Origin of Intermarriage among the Early Indo-Europeans and Semites,” *General Linguistics* 23 (1983): 191–197. There is a difference, though, between פִּלְגֶּשֶׁתַּי ‘concubine’ and זעטוט ‘youth’, since the former fills a lexical slot without a native Hebrew equivalent, whereas the latter appears to be an exact or near synonym of native Hebrew נָעַר.

¹⁰ Jonas C. Greenfield, “Aramaic Studies and the Bible,” in *Congress Volume Vienna 1980* (ed. John A. Emerton; VTSup 32; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 110–130, esp. 129–130; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Aramaic-Like Features in the Pentateuch,” *HS* 47 (2006): 163–176; Clinton J. Moyer, “Literary and Linguistic Studies in *Sefer Bil’am* (Numbers 22–24)” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2009), 14–192; and Gary A. Rendsburg, “Style-Switching,” *EHL* 3:633–636.

the content of Exodus 24 often stands at odds with other biblical themes, including those related to law, ritual, and theology. Here I have in mind the following:¹¹

- v. 4 – setting up *maṣṣēbōt*, against Torah law
- v. 5 – the young men of Israel (who are they?) offering sacrifices
- v. 6 – placing blood in bowls, against typical practice
- v. 8 – sprinkling blood on the people!
- v. 10a – ‘and they saw the God of Israel’!!!¹²
- v. 10b – a view of heaven from underneath, apparently
- v. 11 – ‘and they beheld the God’!!!
- v. 11 – the people enjoyed a meal, seemingly with God

In a classic case of form following content, the text of Exodus 24 is riddled with linguistic peculiarities. Note the following:¹³

¹¹ For recent treatments of this story, see Bernard P. Robinson, “The Theophany and Meal of Exodus 24,” *SJOT* 25 (2011): 155–173; and Eric John Wyckoff, “When Does Translation Become Exegesis? Exodus 24:9–11 in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 675–693. The coverage of these two essays allows me not to review the items in the two following lists in detail, but rather to use a simple outline form with minimal notation. For an earlier discussion, with an especial focus on the aspect of the written text mentioned in Exodus 24, see William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121–130. Of the secondary literature from an earlier generation, I make mention here of one essay with excellent coverage and replete bibliography: E. W. Nicholson, “The Interpretation of Exodus xxiv 9–11,” *VT* 24 (1974): 77–97.

¹² As is well known, the Septuagint modifies the verse, reading ‘and they saw the place where the God of Israel stood’, reflecting a sensitivity to the theological quandary posed by the Hebrew wording. See Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 121. For Aquila (who follows MT literally!) and Symmachus (who adds ‘in a vision’), see Alison Salvesen, *Symmachus in the Pentateuch* (JSS Monograph 15; Manchester: University of Manchester, 1991), 105; and eadem, “Symmachus Readings in the Pentateuch,” in *Origen’s Hexapla and Fragments: Papers Presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 25th July–3rd August 1994* (ed. eadem; TSAJ 58; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 192.

- v. 1 – וְאֶל־מִשֶׁה אָמַר – In addition to the lack of an expressed subject (even if God or YHWH is implied), note the fronting of the indirect object with the concomitant *qatal* form of the verb.
- v. 5 – זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִים – The usual phrase, of course, is זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִים (Lev 17:15, etc.), along with other forms such as זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִיָּהֶם (Exod 29:28, etc.). The wording of Exod 24:5 is attested only once elsewhere, in 1 Sam 11:15.
- v. 6 – וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאַגָּנֹת וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאַגָּנֹת – ‘and he put [it] in bowls’ – The noun אָגָן ‘bowl’ appears only here in BH prose, and only two other times (Isa 22:24, Song 7:3) elsewhere.
- v. 10a – אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ‘the God of Israel’ – In the vast majority of cases in the Bible this term – attested c. 200x – occurs after either the theonym יהוה or the epithet צְבָאוֹת יהוה. To see the phrase ‘the God of Israel’ standing alone is most unusual; in the prose corpus that stretches from Genesis through Kings, the only instances of אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ‘the God of Israel’ by itself are Num 16:9, 1 Samuel 5–6 (7x) – though note that in the latter chapters, the term occurs in the mouth of the Philistines, or in one instance is used by the narrator to evoke the Philistine perspective (1 Sam 5:8, third case).¹⁴
- v. 10b – לְבִנֵּי הַסַּפִּיר – ‘pavement of lapis lazuli’ – One can only imagine how an ancient Israelite understood this phrase; regardless, all will agree that the phrase is unique, indeed the word לְבִנֵּי typically means ‘brick’ (Gen 11:3, Exod 1:14, etc.), with the word denoting ‘pavement’ elsewhere perhaps only in Isa 65:3, indeed, in a context associated with pagan ritual.¹⁵

¹³ Excerpts are cited in their Masoretic garb, even if we are discussing a text – i.e., the זַעֲטוּטִי scroll – from a period long before the development of the Masoretic markings.

¹⁴ See Excursus I for a fuller discussion.

¹⁵ See Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Introduction and Commentary* (2 vols.; Mikra LeYisra'el; Tel-Aviv: 'Am 'Oved / Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008), 2:539 (Heb.); and idem, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary* (rev. and enl. ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 593.

- v. 10b – וּכְעֵצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם ‘and like the sky itself’ – The grammaticalized particle עֵצֶם ‘self, selfsame, the very, etc.’ (< the noun עֵצֶם ‘bone’, i.e., the substance par excellence) is virtually non-productive in Hebrew, limited in 18 of its 20 occurrences to the phrase הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה ‘this very day’. There are only two other usages, the above phrase in Exod 24:10 and Job 21:23 בְּעֵצֶם תָּמוּ ‘in his very fullness’.¹⁶
- v. 10b – לְטֹהַר ‘in purity’ – This form of the noun occurs again only in Lev 12:4, 12:6 (assuming that the form there – MT טְהַרָּה ‘her purification’ – is the same). The word could be a byform of צַהַר, but this noun also is unique, limited to Gen 6:16, with the meaning ‘hatch, opening, window’ (or the like), allowing a view to the sky.
- v. 11 – אֲצִילֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ‘the nobles of the children of Israel’ – The noun אֲצִילֵי ‘nobles’ (cstr.) is a (non-pure) *hapax legomenon*. In its only other attestation, Isa 41:9 (MT אֲצִילֵיהָ), the word means ‘(its) corners’. In the byform אֲצִיל the word occurs 3x with the meaning ‘joint, elbow, armpit’ (Jer 38:12, Ezek 13:18, 41:8).
- v. 11 – וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים ‘and they beheld the God’ – The verb ח-ז-ה ‘behold’ (I use this gloss to distinguish the lexeme from SBH ר-א-ה ‘see’) occurs in the Bible typically in poetry (especially Job, Psalms, Isaiah) and in the superscriptions to prophetic books or sections (Isa 1:1, 2:1, 13:1, Amos 1:1, Mic 1:1, Hab 1:1). Its presence in Num 24:4, 24:16 is to be explained as an Aramaic-like feature in the oracles of Balaam (see above). In narrative prose, the verb ח-ז-ה is limited to Exod 18:21, 24:11. The former

¹⁶ Another approach to עֵצֶם in Exod 24:10 is to understand the word as the noun ‘colour’ (cf. Peshitta כְּרוֹמָא; Symmachus χρωμα). For another possible instance of עֵצֶם ‘colour’ in the Bible, see Lam 4:7. My thanks to both Moshe Bar-Asher (Hebrew University) and Jan Joosten (University of Oxford) – via oral communication and follow-up email exchanges during Summer 2014 – for alerting me to this line of interpretation. For the versional evidence, see Salvesen, *Symmachus in the Pentateuch*, 105–106. If this approach is accepted, the presence of עֵצֶם in Exod 24:10 still would constitute an atypical usage. Regardless of the meaning of the phrase, note further the appearance of עֵצֶם שָׁמַיִם in Sir 43:1 (MasSir V, 17; Genizah MS B, XII recto, 18, both available for inspection at www.bensira.org).

usage has been addressed by Mordechay Mishor, who noticed a series of atypical linguistic usages in the Jethro pericope, in an effort to portray the foreignness of that account set in the land of Midian.¹⁷ This distribution leaves only our verse Exod 24:11, hence we have another instance of atypical language in our chapter.

- v. 14 – וְאֶל־הַזְּקֵנִים אָמַר – ‘and to the elders he said’ – Once more we have the unusual word order, with fronting of the indirect object and the concomitant *qatal* form of the verb.

And then there is the issue of literary coherence vs. an apparent layering of literary strata. Note most significantly the various mentions of who shall (vv. 1, 12) or who does (vv. 2, 9, 13, 15) ascend the mountain:

- v. 1 – עָלָה אֶל־יְהוָה אַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל –
- v. 12 – וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עָלֵה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִיִּהֶם־שָׁם –
-
- v. 2 – וַנִּגַּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבַדּוֹ אֶל־יְהוָה וְהֵם לֹא יָגִשׁוּ וְהָעַם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ: –
- v. 9 – וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: –
- v. 13 – וַיִּקַּם מֹשֶׁה וַיְהִי־שׁוֹשַׁע מִשָּׁרְתָו וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים: –
- v. 15 – וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָהָר –

In short, did Moses ascend Mt Horeb alone; was he accompanied by Joshua; or was he accompanied by Aaron, Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders? Most scholars would ascribe these verses to different sources,¹⁸ though one

¹⁷ Mordechay Mishor, “On the Language and Text of Exodus 18,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz; Publications of the Institute for Advanced Studies 1; Jerusalem: Magnes / Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 228. See also Edward L. Greenstein, “Jethro’s Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18,” in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 163.

¹⁸ See, for example, Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 52–53, 77–78, 117–118, 187, and numerous other places in the book, for which consult the Index, p. 368. See further below, n. 20.

leading proponent of source criticism sees the entire pericope as a unified narrative ascribed to the Elohist source, the present issue notwithstanding.¹⁹

Related to the above issue is the departure in Exodus 24 from the norm of the command-plus-fulfillment narrative pattern. Typically, the command (usually divine) is issued, and the character fulfills the command in swift fashion. Not so in Exodus 24, though, where God states, *עֲלֵה אֶל־יְהוָה אִתָּהּ*, *וְאָבְיָהוּא וְשָׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* in v. 1, but which Moses and the others do not fulfill until *וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהְרֹן נָדָב וְאָבְיָהוּא וְשָׁבְעִים מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* in v. 9.²⁰

As adumbrated above, to my mind, this concentration of nonconforming literary and linguistic matters is not coincidental, but rather serves to direct the reader's attention to the exceptional nature of the storyline. There are other cases of form following content in the Bible (see Excursus II), so the employment of this technique in Exodus 24 falls within the scope of ancient Israelite literary design.

Within the context of Exodus 24, accordingly, one can envision a later Hebrew scribe pursuing this approach with even greater zeal, and thus 'upgrading' the text, as it were, to include an additional atypical lexical item, that is, *זעטוטי* in place of *נערי* to express 'the young men' of Israel (v. 5). Or to put this in other words, if the lexeme *זעטוטי* were to enter the biblical text due to scribal intervention, one may understand its use in Exodus 24 more readily than in other chapters with more 'standard' narrative prose accounts that include the word *נערי*, such as 1 Samuel 25 (3x: vv. 9, 12, 25) or 1 Kings 20 (3x: vv. 15, 17, 19).²¹

To be sure, the entry of a late word into a modified biblical text typically is due simply to said lexeme's greater currency at the time of modification,

¹⁹ Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003), 160–161.

²⁰ Joel S. Baden, "A Narrative Pattern and Its Role in Source Criticism," *HS* 49 (2008): 41–54, esp. 46–47. Baden relies on source criticism to explain the distance of vv. 1 and 9 (see also above, n. 18); readers familiar with my own work will realize that I treat narratives in the Bible as literary wholes. I am grateful to Shalom E. Holtz (Yeshiva University) for this reference.

²¹ Even if *נערי* means 'servants, officials, attendants' or the like, in the latter chapter.

without the author's consideration of literary concerns. Thus, for example, the many linguistic updatings in Chronicles vis-à-vis its source material in Samuel-Kings,²² and in 1QIsa^a when compared to the more conservative MT Isaiah or 1QIsa^b.²³ On occasion, however, one must posit the possibility that later authors or scribes sought to enhance their received texts in some fashion. Isaac Kalimi has demonstrated that the Chronicler did precisely this on a number of occasions, in the course of his reworking of the older Samuel-Kings material;²⁴ while Eric Reymond has suggested something similar for the scribes who transmitted Ben Sira through the centuries.²⁵

To the examples provided by these scholars, I propose here another one, namely, the Chronicler's alteration of Ps 96:6 in 1 Chr 16:27.

The former reads: הוֹד־וְהָדָר לְפָנָיו עֹז וְתִפְאֶרֶת בְּמִקְדָּשׁוֹ

while the latter reads: הוֹד וְהָדָר לְפָנָיו עֹז וְחֵדוּהָ בְּמִקְמוֹ

The author has replaced SBH תִּפְאֶרֶת 'glory, beauty' (notwithstanding its occurrence in four other places in Chronicles) with Late Biblical Hebrew חֵדוּהָ 'joy', attested elsewhere only in Neh 8:10. Quite possibly, the author of 1 Chr 16:27 invoked חֵדוּהָ 'joy' – a word which was unavailable to the Psalmist in the pre-exilic period, but which was available to the Chronicler in the post-exilic period – to heighten the alliterative effect, begun with the two-word expression הוֹד וְהָדָר 'glory and majesty' at the start of the verse,

²² See Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976); along with numerous references to Chronicles in the many publications by Avi Hurvitz on the subject of Late Biblical Hebrew.

²³ The standard treatment remains the magisterial volume of E. Y. Kutscher, *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a)* (STDJ 6; Leiden: Brill, 1974 [first published in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959]). For a succinct summary, see now Takamitsu Muraoka, "Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a)," *EHL* 2:343–348.

²⁴ Isaac Kalimi, *An Ancient Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place and Writing* (SSN 46; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2005), 67–75.

²⁵ Eric Reymond, "Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira," in *The Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira* (ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten; JSJSup 150; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 37–53.

and continued now in the b-line with the /h/-/d/ combination in חֲדָהּ echoing the twice-heard /h/-/d/ combination in the a-line.²⁶

To state the point clearly: I am not suggesting that זעטוטי is original to the text of Exodus 24 (notwithstanding the presence of other linguistic oddities, as per the above). Rather, as indicated, I would explain the presence of זעטוטי in a Torah scroll housed in the Temple during the end of the Second Temple period in accordance with the aforementioned desire by a late scribe to augment the unusual nature of the language of Exodus 24.

We obviously have ample witnesses amongst the biblical scrolls from Qumran with variant texts, that is, at variance with one another and at variance with the Masoretic Text, which already during the floruit of the Yahad community was emerging as the predominant text-type.²⁷ Furthermore, not even the greater sanctity ascribed to the Torah served as a preventative against a fluid textual transmission for these five books.²⁸ Accordingly, hard as it may be to imagine at first blush, it is perfectly reasonable to countenance a Torah scroll in the late Second Temple period reading זעטוטי at Exod 24:5.

I should add here that Talmon considered the *za'atute* scroll as “a representative of those textual traditions which were open to Aramaic influences, owing to linguistic usages common in the time of the copyists” (somewhat akin to 1QIsa^a).²⁹ If this were the case, though, one must ask

²⁶ Or, if the etymological /h/ of the first root letter of חֲדָהּ (cf. Akkadian *hadû*) still was pronounced at this time, then the realisation of the alliteration was /h/-/d/ ~ /h/-/d/. On this phonological issue, see Richard C. Steiner, “On the Dating of Hebrew Sound Changes (*h > h and *g >) and Greek Translations (2 Esdras and Judith),” *JBL* 124 (2005): 229–267.

²⁷ The largest group of biblical manuscripts from Qumran, comprising 48% amongst Torah texts and 44% amongst Prophets-and-Writings books, are ‘proto-Masoretic’ (or ‘MT-like’ or ‘proto-rabbinic’ or ‘semi-masoretic’ or however one wishes to call these manuscripts); see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 108.

²⁸ Emanuel Tov, “The Scribal and Textual Transmission of the Torah Analyzed in Light of Its Sanctity,” in *Pentateuchal Traditions in the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of the International Workshop in Tokyo, August 28–31, 2007* (ed. A. Moriya and G. Hata; *JSSup* 158; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 57–72.

²⁹ Talmon, “The Three Scrolls of the Law,” 26 (= idem, “Three Scrolls,” 262–263).

why only or specifically in Exod 24:5 did נער זעטוט replace נער (in this particular case as the m.pl.cstr., viz., נערי זעטוטי for נערי) amongst the 34 instances of the latter word in the Torah?³⁰ While Talmon's position remains viable and possible, in light of what I have stated above concerning the special nature of Exodus 24, the presence of the noun זעטוט specifically in Exod 24:5 and nowhere else in the Torah would be an exceedingly major coincidence.

We turn now to additional occurrences of זעטוט within the ancient Jewish (both Hebrew and Aramaic) literary corpus, starting with the seven-fold attestation of the word in the Qumran documents.³¹ The occurrences are as follows:³²

CD 15.16	וכה עינים לבל[תי ראות וחגר או פסח או חרש] ונער זעטוט אל יבוא אי[ש מאלה אל תוך העדה]
1QM 7.3	ועורך הצידה כולם יהיו מבן חמש ועשרים שנה ועד בן שלושים וכול נער זעטוט ואשה לוא יבואו למחנותם בצאתם
4Q265 (4QMisc Rules) 3.3	[אל] יואכל נער זעטוט ואשה [בזב] ח הפסח
4Q266 (4QD ^a) 8i.8	[ו] חגר או פסח או חרש או נער זעטוט א[ל יבו] איש [מ] אלה אל תוך העדה כי מלאכ[י] הקוד[ש] בתוכם

³⁰ To keep matters simple, I do not distinguish here between the different meanings of the noun נער, which range from a three-month-old baby (Exod 2:6) to military attendants (Gen 14:24).

³¹ The count includes the Damascus Document from the Cairo Geniza and also includes parallel citations.

³² Information culled from Emanuel Tov, ed., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library* (rev. ed.; Provo: Brigham Young University / Leiden: Brill, 2006); and *Accordance Bible Software*, version 10.4.3.2 (OakTree Software, Inc. July 2014). See also Martin G. Abegg, James E. Bowley and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1:246; David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011), 3:125; and *Ma'agarim*, s.v. זעטוט. Just for the record, *Accordance* counts an eighth occurrence, restored at 4Q270 (4QD^e) 6ii:9, though the restoration is total, without a single letter extant in this fragment. Note the quick mention of this word as a lexeme attested both in Qumran Hebrew and in Tannaitic Hebrew by Elisha Qimron, *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976), 297 (Heb.); and idem, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 99.

4Q491 (4QM ^a) 1–3.6	וזה הסֶרֶךְ בַּחֲנוּתָמָה וּבְ[] מֵהַ וּבְ[חִלּוֹקוֹתָמָה מִ] מִיָּמִים סְבִיבָה מִחוּץ ° [] וְאִשָּׁה וְנָעַר זַעֲטוֹט וְכוּל אִישׁ מִנּוֹן גַּע בַּטְמָאָת בְּשֵׁרוֹ]
4Q502 (4QpapRitual of Marriage) 28.4	זַעֲטוֹטִי־ם]
4Q502 (4QpapRitual of Marriage) 311.1	זַעֲטוֹטִים]

As may readily be seen from the above list of passages, the expression נער זעטוט is a fixed phrase in Qumran Hebrew (QH), used in the Damascus Document, the War Scroll, and 4Q265. (The other two occurrences are in the exceedingly fragmentary 4Q502 text, with the preceding word in these two instances unknown.)³³ The context of these Qumran compositions suggests that נער זעטוט is a technical term for a young individual, who, for one reason or another, is in a state of either impurity, ineligibility, or disqualification.³⁴ Regardless of the specific connotation, though, the Qumran evidence demonstrates that זעטוט ‘youth’ (or some such gloss within the general

³³ Commenting on the use of the locution נער זעטוט in the War Scroll (the first Qumran text with this expression to come to light—on CD, see below, n. 35), Yigael Yadin opined that the addition of זעטוט after נער allowed for the meaning ‘youth, young person’ to be understood, since נער alone could mean ‘young warrior’ (cf., e.g., 1 Chr 12:28). In the light of the presence of the same phrase in texts without a military context, such as 4Q265 and 4Q266, I for one would surrender this view in favour of the notion that נער זעטוט is simply an idiomatic phrase in QH. See Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (trans. Batya and Chaim Rabin; London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 290; trans. of מגילת מלחמת בני אור בבני חושך ממגילות מדבר יהודה (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1955), 300.

³⁴ Commenting on the War Scroll passage, Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 120, remarks that “because of the presence of the angels among the holy warriors, it is also imperative that only men fit for the battle be admitted to the ranks of warriors and that there be absolute bodily and cultic purity in their camp.” Schäfer’s comment is confirmed by the explicit mention of the angels in the analogous passage from 4Q266 (4QD^a) 8i.8 cited above.

semantic field of 'young person') was present in the Hebrew language by the 2nd century B.C.E.³⁵

Apparently, though, the vocable did not gain much currency, for *עטוט* occurs in both Hebrew and Aramaic in relatively limited fashion. Indeed, in Hebrew, the word occurs only as follows: a) in QH (as per above); b) in the above-cited passages (see n. 1) whilst quoting the variant text in Exod 24:5; and c) in *b. Megilla* 1:8 (9a) in a list of passages which the Septuagint translators rendered differently than the *textus receptus*.³⁶ Not just any

³⁵ I should note that only very few scholars have connected the Qumran evidence to the rabbinic story about the three scrolls. Those who have include Talmon, "Three Scrolls," 263 (though not in the English version of the article); Yadin, *Scroll of the War*, 290 (= idem, *מגילת מלחמת בני אור בבני חושך*, 300); and Joseph Baumgarten, *Qumran Cave 4.XIII: The Damascus Document (4Q266-273)* (DJD 18; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 64. I should add here that the earliest readings of CD, MS A, col. 15, line 16, identified either nothing at all or only the *tet* at the end of our key word; see, e.g., Solomon Schechter, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries*, vol. 1: *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 15 of the transcription section (nothing at all); and Chaim Rabin, *The Zadokite Documents* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 75 (only the *tet*). (For personal inspection of the document, go to: <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-TS-00010-K-00006/15>.) Only in the wake of the discovery of the parallel passage in 4Q266 (4QD^a) did scholars reconstruct the word *עטוט* in CD 15:16.

³⁶ Even though *ζητητής* does not occur in the Septuagint. See the standard treatment of the subject by Emanuel Tov, "The Rabbinic Tradition Concerning the 'Alterations' Inserted into the Greek Translation of the Torah and Their Relation to the Original Text of the Septuagint," in idem, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (VTSupp 72; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1-20. Earlier versions of this article are: a) "The Rabbinic Traditions concerning the 'Changes' Inserted in the Septuagint Translation of the Pentateuch and the Question of the Original Text of That Translation," in *Isac Leo Seeligmann Memorial Volume* (ed. A. Rofé and Y. Zakovitch; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 371-393 (Heb.); and b) "The Rabbinic Tradition concerning the 'Alterations' Inserted into the Greek Pentateuch and Their Relation to the Original Text of the LXX," *JSJ* 15 (1984): 65-89. For a thorough treatment of the rabbinic traditions concerning the Septuagint, see Giuseppe Veltri, *Eine Tora für den König Talmai: Untersuchungen zum Übersetzungsverständnis in der jüdisch-hellenistischen und rabbinischen Literatur* (TSAJ 41; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994). Within the discussion, Veltri addressed the question of *עטוט* in both Exod 24:5 and Exod 24:11 on pp. 79-82, 87-88 (and elsewhere, consult the

random passages, mind you, but strikingly the two relevant passages from Exodus 24, to wit:

v. 5: וישלח את זעטוטי בני ישראל:

v. 11: ואל זעטוטי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו:

Which is to say, in v. 5, with זעטוטי instead of נערי; and six verses on, in v. 11, with זעטוטי in place of the *hapax legomenon* אצילי – on which see also above, n. 4.

In Aramaic, the word is even less widely used, with only two attestations.³⁷ The first is within the Targumic expansion of Song 6:5, in the phrase ושאַר זעטוטין ועמא דארעא 'and the remainder of the young-men and people of the land'.³⁸ The second is less textually reliable, but worth mentioning nonetheless: both Levy and Jastrow cited Tg. Yerushalmi to Exod 24:11 (!), with the word זעטוטי rendering אצילי,³⁹ although the chief

index on p. 265). In addition to the monograph itself, see also the review essay by Emanuel Tov in *Scripta Classica Israelica* 14 (1995): 178–183; repr. in idem, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 75–82.

³⁷ So rarely attested, in fact, that there is no entry for זעטוט in the standard dictionaries – Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990); idem, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002); Abraham Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (2 vols.; HdO 1.50; Leiden: Brill, 2000); and Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns / Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2009) – save for the once-attested similar form זוטאי as a gentilic (parallel to כנענאי) in Asaṭir 9b, for which see *Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, 1:229. The outward similarity of זעטוט to Aramaic זוטא 'small' may be simply a coincidence. Once more, see my forthcoming article, which will address the matter with a greater linguistic focus.

³⁸ As we shall see in the follow-up article to this article, in this passage זעטוטין connotes more specifically 'students' than the general term 'young men'.

³⁹ It is not clear to me which edition of Tg. Yer. was used by Levy or by Jastrow, though most likely the source of the information in their respective dictionaries is Elijah Levita, מתורגמן: *Lexicon Chaldaicum* (Isny, 1541), s.v זעטט (available online at <http://hebrewbooks.org/44372>). See also Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, *Fragments of Lost Targumim* (2 vols.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983–1989), 1:64 (Heb.). I am indebted to Edward Cook (Catholic University of America) for these two sources (email communication, 20 August 2014). Finally, for discussion of the

witness to this text, British Library (formerly British Museum) Add. 27031, reads עולימיא שפיריא here.⁴⁰

Regardless of its other usages in Hebrew and Aramaic, the main point to be stressed here is the Qumran usage נער זעטוט, virtually a fixed phrase in the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus.⁴¹ Given the relatively widespread (that is, within the limited corpus of Qumran documents) occurrence of this phrase, one will understand how a scroll of Torah from the same general time-period used the word זעטוטי instead of נערי.⁴² They were, in the mind of at least one scribe or several scribes, either equivalent or interchangeable. One such scroll, according to rabbinic tradition, was present in the Temple

word, see also Jacob Levy, "Beiträge zur Revision der Thargumim," *ZDMG* 14 (1860): 269–277, esp. 276–277.

⁴⁰ Ernest G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1984), 96. The manuscript is now available online at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_27031 (with our passage on fol. 85r). See also *Tg. Neof.* (mg.) עולימיא שפיריא, available online at http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Neofiti.1 (with the relevant marginal note on fol. 161v). For the various Targumic renderings gathered together conveniently, the reader is directed to the Targumic Studies Module of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon: <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/index.html>.

⁴¹ If the reader seeks a parallel to such a fixed phrase in Hebrew, compare אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה (2 Sam 14:5, 1 Kgs 7:14, 11:26, 17:9–10). Obviously, every אֶלְמָנָה is by definition an אִשָּׁה, just like every זעטוט is presumably a נער—and yet the language develops phrases such as אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה and נער זעטוט. The former locution, incidentally, found its way into the English language as 'widow woman', listed at the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'widow', def. C1.a, as "usually arch. or dial." (online at <http://www.oed.com/>). The origin is John Wycliffe's translation (1382) of 1 Kgs 7:14 אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה as 'widowe womman'; see also 2 Sam 14:5, 1 Kgs 11:26, 17:9–10, though in these passages Wycliffe used 'womman widowe' (or variant spelling 'womman widewe'). The expression then passed into the King James Version as 'widow woman' (at four of the above five verses), whence it gained currency throughout English speech and literature, as witnessed, for example, in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), II.xxix.100 'widow-woman'.

⁴² And by extension, perhaps, also זעטוטי instead of אצילי at Exod 24:11.

library – a tradition, to my mind, with some considerable cogency, based on the evidence presented herein.⁴³

Excursus I: The Phrase אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 'the God of Israel' in the Bible

As indicated in the main body of this article, in the vast majority of cases in the Bible, the phrase אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – attested c. 200x – is preceded either by יהוה or by יהוה צְבָאוֹת. The exceptions, and their explanations or conditions, are as follows:

Gen 33:20 אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – Serving to specify the identity of אֵל 'El'.

Num 16:9 אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתִכֶּם מֵעַדְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל – Perhaps to emphasize the connection to עַדְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

1 Sam 5:7, 5:8 (3x), 5:10, 5:11, 6:2 – See above, within the context of the Philistines' referring to the God of Israel (six of the seven), or the narrator adopting the Philistines' perspective (5:8, third instance).

2 Sam 23:3 אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – Within the archaic poem 'The Last Words of David', itself replete with atypical usages.⁴⁴

Isa 29:23 וְאֶת־אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲרִיצוּ – In the b-line of a poetic couplet, parallel to וְהִקְדִּישׁוּ אֶת־קְדוּשַׁי יַעֲקֹב in the a-line.

Isa 41:17, 45:3, 52:12 – All three in the b-line, with יהוה in the a-line.

Isa 45:15 אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר – In the b-line, parallel to אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר in the a-line.

Isa 48:2 וְעַל־אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִסְמְכוּ שְׁמוֹ – With יהוה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ following, to clarify and identify.

⁴³ I am grateful to Emanuel Tov for an exceedingly helpful discussion (via email, August 2013) and for several bibliographic items cited herein. Though even without this formal recognition of his kind assistance, the attentive reader will realize my indebtedness to Professor Tov's work, given the number of his scholarly oeuvre cited herein. In addition, I thank the anonymous reader for this journal, whose helpful comments forced me to reformulate several key matters. I alone, however, remain responsible for the conclusions herein.

⁴⁴ See Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Northern Origin of 'The Last Words of David' (2 Sam 23,1-7)," *Biblica* 69 (1988): 113-121; and idem, "Additional Notes on 'The Last Words of David' (2 Sam 23, 1-7)," *Biblica* 70 (1989): 403-408.

- Ezek 8:4, 9:3, 10:19, 11:22, 43:2 אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – A usage unique to Ezekiel.
 Ezek 10:20 – היא החייה אשר ראיתי תחת אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּנִהְרֵי־כְבֹד וְאָדַע בִּי כְרוּבִים הֵמָּה:
 This time without the word כְּבֹד preceding, but still typical of Ezekiel.
- Ps 68:9 – אָרַץ רַעֲשָׁה אַף־שָׁמַיִם נִטְפוּ מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים זֶה סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 Following אֱלֹהִים, perhaps added as a gloss to specify the term סִינֵי, within another archaic poem.
- Ps 69:7 – אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי קַיִד אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת אֶל־יִכְלְמוּ בִי מִבְּקִשְׁיֶךָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 to אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת.
- Ezra 3:2 וַיִּבְנוּ אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַעֲלוֹת עָלָיו עֹלוֹת כַּכְּתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים:
 – In Late Biblical Hebrew, it appears that the phrase אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל became more standard, presumably due to the decreased usage of יְהוִה. See also the next three examples, though each verse includes a foreign context, which may have served to generate the usage.
- Ezra 6:22 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ חֲגֻמְצוֹת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּשִׁמְחָה כִּי שִׁמְחָה יְהוָה וְהִסֵּב לֵב מֶלֶךְ־אַשּׁוּר עָלֵיהֶם
 –In addition to the above comment, note that the perspective of the king of Assyria may be intended here, with the Temple referred to as בֵּית־הָאֱלֹהִים, with the deity then glossed as אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
- Ezra 9:4 וְאֵלֵי יֹאסְפוּ כָל חֵרֵד בְּדַבְרֵי אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל מַעַל הַגּוֹלָה וְאֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב מִשׁוּמִם עַד לְמַנְחַת
 –Note the context of Ezra 9, with reference to the foreigners within Israel's community.
- 1 Chr 5:26 וַיַּעַר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־רוּחַ פּוּל מֶלֶךְ־אַשּׁוּר וְאֶת־רוּחַ תַּלְגַּת פִּלְגֶסֶר מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר וַיִּגְלֵם
 – לְרֹאוּבֵנִי וְלַגָּדִי וְלַחֲצִי שִׁבְט מְנַשֶּׁה וַיְבִיאֵם לְחַלְחֵל וְחִבּוֹר וְהִרְאָה וַנְהַר גּוֹזָן עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:
 The foreign factor is obvious, with the 'God of Israel' arousing the spirit of the king of Assyria in order to exile the two-and-a-half tribes of Israel located in Transjordan.

Excursus II: The Literary Device of 'Form Follows Content' in the Bible

As seen in the body of this article, the peculiar language in Exodus 24 reflects the very unusual series of events narrated within the chapter. While a full study of the technique of 'form follows content' in the Bible remains a desideratum, I take the opportunity here to note some notable examples.

1. The first creation account in Genesis 1 proceeds in orderly fashion, with each day enumerated separately, with refrains present, with repeated terms and phrases, and with the first three days of creation matching the second three days. The result is a well-designed literary structure, serving as the blueprint to creation. God brought order out of chaos, indicated in a variety of ways (e.g., the creation of 'light' in a world preexistent with 'darkness') – and the text of Genesis 1 reflects this process throughout.

2. Genesis 29:20 reads: וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וַיְהִי בְּעֵינָיו כִּימִים אָחָדִים בְּאֵהָבָתָּהּ אֵתָּה 'And Jacob worked for Rachel (for) seven years; and they were in his eyes as (but) a few days, such was his love for her'. The first nineteen verses of this well-known chapter in the Bible narrate the action that took place over the course of one month (see v. 14); indeed the first thirteen of those verses narrate the action that occurred on a single day! And yet the succeeding seven years of Jacob's servitude are reported by a single solitary verse – so that the reader experiences the quick passage of time in precisely the manner which Jacob did: 'and they were in his eyes as (but) a few days, such was his love for her'.

3. Genesis 39:2-5 repeats over and over again the success that was had in the house of Potiphar, due to Joseph's diligence and expertise:

2 וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מְצַלִּיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו הַמִּצְרָיִ: 3 וַיֵּרָא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה מְצַלִּיחַ בְּיָדוֹ: 4 וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּשְׁרֹת אֹתוֹ וַיִּפְקְדֵהוּ עַל־בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל־יִשְׁלֹוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ: 5 וַיְהִי מֵאִזּוֹ הַפְּקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹוֹ וַיִּבְרָךְ יְהוָה אֶת־בֵּית הַמִּצְרָיִ בְּגִלְלַת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בְרַכְתּוֹ יְהוָה בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹוֹ בְּבֵית וּבְשָׂדֵה:

Potiphar's house is blessed with bounty, on account of Joseph, and the effusive language reflects the abundance.

4. A whole series of verses in the Bible reflects confused language, as a means to portray the confusion, excitement, or bewilderment of the moment.⁴⁵ A classic example was noted by Martin Buber in 1 Sam 9:12-13,⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1998-99): article 6, electronic version, on the web at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/>; and idem, "לשון מבולבלת כתבסס ספרותי בסיפור המקראי," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Moshe Garsiel* (ed. Shmuel Vargon et al.; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 27-43.

the response of the maidens to the simple question posed by Saul and his attendant, הַיֵּשׁ בְּזֶה הַרְאָה (v. 11):

12 ... יֵשׁ הַנָּה לְפָנֶיךָ מֵהַר עֵתָה כִּי הַיּוֹם בָּא לְעִיר כִּי זָבַח הַיּוֹם לְעֵם בְּבִמְהָ: 13 כְּבֹאֲכֶם הָעִיר בֶּן
תִּמְצְאוּן אֹתוֹ בְּטָרִם יַעֲלֶה הַבְּמִתָּה לְאָכֹל כִּי לֹא־יֵאָכֵל הָעֵם עַד־בָּאוּ כִּי־הוּא יִבְרַךְ הַזָּבַח אַחֲרֵי־כֵן
יֵאָכְלוּ הַקָּרָאִים וְעֵתָה עָלוּ כִּי־אֹתוֹ כְּהַיּוֹם תִּמְצְאוּן אֹתוֹ:

Perhaps the best way to apprehend the true intent of the passage is to provide a relatively literal translation: “Yes, here before you; hurry now, because today he is coming to the city, because the sacrifice is today for the people at the high-place. When you come to the city, thus you will find him, before he goes up to the high-place to eat, because the people cannot eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice, afterwards the invited-ones can eat; so now go up, because him, this very day you will find him.” By the use of such language, the text succeeds in depicting the girls’ excitement over seeing the tall, handsome Saul, as they prattle all at once, creating a cacophony of voices.

5. In Judg 18:17, the action of the men who disturb and loot Micah’s house is described with the phrase בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה לְקַחוּ (followed by the list of the four items taken). Several scholars have disapproved of this phrase. G. F. Moore noted that “the asyndeton is without parallel in simple narrative”;⁴⁷ while A. B. Ehrlich used the rather strong term ‘unhebräisch’.⁴⁸ But certainly this view is a misunderstanding of what the author attempted to convey here. The lack of the conjunction is an indication of the suddenness by which the men swooped into the house and took the desired items. The text is not ‘un-Hebraic’, but rather once more form follows content: the speeded syntax (if I may use that term) reflects the speed with which the event occurred.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, “Die Erzählung von Sauls Königswahl,” *VT* 6 (1956): 126. See also Avi Hurvitz, “Ruth 2:7—‘A Midrashic Gloss?’” *ZAW* 95 (1983): 122; Rendsburg, “Confused Language,” §1; and idem, “לשון מבולבלת,” 29–30.

⁴⁷ George Foot Moore, *Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 397.

⁴⁸ Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel* (7 vols.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908–1914), 3:146.

⁴⁹ See already Rendsburg, “Confused Language,” §5.5; and idem, “לשון מבולבלת,” 39.

6. As a parallel usage, see Ps 73:19: מִן־בְּלֵהוֹת: אֵיךְ הָיוּ לְשֹׁמֵה כָּרְגַע סָפוּ תָמוּ מִן־בְּלֵהוֹת: 'How they are ruined, so suddenly; at an end, completely, by terrors'. The asyndeton סָפוּ תָמוּ follows immediately upon the word כָּרְגַע 'so suddenly'. I have rendered the two Hebrew verbs here very loosely, as adverbials, 'at an end, completely', in an attempt to mimic the effect of a swift and complete ruin. Standard translations capture the hendiadys thus: 'swept away utterly' (RSV), 'wholly swept away' (NJV)—with one verb and one adverbial, and by deriving the verb from ס-פ-ה 'sweep away' (and not from ס-ו-ף 'end', as per the Masoretic accents). Regardless, the suddenness of the event is indicated by the Hebrew verbal construction.

7. Yet another parallel usage is found in Song 5:6, where the asyndetic phrase וְדוּדִי הָמַק עָבַר 'and my beloved had turned, had gone' indicates the instantaneous disappearance of the male lover from the female lover's fantasy.⁵⁰

8. An even greater suddenness is evoked by the lack of a verb altogether, as in Ps 22:17: כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הַקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֶרֶץ יָדַי וְרַגְלֵי: 'yea, dogs surround me, a company of evildoers encircles me; like a lion—my hands, my feet'. The absence of a verb in the second stich indicates the swiftness with which the attack comes. The reader experiences the anguish of the psalmist, who is surrounded by enemies, and then suddenly, the pounce—with the immediate cry about hands and feet under attack. The speed with which a lion (or better: lioness) pounces on its prey is indicated by the speed with which the verse reaches its climactic end, passing over the unnecessary verb, in order to highlight the pain of the psalmist as if his very limbs are rent asunder.⁵¹

9. All scholars have noticed the exceedingly difficult language which dominates the book of Job. Raymond Schiendlin has gone further, however, with the following insightful remark: "the author of Job may have decided

⁵⁰ Again, see already Rendsburg, "Confused Language," §5.5; and idem, " לשון מבולבלת," 40.

⁵¹ See my earlier treatment: Gary A. Rendsburg, "Hebrew Philological Notes III," *HS* 43 (2002): 25–26.

that a difficult texture was the right one for his emotionally wrenching theme—a tortured language to describe life’s torment.”⁵²

No doubt further analysis of the biblical text would reveal additional instances of the ‘form follows content’ technique. For the present, though, we may content ourselves with these examples, which suffice to demonstrate the point made herein.

⁵² Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Book of Job* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 31.