CORROBORATING EVIDENCE FOR
THE ANTIQUITY OF THE TORAH'S HEBREW

Joshua Sherrill

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1. Introduction

At the ETS Annual Meeting 2024, the Old Testament/Ancient Near Eastern Background section hosted an invited guest, Aaron D. Hornkohl of the University of Cambridge. Dr. Hornkohl is a leading scholar in the historical linguistics of the Hebrew Bible (HB), so it was his assignment to lead off the session with an introduction into that subject and its implications for the dating of biblical texts. The other three papers presented during the session were all on the same subject and on how to interpret the linguistic data from an inerrantist view of Scripture. The contributions also frequently pointed back to an important *JETS* article, now twenty-four years old, by Michael Grisanti (2001) on broadly the same issues.

As it happened, in that same week last year, Dr. Hornkohl's latest book was released, titled *Diachronic Diversity in Classical Biblical Hebrew*, which is available open access by Open Book Publishers. In it, the author proposes that the linguistic profile of the Torah, when compared to that of the Prophets and the pre-exilic Writings,[1] requires a modification to the bipolar periodization of Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) vs. Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH). He maintains the view, widely accepted by historical linguists of Hebrew, that the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Torah is, in the main, later than the pre-classical language reflected in Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH), but he proposes a sub-periodization of CBH: "CBH_1" in the Torah and "CBH_2" in the (non-LBH) Prophets and Writings. He even went so far as to imply that the Torah might preserve texts from the second millennium. To borrow a New Testament idiom, this has caused "no small stir."

For those unfamiliar, the linguistic approach Hornkohl defends stands methodologically distinct form the source-critical and religious-/socio-historical models, though it is not *a priori* in conflict with their results. When the linguistic approach was formalized in the 1970s, it was based on observable differences between the Hebrew of the synoptic texts of Chronicles (written after Israel's exile) and the Hebrew of Samuel–Kings (presumed to have been written almost entirely beforehand). This led to investigations of other characteristics of the self-proclaimed post-exilic books of the HB and to their integration into a historical-linguistic paradigm in all domains of language—phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology, orthography, etc.—continuous with post-biblical Hebrew also. Thus, the biblical books have been collected into CBH and LBH.[2] Onto this continuum, two other strata were proposed for biblical texts: (1) the archaic phase (ABH), comprising some eighteen poems, largely from the Pentateuch, possibly also the dialogues of Job;[3] and

[1] See note 2 below on the books included in "CBH," from these two canonical divisions.

[2] CBH generally includes, from the Prophets, Gen–2 Kgs 23; Isa 1–39; Hos; Amos; Obad; Mic; Nah; Hab; and Zeph. From the Writings, CBH is generally held to include most of the Psalms; Job's dialogues (but see below); and perhaps, in a northern dialect, Prov 10–29 and Song of Songs (Rendsburg 2003; Noegel and Rendsburg 2009). LBH is held to include: Ezra-Neh; Esth; Dan; 1–2 Chron. For analysis, Hornkohl's dimension "LBH+" also includes Qoh; Ps 119; and Job 1–2; 42:7–17. Some scholars also add Ps 107; Prov 1–9; 30–31; Ruth; Jonah; and Joel. Isa 40–66 was also widely considered to be LBH, *a priori* because of its reference to Cyrus (44:28; 45:1; e.g., Hurvitz 2014: 4), but for more recent linguistic arguments against this, see below. In general, see Hurvitz 2014; Morgenstern 2016.

[3] ABH is held to include Gen 49; Exod 15; Num 23–24; Deut 32–33; Jdgs 5; 1 Sam 2:1–10; 2 Sam 1:17–27; 2 Sam 22 // Ps 18; 2 Sam 23; Pss 29; 68; 72; 78; and Hab 3 (cf. Gianto 2016; Mandell 2013).

(2) a transitional phase (TBH), comprising exilic books and some corpora overlapping with the pre- and post-exilic periods.[4]

Sometimes the approximate dates given by scholars to the language phases and their books have confirmed traditional dates (e.g., Jer; Ezek; the Former Prophets); sometimes they have challenged traditional dates (e.g., Qoh; Song; Job prose). At other times, linguistic dating has even turned back on itself, as the field becomes more disciplined and more data- and corpus-driven rather than intuitional (e.g., Isa 40–66; cf. Koser 2024). All the while, there has been a minority of dissident voices, led by scholars Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, criticizing not just the excesses but the method overall (Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensvärd 2008; Rezetko and Young 2014; cf. Young 1993). However, far from favoring the traditional dates of biblical texts, such scholars defend post-exilic dates as the essential period of Bible formation. Preferred dates are often darlings on all sides, and Hornkohl's book is disruptive.

Thus, the book's research question is well summarized on page 1: "Against such an epistemologically fraught background, the topic of the present volume may seem at best ill advised, at worst a fool's errand. The main question is *Can CBH be divided into chronological sub-chronolects?*" The book's answer is that it can and should. As provocative as that is to critical scholarship, it is not at all surprising to evangelicals.[5] Though still, the book cannot be read without appreciating that difficulties remain for explaining the form in which the OT has come down to us, particularly the Hebrew of the Torah. That said, in this paper, I will, first, review Hornkohl's book and related scholarship on its interpretive scenarios. Second, I will adduce additional evidence for a pre-monarchic textual base of the Pentateuch. Third, I will evaluate Hornkohl's distinction between CBH_1 and ABH, as well as their dating, viz. whether they are sustainable, considering the external evidence. Then, finally, I will discuss the relevance to an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

2. Review of *Diachronic Diversity in Classical Biblical Hebrew*

2.1. Method

Hornkohl's book (hereafter "*Diachronic Diversity*") builds on the work of a few others who have recognized individual features here and there that are unique to the Torah. Though, he especially, wittingly follows Yoel Elitzur, who opened the discussion ten years ago. In 2015, Elitzur published an article on the emergence of *Adonāi* as a name for God midway through the CBH corpus. The emergence approximated the eighth-century prophets, which is also midway through the four centuries typically assigned to CBH, 1000–600 BC (approx. Iron Age II). Thus, Elitzur suggested that a sub-periodization of CBH may be in order on linguistic grounds (2015: 105). He then pursued that hypothesis in several publications thereafter (2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2022; 2023).

Hornkohl's book also follows the methodology established by the late Avi Hurvitz (e.g., 2014: 9–11; cf. 2001; 2013). The method set forth three criteria for identifying a given linguistic feature as diagnostic of LBH (i.e., a diachronic "isogloss"), which can be clarified by the following questions:

1) Biblical distribution – Is the feature found in the acknowledged late compositions?
2) Biblical opposition – Does the feature have a clear CBH alternative?
3) Extrabiblical confirmation – Is the feature attested in contemporary external sources?

[4] TBH typically includes 2 Kgs 24–25; Isa 40–66; Jer; Lam; Ezek; Hag; Zech; and Mal (Hornkohl 2016; Shin 2007), but Shin later revised this evaluation, now considering Hag–Mal to be LBH (Shin 2016). The narratively later portions of 2 Kings may also exhibit linguistically later Hebrew than earlier portions (Hornkohl 2016).

[5] I owe this this simple but significant insight to a similar one made by Benjamin Suchard (forthcoming).

The same steps may be applied to positively identify the relatively early features as well. However, an imbalance must be recognized: later texts naturally preserve earlier linguistic features, sometimes much earlier, while earlier texts cannot "preserve" later features. Old linguistic elements can also pass out of use and be revived—something Kutscher called a "mirage form" (Kutscher 1984 §54; cf. Cohen 2012: 362; Notarius 2017: 84). Thus, to avoid being misled in the dating of a given text, Hurvitz also used a fourth criterion:

4) Accumulation – Is the feature found in a concentration of other co-diagnostic features?[6]

Using these criteria, *Diachronic Diversity* identifies twelve linguistic features characteristic of the Torah but not the rest of CBH. These are divided into two groups: (1) those perceptible in the combined written-reading tradition (which is to say, the consonantal text, the *ketiv*, as well as the Tiberian vocalization, including the *qere* where it varies from the *ketiv*), and (2) those limited to the written component only (i.e., the consonantal text, the *ketiv* alone). For each feature, Hornkohl systematically finds the distribution, then the opposition, then, where possible, the external confirmation from epigraphic sources. He frames them cumulatively within his overall question, whether early features accumulate in the Torah, and then provides a summative conclusion.

2.2. Results

The table in Appendix 1 shows a summary of Hornkohl's results. There, the comparative data are summarized between the CBH of the Torah, the rest of CBH (which includes TBH and the "non-LBH Writings"), and LBH. The seven features traceable in the combined written-reading tradition are presented in Part 1, chapters 1–7. The first, being one of Hornkohl's most diagnostic features, is that names in the Torah are not found with the theophoric elements found latter on in the Bible. In the Prophets, Yahwistic names are replete with the יָהוּ- ending, which is then usually shortened in LBH to יָהּ-. In sharp distinction, the only two names in the entire Torah (which lists many names) that probably include a Yahwistic element are יְהוֹשֻׁעַ and יוֹכֶבֶד, each starting rather than ending with the divine name, thus reflecting a different and less pervasive tradition.

The second feature is the most complicated. The first-person *wayyiqtol* conjugation can be found in three forms: short, long, and augmented. Some are only discernible in the *hiphil* stem or in certain weak roots (e.g., III-*y* and II-*y/w*). Though short, long, and augmented forms can be found in all phases of biblical Hebrew, their balance progresses through the Bible in one direction. While the Torah shows a preference for short forms (e.g., ואקם, ואעד, ואעש), the rest of CBH shows a preference for long forms (e.g., ואקום, ואעיד, ואעשה), and LBH shows a strong dominance of long and augmented forms (e.g., ואקטלה, ואקומה, ואעידה). This trend continues into post-biblical Hebrew.

Third, two complementary forms are found in the HB for the root יס״ף "add": a *qal* stem and a *hiphil* stem. Both are incomplete paradigms on their own and were apparently used as allomorphs. Yet, whereas the Torah shows preference for the *qal* (16:1), the *hiphil* becomes greater in the rest of CBH (16:4), and it is preferred in LBH (1:6). Fourth, the construct מְאַת as opposed to the absolute מֵאָה is the normal form for multiples of "hundred" in the Torah (27:5), but the norm sharply shifts to the absolute in other CBH (0:34) and LBH (3:14). Fifth, to express the passive voice, the HB has both a *niphal* form and a *qal* internal passive. It is well known that the *qal* is moribund already. Yet Hornkohl also shows that while the Torah preserves a mixture of each, it is

[6] Hornkohl fully recognizes this, which he calls "concentration." Yet, since his objective was not to date any given text within the Torah, he does not devote special attention to it case by case for the evidence he adduces. Essentially, the whole book is his argument for accumulation of older features in the Torah (= CBH_1).

only in the rest of CBH and LBH that the *niphal* becomes dominant. Sixth, the roots צע״ק and זע״ק are treated as byforms in the HB for "cry, muster." But the Torah strongly prefers צע״ק (27:2), while the Prophets and CBH Writings begin to show a slight preference for זע״ק (46:77) that becomes even stronger in LBH (3:12). The seventh feature is a progression of the first-person pronoun "we, us" from נַחְנוּ to אֲנַחְנוּ. The Torah's Hebrew preserves a slight mixture (4:28), which vanishes through CBH and LBH (1:62 and 0:31, respectively).

Part 2 presents in chapters 8–12 the last four features, being those traceable in the written tradition alone, not the reading tradition. For these the consonantal text (the *ketiv*) shows disharmony with the Tiberian vocalization superimposed upon it (the *qere*). Opening this category, Hornkohl's eighth feature is a well-known *qere perpetuum* of the Torah: the feminine singular pronoun "she" written consonantally as הוא (identical to the masculine pronoun) but vocalized as *hī*. The Torah preserves this written tradition in inverse proportion to the rest of the HB where היא is the normal orthography (194:18 vs. 9:282, respectively).[7] The ninth feature is the second-/third-person feminine plural ending in prefix conjugation verbs (*yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*). The Torah preserves the ending ן- with a final-form consonant (pointed ָן- and once as ְן- by the Masoretes), as opposed to the more common vowel-final ending נָה- (27:44). It is much less frequent in the rest of CBH (12:244) and absent in LBH (0:11).[8] Tenth is an apparent epicene in the Torah, where "girl" is always written and pronounced נער instead of נערה, except once (34:1); the rest of the HB is always נערה for "girl," נער for "boy," with no exceptions.

The eleventh and twelfth features have to do with spelling. The former concerns abstract nouns ending in *-ūt*, which are pointed by the Tiberian Masoretic tradition as ֻת- or וּת-. The shorter spelling dominates the Torah (35:10) but is effectively absent from the rest of the HB where the longer is preferred (1:114). The twelfth feature is similar: Andersen and Forbes (1986) have shown that the spelling of the Torah is the most defective, the Prophets more *plene*, and the Writings the most *plene*. The Torah would, then, seem to represent the oldest spelling convention. But abstract nouns with final *-ūt* endings are a special—and by virtue of their statistics, a pronounced—case. The short form may in fact be preserving an altogether different vocalization than the long form. For, as Hornkohl shows, the long stressed final *-ū* vowel is usually written *plene* in the Torah (following Elitzur 2018: 88). In other words, the majority ֻת- and even the minority וּת- in the Torah may reflect the Masoretes' "leveling" so as to harmonize with the Prophets and Writings.

2.3. Interpretation

The main conclusions drawn from the above twelve features are that the Torah's linguistic profile is indeed distinct from the rest of CBH and that its distinction might be explained in one of two ways:

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[7] Hornkohl (following Fassberg 2012; Qimron 1986; 2018: 261–62) suggests the consonantal text preserves an allomorph, *hiwa*, alongside the more general tradition, *hī*. Historically this would have corresponded to the masculine form *hu(wa)*, reflected in other Northwest Semitic languages. In addition, both genders' long forms are reflected in the *plene* spellings of archaizing texts at Qumran, thus supporting the case for a genuine archaic form in the Torah.

[8] Of further interest here is the fact that other feminine plural morphs (pronouns, nouns, imperative verb endings) alternate between ן- or נָה- in varying degrees, but none disagrees even once between orthography and the Tiberian vocalization. Conversely, there is only one instance of the feminine plural *yiqtol* ending that shows harmony between the written and reading traditions: Genesis 49:26, an ABH text. Hornkohl deduces, it was "presumably left as is [by the Masoretes] due to its embedding in archaic poetry, where non-standard morphology was more readily tolerated" (p. 161).

1) The Torah reflects a relative scribal conservatism compared to the rest of the CBH corpus (the Prophets and non-LBH Writings) and the LBH corpus, due to either (a) its obtaining canonical status earlier than they or (b) its having a greater perceived sanctity.
2) The Torah reflects a relative typological priority, sometimes even pre-monarchic, in its textual base, some contemporization notwithstanding.

The first explanation, says Hornkohl, is the less controversial but the less likely. It is not that scribal conservatism with the Torah did not occur but that it cannot explain all the evidence. Specifically, five of the twelve features above—numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6—seem to preclude such a solution in his opinion (p. 17). He writes, "Since CBH as a whole, whatever its content, patterns as a chronolect of Iron Age II, approximately 1000–600 BCE, it is not immediately obvious that the Torah should necessarily be distinguished by typologically early features. The fact that it is *might* result from its incorporation of pre-monarchic traditions preserving facets of especially ancient linguistic profiles" (pp. 15–16, emphasis his).

Yet absolute chronology, he acknowledges, remains difficult for want of sufficient external evidence. He indicates a dating throughout, with statements like this one in chapter 5:

> This state of affairs does not necessarily imply the early composition of the Tiberian Torah in its extant form—though this well may be the case—but it does seem to indicate the preservation of a typologically early linguistic tradition, which tallies with the notion that the content of the Pentateuch, whenever it achieved its ultimate form, incorporates genuinely ancient, i.e., pre-monarchic, material *in a form* that preserves pre-monarchic linguistic features. (pp. 124–25, emphasis mine)

Finally, in one place—and one place only—Hornkohl gives a dating for CBH_1 as "substantially representative of the period 1000–800 BCE, albeit possibly preserving some earlier features of pre-monarchic traditions, and CBH_2, reflecting 800–600 BCE" (p. 207).

2.4. Evaluation

I could find only two academic reviews of *Diachronic Diversity* yet in publication. One is Benjamin Suchard's, which appeared in Dutch early this year (2025a); though, a machine-translated version is available on his website (2025b). The other is a short response in the online, open-access journal *The Bible and Interpretation*, by Rezetko, Young, Ehrensvärd, and Naaijer (2025). Suchard and Young both have more rigorous reviews forthcoming in addition to these. Suchard gives a glowing (though not uncritical) review; the rest, consistent with their previous opinions, find the work to espouse an outdated paradigm, for which they call to be abandoned.

In my assessment, Hornkohl's conclusions are cautious, and he entertains multiple explanations before drawing them up. Most importantly, given that the leading detractors of the historical-linguistic approach favor the source-critical Documentary Hypothesis (Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensvärd 2008, II: 12), Hornkohl entertains the DH for the sake of argument in every linguistic feature he examines. When he finds a feature to characterize the Pentateuch over against the rest of CBH, he presents the tokens in the standard stratification of sources found in Richard E. Friedman's *Who Wrote the Bible?* (1989: 246–55; Hornkohl 2024: 21).[9]

[9] Friedman, to be fair, argues that P precedes D, with the latter dating to the reign of Josaiah, such that all four documentary sources of the Pentateuch are written in CBH (2003: Introduction). In other words, Friedman attempts to incorporate the linguistic arguments levied by Hurvitz, Rendsburg, Hendel, and the like. Yet, Friedman's

Hornkohl's primary interlocutors—Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensvärd—prefer seeing the P source as last of the four (J, E, D, P) and exilic or post-exilic. That would mean P should exhibit characteristics of LBH or at least TBH. However, while Hornkohl's results are, in his words, "somewhat equivocal," they "certainly do not point unambiguously to P's relative lateness, whether in the Pentateuch, specifically, or in CBH, more generally" (p. 21). With six of the twelve features examined (nos. 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10), there is no discernable difference between P and the other sources. With two others one could argue that P is slightly later (nos. 5, 9). Yet, with the remaining four features (nos. 3, 4, 11, 12), "P stands out as typologically early" (p. 22). Thus, Hornkohl shows judiciously that there is no meaningful correlation between a supposed source document and its linguistic phase. I would argue that though *Diachronic Diversity* does not defeat the Documentary Hypothesis, nor attempts to do so, it continues to show in a scientific manner that the hypothesis is not borne out by objective linguistic data.

On the other hand, one possible explanation that Hornkohl does not entertain is that of a single author at least substantially responsible for the distinctiveness of the Pentateuch's language, i.e., a Mosaic style of writing. In fact, the name "Moses" seldom occurs in the book, and when it does, it is merely in biblical or post-biblical citation, not a historical reconstruction of authorship. Evangelicals would, of course, consider substantially singular authorship of the Torah to be an important factor, not to the exclusion of historical linguistic observations but alongside them. Yet Hornkohl's aims in the present volume are different and more modest. The features he examines are not idiosyncrasies of what linguists would call an *idiolect* (diaphasic variation) but those of a *chronolect* (diachronic variation). That is, the twelve features he highlights belong somewhere on a timeline of linguistic change that can be constructed either explicitly via the epigraphic corpus or implicitly by regular sound changes occurring in all human languages.[10]

Hornkohl's data is also disciplined but necessarily one-sided between biblical and extra-biblical data (pp. 7–8). The internal data of the biblical corpus is culled and organized thoroughly, with deep insight into both the consonantal and vocal traditions of the MT, as few other scholars could well do. Yet, after a feature emerged as characteristic of the Pentateuch vis-à-vis other CBH, at times only one or two epigraphic texts were adduced to confirm it. As acknowledged, sometimes

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collation of sources is still used by others who date the documents in a different order and to different phases of Hebrew.

[10] In an earlier introduction to historical linguistics in the biblical languages, Ozoliņš (2023: 185–86) rightly points out that the universal regularity of sound change is, in fact, "a far-reaching theoretical commitment" and "a topic of some controversy in historical linguistics." Yet it is basic to the diachronic enterprise. The late eminent Semitist Joshua Blau, for example, leaned heavily on this principle, which is explicit in his masterful *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew* (2010: 26):

> The analysis of the linguistic facts clearly demonstrates that sound shifts are regular, as long as other factors do not interfere. This assumption is not only demonstrated by hundreds and hundreds of cases of regular development in various languages and regular correspondences between related languages, but it has also enabled important findings that otherwise would not have been made. [It is] the basic principle of historical linguistics that sound shifts are regular.

However, Blau also documents that there are exceptions, some changes are conditional, and others are even wiped out by suppletion or paradigmatic leveling (2010: 50–53). Ozoliņš summarizes that while regularity is broadly true, some sound changes are less so; therefore, a "general regularity" or "qualified exceptionlessness" is an acceptable working hypothesis. Regularity is an assumption on which Honkohl also proceeds; yet, while that assumption is doubtless explicit in his many other works, I could not find an acknowledgement of it in this volume. As with other aspects of the book, it simply points out that some previous introduction to diachrony in biblical Hebrew will be necessary for most readers.

the inscriptions were Moabite, Old Aramaic, or some other Aramaeo-Canaanite language, which are indeed wholly relevant (on which, see below). Yet according to the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, the inscriptions agreed upon by scholars to be Hebrew only comprise at best about 5,800 words, or 1.1% of the known classical Hebrew corpus (525,552 words), including the HB, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Ben Sira (2016, IX: 13). It should be borne in mind that the epigraphic corpus is miniscule compared to the biblical corpus, accidental in terms of its preservation, and it could itself, therefore, exhibit anomalous features for the respective periods of its witnesses. Besides these factors, such texts, though alphabetic, were usually documentary rather than literary and written on crude materials. Thus, they normally reflect a different writing purpose, level of linguistic care, and literary potential than texts of the HB written on vellum or papyrus (Averbeck 2020: 209–10).

Finally, throughout *Diachronic Diversity*, Hornkohl is careful to qualify that the linguistic profile emerging from the Torah is not explained by the distinction between ABH and CBH (pp. 51, 134). In his conclusion, he writes, "The distribution of features traced in the present monograph tallies with none of the accepted divisions, demanding instead the recognition of diachronic diversity within CBH, which might lead to an overall schema of ABH–CBH_1–CBH_2–TBH–LBH. Given the number and enormity of evidentiary uncertainties, it is tempting to leave the schema unaccompanied by an absolute chronology" (p. 206). Yet he "tentatively and approximately" gives the dates already partially mentioned (p. 207):

CBH_1	1000–800 BCE
CBH_2	800–600 BCE
TBH	600–450 BCE
LBH	450 BCE
ABH	"real-world temporal associations… remain unclear"

I think there is a tension between Hornkohl's introductory and incremental summations of the emerging situation, on the one hand, and his final chronological hypothesis, on the other. Namely, whereas he indicated the possibility of pre-monarchic traditions or even (it seemed) textual origins, in the end he dates the Torah's Hebrew to Iron Age II (IA II). In his introduction, he says "the onomasticon with and without *yahu* names… appears to divide the pre-monarchic naming traditions seen in Genesis–Samuel and the monarchic traditions in such books as Kings, Isaiah, and Jeremiah" (p. 15). If we follow Hornkohl's chronology, then, we have a large distance between the traditions and the text, leaving the Hebrew *chronolect* of Genesis to align with the *chronology* of 1 Kings. As well, in Hornkohl's conclusion he seems to downplay the connection to pre-monarchic traditions, I presume being driven by methodological conservatism.

Elitzur, for his part, has not yet written publicly about *Diachronic Diversity*, but in his earlier work, upon which Hornkohl wittingly builds, Elitzur adduces some of the same data. He consistently, more confidently concludes that the Torah is pre-monarchic and second-millennium (2018b). Beyond that, he writes, the differences between earlier and later language are "corresponding to the order in which the Hebrew Bible presents itself" (2022: 483). Suchard, praises *Diachronic Diversity* for proving that, yes, the Torah should be sub-periodized from the rest of CBH, but in the end also takes issue with Hornkohl's dating—in the opposite direction. Elitzur's dating, Suchard says, is more "traditional" but arguably more consistent (2025b). Suchard would date the Torah's Hebrew not to the pre-monarchy but to the later monarchy, for in his opinion it is more consistently comparable to inscriptions from the eighth century and later.

To be clear, Hornkohl has not explicitly dated the Torah's origin to 1000 BC or later. He has "tentatively" dated the Torah's *Hebrew* to 1000 BC or later; that is to say, its linguistic profile.

He frequently acknowledges his assumption of scribal contemporizing in the HB throughout its history, the Torah included. For example, in his chapter 12 on orthography, regarding the difference between Iron Age inscriptions, which are more regularly defective than any corpus in the MT, he writes, "This means either that the earliest biblical texts were written later than the inscriptions or, alternatively, that their orthography, once more defective, was updated over the course of their literary and textual development and transmission. Evidence for the latter alternative is forthcoming from several DSS versions of biblical texts" (p. 185). Again, he nowhere indicates that he intends his argument to defeat Mosaic authorship or second-millennium origins. But origins do not a Pentateuch make, and if his argument proves true, linguistic contemporizing would indeed have to be normative.

I highly recommend *Diachronic Diversity* for advanced Hebrew studies. I would now simply add that there are other data and reasoning that, I think, corroborate the antiquity of the Torah's Hebrew and makes entirely plausible the Torah's own characterization of itself as a text originally of the pre-monarchy, which is historically datable to the late second millennium.

3. Corroborating Evidence for CBH_1

As mentioned, the work of Yoel Elitzur has been formative to this discussion over the last ten years. Others have also made contributions without taking the issue head on. Space prohibits a full engagement. Therefore, below is a brief sampling of a few lines of evidence that corroborate the Torah's antiquated language and authorship.

3.1. ADNY

Elitzur claims to be aware of "over 40 proven examples" of linguistic change along the progression of inner-biblical chronology (2022: 483). The first he published was, as already mentioned, on the divine name אֲדֹנָי (*adonāi*, ADNY; 2015; cf. 2019). This plural pronominal form, "my lord," appears 439x in the HB. It was originally the *pluralis majestatis adonim* or plural of majesty used generally as a "submissive address," including in the Torah (18x, e.g., Gen 15:2, 8). However, it seems, the eighth-century prophets began using it specially in reference to God, with and without YHWH attached (e.g., Isa 3:17; 4:4; Amos 1:8; 3:7–8; 1 Kgs 2:2; 3:15). Elitzur writes, "In the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and Samuel we do not find a single occurrence in this [latter] function, while beginning with Amos, Isaiah, and Kings, it continues to appear until the latest books of the Hebrew Bible except Chronicles" (2015: 91). It is this form standing behind the MT's pointing of the tetragrammaton as we see it today. It seems, then, that a sacred-secular distinction between *adoni* and *adonāi* had already obtained when Isaiah and Amos began to use *adonāi* as a name for YHWH.[11] Regardless of when the change occurred exactly, it is a feature of CBH_2, later than CBH_1.

[11] The singular form with the 1cs suffix, *adoni*, is also common (195x) and has the same consonantal form as the plural. Only the Masoretic pointing differs: אֲדֹנִי vs. אֲדֹנַי. The singular is also used in direct address, and in fact, it is more common than the plural in the Torah. But it is never used to address God or to refer to God anywhere in the MT (2019: 437). One might ask whether we can know that *adonai* in the Prophets was originally plural and not simply a vowel pointing after the fact. Though not certain, it is indicated by the fact that the noun in pronominal states is always unambiguously plural except for with the 1cs suffix where it may be either.

Notwithstanding are two cases of defective spelling (1 Sam 16:16; Prov 30:10 [where Q is pl.]). The plural is signaled unequivocally by the "connecting vowel" *-y-*. Technically, it is a vestige of the extinct case endings and is only summarily called a "connecting vowel" posthumously. The historical dual oblique case ending (doubling as a plural) is preserved clearest with 2fs suf. (אֲדֹנַיִךְ), but it is generally monophthongized (*-ay* > *-ē*, or before *qamaṣ* > *-ê*; cf. Blau 2010 §§4.4.5). No such ending is present in *adoni*; but cf. the one instance of *adonai* in Gen 19:2, where lot addresses a true plural referent.

3.2. בְּאֵר vs. בּוֹר (בּאֹר)

The common noun בְּאֵר "well" is found in the Pentateuch 27x (Gen 20x; Exod 1x; Num 6x). Elsewhere, the same noun only appears in 1 context with the meaning "cistern" (2 Sam 17:18–21) and 5x in poetic parallelisms meaning something between "(waterless) pit," "cistern," and "well." By contrast בּוֹר "cistern, pit; dungeon" appears 15x in the Torah (9x in the Joseph narrative) but 55x in the Prophets/Writings. Elitzur shows that toponyms reflect the same transition from באר to בור. There are a handful of place names outside the Torah with consonantal forms באר (Josh 19:8; Jdgs 9:21) and בארות (Josh 9:17; 18:25; 2 Sam 4:2; Ezra 2:25; Neh 7:29). However, it is argued, these probably reflect בּאֹר (cf. Jer 2:15), since they reference locations "in districts whose water system was based on cisterns" (2018a: 97). Elitzur concludes, based on archaeological reports, "the use of wells is an ancient technique utilized from at least the third millennium BCE. Cisterns substituted for wells in the land of Israel after the Israelite conquest and settlement which was located mainly in hilly districts and semi-desert plateaus, and are apparently a local innovation. In the Bronze Age, cisterns were rare" (2018a: 97).

3.3. הָאֵל vs. אֵלֶּה

The normal plural demonstrative pronoun in biblical Hebrew is אֵלֶּה "these." However, הָאֵל occurs 8x in the Pentateuch (Gen 4x; Lev 1x; Deut 3x; possibly also Num 24:23 [cf. the versions]). It is paralleled in the Phoenician plural demonstratives *ʾl* and *hʾl* and in Old Aramaic. Besides in older texts, אֵל "these" also appears once in 1 Chronicles 20:8 (where the parallel 2 Sam 21:22 has אֵלֶּה), indicating that it could be an Aramaism. Likewise Aramaic Ezra 5:15 has the odd form אֱלֵה in the *ketiv* but הָאֵל in the *qere*. Defective spelling of the final *-e* is not otherwise known in biblical Hebrew, so the 9 total occurrences of אֵל(ה) should not be assumed to have been pronounced *elleh* as in אֵלֶּה (2018a: 93). In my judgment, the Aramaism is a helpful example of the circulatory route that "mirage forms" take; archaisms may disappear and then re-enter the language as late features.

3.4. מַטֶּה vs. שֵׁבֶט

Elitzur demonstrates that both שֵׁבֶט and מַטֶּה are used in the primary sense of "branch," and therefore by extension, "staff," "rod," a primitive weapon, and, figuratively, a political rule (2022: 494–95; cf. "mace" in English). Both are then used in the secondary sense, of "tribe, clan," which is the most frequent of all. Yet, while שֵׁבֶט is used in both senses throughout the Bible, מַטֶּה is used in the secondary sense "tribe" almost exclusively in the Former Prophets (Exod 6x; Lev 1x; Num 92x; Josh 58x; Kings 2x; Synoptic Chron 23x; Non-Synoptic Chron 1x). Out of all the synoptic Chronicles material, 22 instances of מַטֶּה as "tribe" appear in 1 Chronicles 6, which is an updated version of the cities of the Levites list in Joshua 21. Another instance is in 2 Chronicles 5:2, copying 1 Kings 8. The lone occurrence in non-synoptic portions is 1 Chronicles 12:32.

This is compelling evidence that the word belongs to CBH, though it does not at first appear to be CBH$_1$—at least, not as defined by Hornkohl. The data strengthens the chronological relationship between the Pentateuch and Joshua. Yet, if מַטֶּה were CBH$_1$, then why is it so dominant in Numbers (92x out of 97 environments) but totally absent in Deuteronomy (0 of 18)? I observe that, on the one hand, the environments where מַטֶּה is used in Numbers and Joshua 6 are census data, land inheritance law, and land survey data; and, on the other hand, that every instance of מַטֶּה in

Thus, every case of possessive *adon* in the Bible is plural (105x), except for *adoni*. *Adoni* is the irregular form. Yet, from Kings forward it became standard for secular lords, and *adonāi* became exclusively used for the sacred Lord. It may be that previously plural forms אֲדֹנַי, such as in the Torah, were revocalized after the fact to אֲדֹנָי. But then, Gen 18:2 was overlooked and the emergence of the name ADNY is unrelated. This seems less probable.

Deuteronomy is in a speech of Moses. In light of these factors, I suggest (not Elitzur) that either מַטֶּה had obtained technical status for clerical purposes in this period and/or amanuenses different from those of the surrounding texts may have been responsible for penning these clerical sections, for example, a military commander such as Joshua (cf. Exod 17:9; 24:13; 33:11; Josh 1:1). The total absence again in Judges (0x of 15 possible), strengthens this argument by contrast, and it could also be an indication of the chronological gap between the compositions of Joshua and Judges, which I hope to explore in the future.

3.5. Loanwords

In a 2016 essay and then more thoroughly in a 2019 monograph, Benjamin Noonan studies non-Semitic loanwords in the Hebrew Bible. Loanwords have frequently been taken as indications of the lateness of a given biblical text. This tendency in scholarship has certainly abated with respect to Aramaic loans, with recognition instead of how much contact Aramaic could have had with Hebrew throughout its history (Hurvitz 2003; Eskult 2003). Noonan examines loanwords from several languages: Egyptian, Hurrian, Old Iranian, Old Indic, and Greek. The only language for which the number and frequency of loans in the Pentateuch was found to be statistically significant was Egyptian. Because of the long history and frequent contact between Egypt and the southern Levant, the former's loanwords into Hebrew are not generally datable (but see Wilson-Wright forthcoming). Yet, Noonan finds two kinds of Egyptian loanwords to be datable:

1) Loanwords evincing an original Egyptian phonology that is archaic, when the disappearance of the archaic feature is datable in Egyptian texts
2) Loanwords borrowed back into Egyptian ("reborrowed") after being changed in the receptor language, when the reappearance is datable in Egyptian texts

Noonan finds several examples in these categories. Of the first kind, there are several loans from Egyptian feminine nouns in the Bible: שִׁטָּה "acacia wood," נֹפֶךְ "turquoise," לֶשֶׁם "feldspar, amazonite," טֶנֶא "basket," טַבַּעַת "seal, ring," אֵיפָה "*ephah*-measure," אַחְלָמָה "red jasper," זֶרֶת "hand-span," and תֵּבָה "box." In Egyptian, the feminine *-t* ending begins to drop out in the Old Kingdom. By the Amarna period (1360–1330 BC), the Akkadian syllabic representation of Egyptian's final *-t* appears as *-a* rather than *-at*. Then by 700 BC it appears as *-i* in Neo-Assyrian texts. The latter was the form borrowed into Imperial Aramaic texts for Egyptian feminine nouns. In Hebrew, however, as seen above, the loans are vocalized with a final *-a*. Thus, they must have entered the Hebrew lexicon sometime around the Amarna period or slightly earlier but certainly before 700 BC (2016: 62–63; 2019: 304–5).

Of Noonan's second type, he finds one datable word: תַּחְרָא "leather vest" (Exod 28:32; 39:23) from Egyptian *dḥr* "leather, animal hide." Exodus uses the term for robe of the ephod, comparing its side-stitching to a תַּחְרָא. The Egyptians subsequently borrowed this word back as *tḥr*, first appearing in the Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1200), meaning the leather paneling of a carriage. Clearly it is a related concept, but the word has morphed from Egyptian to Hebrew and then from Hebrew to Egyptian again. One caveat is that this item could have entered the Northwest Semitic (NWS) lexicon, to then be inherited by Hebrew, rather than entering Hebrew as such directly. The word does, at least, reflect the earlier Egyptian pronunciation and culture, appearing nowhere else in the Bible except Exodus. Thus, I agree with Noonan, that while not decisive, it contributes to the accumulation of antiquated language in the Torah (2016:64; 2019: 305–6).

3.6. Spelling

From another angle, Aaron Koller argues there must have been real "though not all that extensive" scribal training in Israel in Iron Age I (1200–1000 BC) based on spelling in the Hebrew Bible (2021: 21). The HB preserves historical, morphemic spellings (over against purely phonemic ones) that had to have pre-dated the end of the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC). For example, the quiescent *ʾalef* in צאֹן and ראֹשׁ is of purely historical relevance (cf. Steiner 2015). The well-known Canaanite shift saw stressed long *a* vowels (/á/) become stressed long *o* vowels (/ó/). Remnants are seen in the plural form רָאשִׁים, for example; when the tone syllable shifts leftward due to the plural morpheme, the long *ā* vowel is retained under the *ʾalef*. In other examples, Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (*shalōm*) is cognate to Arabic *salām* and Hebrew לֹא (*lō*) is cognate to Aramaic לָא (*lā*), because Arabic and Aramaic are not descended from Canaanite where the shift /á/ > /ó/ occurred. Datable evidence comes from the fourteenth-century Amarna Letters where the Canaanite shift was underway and inconsistent. "So how," Koller asks, "did Israelite scribes know to spell the word צאן with an *ʾalef*, rather than spelling it like בור 'cistern', כוס 'cup', דוד 'generation', and the like? This requires education, in the form of sheer memorization" (2021: 11). This line of evidence, to my knowledge, does not inform a distinction between CBH_1 and CBH_2, but it again corroborates the antiquity of the Torah's Hebrew. It retains text-centered, scribal orthography—not simply an oral tradition—that must precede the end of the LBA.

More examples could be adduced. These are merely a sampling, sufficient for the moment, that support Hornkohl's hypothesis and the antiquity of the Torah's Hebrew.

4. Evaluation of ABH vs. CBH_1

Still, returning to *Diachronic Diversity*, Hornkohl argued that the distinctiveness of the Torah is not explicable as belonging to the ABH phase of the language. He considers ABH to possibly preserve pre-monarchical traditions, meaning before 1000 BC, but CBH_1 to probably preserve the chronolect of 1000–800 BC. We may ask whether this distinction is legitimate with closer examination.

4.1. Corpus–Features of ABH

To begin with, the ABH corpus has always been identified mainly by texts *within the Torah* that stand out from their surroundings: the "Blessings of Jacob" (Gen 49), "Song of the Sea" (Exod 15), "Oracles of Balaam" (Num 23–24), "Song of Moses" (Deut 32), and "Blessing of Moses" (Deut 33). In addition, those who see ABH as distinct, widely agree that it includes the "Song of Deborah" (Jdgs 5), "Song of Hannah" (1 Sam 2:1–10), and "David's Thanksgiving Psalm" (2 Sam 22 // Ps 18). Texts like Psalm 68, the hymn in Habakkuk 3, and the dialogues of Job are debated. By nature, the linguistic features these texts show in common with each other and in concentration individually are not found in their surrounding contexts, and that includes those in the Torah. This is especially apparent in texts memorializing the same event between narrative and poetry side-by-side; for example, the exodus narrative in Exodus 14 followed by the Song of the Sea in chapter 15, or the defeat of Sisera narrated in Judges 4, celebrated by the Song of Deborah in chapter 5.

A sampling of the features most often recognized as diagnostic of ABH are the following (Mandell 2013; Pat-El and Wilson-Wright 2013; Gianto 2016):

- Pronominal affixes: 3ms suffix ◌ֹה- (CBH: ו\◌ִי-), 3mp suffix מוֹ- (CBH: ם-)
- Verbal affixes: prefix conjugation 3fp -י (CBH: -ת), suffix conjugation 2fs תי- (CBH: -ת), suffix conjugation 3fs ◌ַת- (CBH: ◌ָה-)
- Preterite use of the *yiqtol* and *qatal* (CBH: *qatal*); *qal* passive (CBH: mostly *niphal*)

- Enclitic *mem* and vocalic endings -ִי, -וֹ, and -ָה
- Relative use of demonstrative pronouns זֶה, זוֹ, and זוּ; relative particle -שֶׁ (CBH: אֲשֶׁר)
- Rare particles, e.g., בַּל "not" (CBH: לֹא), indefinite/interrogative מָן, and asseverative -לֵ
- Rare use of the accusative marker אֶת and definite article -הַ
- Rare lexemes, e.g., שָׂדַי "field," אִמֶּר "word," אֹרַח "way," גֶּבֶר "man," אֱנוֹשׁ "man," חֶמֶר "wine," חָרוּץ "gold," and פָּז "gold"

The designation ABH, therefore, does legitimately point to a pattern of clear linguistic differences concentrated in poetry, a pattern that is not merely poetry by the broader definition.

4.2. Genre–Style–Register of ABH

It is significant that every text identified as ABH is poetic. Of course, poetry in every language tends to archaize, and so detractors from the chronological perspective argue that ABH was simply a style: an archaizing, poetic tradition in which one could elect to write by "code-switching" at will (Young 2017: 12–13). Certainly, we should expect this phenomenon to some degree in the Bible, since it occurs in other languages. Yet, out of 150 psalms in the MT, only a handful exhibit the above features in sufficient concentration to qualify as ABH (Pss 18; 29; 68; 72; 78). The absence is similar in prophetic poetry; no ABH texts have been identified in the context of the Latter Prophets, except possibly Habakkuk 3, a very small minority. Moreover, nothing prevents a prophetic author from re-using an old poem in its old form, and this has been suggested by some scholars for Habakkuk 3 (Andersen 2008: 24, 260, 268n1; Hiebert 1986; cf. Dietrich 2016: 178–82), but ABH does not seem productive after 1–2 Samuel.[12] If ABH were a style, then, it seems to have been an earlier one.

On the other hand, poetic style does not mean the *composition* of the ABH poems are necessarily from a different period than the CBH texts surrounding them. Baker and Wells have shown that in Egyptian—a pertinent context when discussing the age of the Torah—phases of the language overlapped by register. Some registers adopted innovations more quickly than others; some registers were decidedly conservative. Their summary bears citing at length:

> Studies show that the first area of communication to change [in the Egyptian language] was colloquial speech…. The next area to change was literature…. The third area to change was official communication…. The last to change was the religious texts…. Thus, at any one moment of time, potentially four stages of language might appear, with potentially the same scribe writing all four. Indeed, three periods in Egyptian history saw as many as three language stages in use concurrently: the eighteenth dynasty of the New Kingdom, the Third Intermediate Period, and the Ptolemaic Period. ... [O]nly one historic period saw only one language stage in use:

[12] The dating of the book of Job is notoriously elusive. Robertson found it to be statistically in the ABH corpus for the poetic features he tested, dating it tentatively to the eleventh–tenth centuries BC (1972: 153–55). The prologue and epilogue, however—in contradistinction to the poetic dialogues comprising the book's bulk—were soon profiled by Hurvitz (1974) to be LBH and later to be TBH by Hendel and Joosten (2018: 74–76; Joosten 2013). Young (2009) argued that the prose texts could *not* be profiled as LBH but only CBH, because they fail to meet Hurvitz's own criterion of accumulation, and that anyways, both should be considered styles and not chronolects. As for the dialogues comprising the book's bulk, its international wisdom genre and poetic prowess greatly complicate any ability to date the text linguistically (Greenstein 2003, esp. pp. 651–53; 2013 *passim*). There are points of consilience that point to a pre-exilic provenance (e.g., the semantics of שַׂעַר [Van Wolde 2009: 101–2]). The poetic portions also exhibit some archaisms, and the features typically considered to be late may, in fact, be undatable foreign coloring. Nevertheless, the overall linguistic profile of the dialogues has yet to be comprehensively analyzed (cf. Rata 2008 for overview).

> the very first (early Old Kingdom, where there are not many texts available for study). In other words, two or more language stages were used concurrently in every period of Egyptian pharaonic history except the first.

Note well the Egyptian context here. Specifically, the phenomenon of overlapping language phases governed by register was the norm, not the exception. Moreover, one of the periods in which it occurred was the New Kingdom (1550–1069 BC), the beginning of which corresponds to the Late Bronze Age in Canaan (1550–1200 BC). This is precisely where the Pentateuch characterizes its origin under the authorship of an exceptional individual with a royal, Egyptian education, an education which would have included literacy and some scribal skills.

4.3. Dating of PNWS–Canaanite–ABH

All the above leads back to the question of dating the CBH_1 and ABH portions of the Torah. While most Hebraists would say that ABH reflects pre-monarchic traditions, a few venture that it *might* also reflect pre-monarchic texts; but the consistent assumption is that, at earliest, they originated in Iron Age I, since all epigraphic Hebrew comes from Iron Age II (Aḥituv, Garr, and Fassberg 2016: 55–56). The earliest inscription that anyone has identified as Hebrew via comparison to the linguistic features of ABH—that is, identified with substantial scholarly acceptance—is the Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon, dated to the tenth century BC (see below). If this is when Hebrew was born, it would, in terms of biblical chronology, preclude Mosaic authorship for any text in the Torah, let alone the whole five books, regardless of what date one takes for the exodus. Fundamentally, the dating of ABH relies on the epigraphic corpus and how early scholars are willing to call the dialect spoken in the southern Levant "Hebrew" as opposed to Canaanite.

Like many nodes in the Semitic family tree, Canaanite is a reconstructed language, i.e., a language in which there is no direct surviving witness. Such reconstructed languages are necessary to have existed, if in fact the Semitic languages form a family tree that is at all traceable. Such tracing is done via the languages' shared (inherited) linguistic features, on the one hand, and their distinctive changes (innovations), on the other hand. Tenuous though it may at first seem, the tracing of innovations is well founded in historical linguistics broadly and in the Semitic languages specifically. Semitic languages do have epigraphic witnesses dating back to the early third millennium BC, with new dialects emerging thereafter in other localized and datable witnesses across the ancient Near East.

It is generally agreed that Canaanite's predecessor Proto-Northwest Semitic broke off from Central Semitic in the third millennium, as early as 2500 BC. It is later attested in the Ugaritic and Samalian languages in the late second and early first millennia, respectively. But a comparatively long, long history is accorded to PNWS before Canaanite is believed to emerge. In fact, no secure dating has yet to arise for Canaanite (or, if one accepts it, Aramaeo-Canaanite [cf. Pat-El 2018; Heuehnergard and Pat-El 2019; but see Wilson-Wright forthcoming]). The latest Canaanite could have emerged (i.e., the *terminus ante quo*) was the fifteenth century, as reflected in the mixed Canaano-Akkadian dialect of the Amarna Letters (Schniedewind 2013: 44–48). Still, the Amarna Letters are written in cuneiform, not the alphabetic script, and they are not a direct link to Hebrew but more of a "stepfather" (Schniedewind 2013: 44). Hebrew, it is concluded, must be younger still.

Two qualifications must be interjected here with utmost importance. First, Semitists have in the last fifteen years recognized the need for a modified model of tracing relations. Whereas the family tree (phylum) model is still of primary importance for the greater whole, the wave (areal) model is essential also (Huehnergard and Rubin 2011). The wave model posits that, given that two

languages in contact will influence one another, especially when in close quarters and prolonged contact, they may come to adopt the same features without having mutually inherited them. That is, two languages need not be mother-daughter or even sister-sister to exhibit the same characteristics, whether phonologically, morpho-syntactically, or lexically. An innovation in one language may ripple outward geographically from an epicenter, so that the surrounding languages adopt it also, even if not immediately related. According to Huehnergard and Rubin, certain historical instances of this effect "wreak havoc with the neat family tree" devised in earlier days, though the tree model is still essential and workable with qualification (2011: 264; Ozoliņš 2023: 192–93).

In light of the above, it seems to me that at precisely the time and in precisely the narrowed place where Israel's first writings came into being, it becomes much more difficult to know which shared features between the Canaanite dialects were mutually inherited from a mother-tongue and which were adopted via language contact between the daughters and cousins. It may help to recall that the geographical area into which Israel migrated and from which the Canaanite tongue is believed to have diversified (into Phoenician, Hebrew, Ammonite, Edomite, and Moabite) is approximately the size of New England. Thus, if the shared features that scholars believe were inherited—and thus give sequential order to the progression from (Aramaeo-)Canaanite to Hebrew—were adopted by contact rather than inherited, then the date of their divergence would have to be raised, pushed back earlier than previously thought.

As a second qualification, Schniedewind (2013: 51) quotes a well-known quip by the Yiddish linguist, Max Weinreich: "A language is simply a dialect with an army and a navy." A large reason why the alphabetic inscriptions at the turn of the millennium are so difficult to linguistically identify is because the dialects of Syria-Palestine were mutually intelligible and differed very little in linguistic innovations. Sociologically they become more differentiated with the development of statecraft, each in their various directions. Thus, between two languages, simultaneous innovation of a single feature would have double the impact, making the two daughters closer to the mother than they are to each other. Hence, some of the seminal studies in this area simply refer to the languages of Syria-Palestine in the Iron Age as "dialects" (Harris 1939; Garr 2004). Canaanite is closer to Hebrew than it may at first seem to non-linguists.

4.4. Inscriptional Evidence

During those one thousand years typically allotted to PNWS (2500–1500 BC), the early alphabet emerged. The first alphabetic inscriptions are found in Egypt, being apparently invented from Egyptian hieroglyphs by speakers of some NWS dialect in the Sinai and the Upper Nile valley (nineteenth/eighteenth centuries BC). Though the texts are thus far untranslatable,[13] they show an unmistakable typological continuity with linear alphabetic texts of the southern Levant, the

[13] Douglas Petrovich's proposal (2016; 2021)—that the family of Jacob invented the alphabet from hieroglyphic consonantal writing and that Hebrew, as such, was already operative in the nineteenth-century semi-alphabetic inscriptions from Egypt and the Sinai—does not seem to account for significant socio-historical linguistic data from the greater corpus of second-millennium Semitic inscriptions. The latter strongly indicate that Hebrew, being a descendant of the Canaanite branch of PNWS, inherited or adopted the alphabet rather than invented it (Zhakevich 2020: 163–68, esp. 165n6; Schniedewind 2013). Moreover, the Canaanite proto-language underwent significant linguistic development in the second millennium, before its daughter languages—Phoenician, Hebrew, Ammonite, Edomite, Moabite—became distinct from it and from each other. As mentioned, how and when this happened is complex, but Petrovich's new reconstructions and translations require the Hebrew language *as such* not only to have pre-existed Canaanite but also to have been little changed from the nineteenth century until CBH, effectively "leap-frogging" centuries of development. See the reviews of Millard 2017; Falk 2018; Holmstedt 2019; Wilson-Wright 2020.

alphabetic script which would become the "national script" of the Hebrew language (Naveh [1987] 2005; Yardeni 2018).

Still, the earliest Hebrew inscription is debated. Some consider the Gezer Calendar and the Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon to be contenders, both dating from the tenth century at the earliest, both hailing from Israelite territory (Aḥituv 2008: 252; Garfinkel: 2021).[14] These, however, have both been alternatively typified as Phoenician. Naveh, for example, concluded that "in the tenth century the Hebrew wrote in the prestigious Phoenician language, as did Kilamu bar Ḥaya, king of Yadi, in the late ninth century, notwithstanding the fact that the tongue spoken in Yadi-Samʾal was a local Aramaic dialect" (Naveh 2005: 76; cf. Pardee 2013). Even still, if it is conceded that the Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon is indeed Hebrew, it is the only inscription of which I am aware that has been called ABH, like that of the biblical poems. Donnelly-Lewis likens it to Exodus 15:13, 16 for its use of זו as the relative particle and a few other archaic features (2022: 204). A small horde of other alphabetic inscriptions from Israel have been discovered from the thirteenth to tenth centuries, but most of these are not sufficiently long to be diagnostic.[15] Schniedewind is candidly pessimistic: "Though the ancient Israelites undoubtedly had their own local dialects and speech communities, there is little evidence to suggest that they had developed an independent writing system or scribal community. ... At present, all of our inscriptions from Israel are too short to be useful for a substantive description of archaic Hebrew writing or language" (2013: 62).

Yet, in recent years, more and remarkable inscriptions have been uncovered (see the inventory in Rollston 2020). In fact, the city of Lachish and its treasures have been called the "missing link" between the nineteenth-/eighteenth-century inscriptions and the thirteenth-century inscriptions (Höflmayer et al. 2021). In the various strata there, archaeologists have uncovered alphabetic inscriptions including the Lachish Ewer Bowl (ca. 1250–1150 BC), Lachish Ostraca (1250–1150 BC), Lachish Sherd (ca. 1500 BC), the Bronze Dagger (ca. 1700–1550 BC), and the crowning jewel, the Lachish Lice Comb (ca. 1700–1550 BC). These all hail from the MBA or LBA. Besides Lachish, Alice Mandell has just published a brilliant article (2025) calling for the Amarna Letters to be examined more closely in conjunction with biblical Hebrew poetry. The scribal practices there show memorized formulae, stock expressions, localized lexical lists, parallelism, chiasm, imagery, word pairs, and other features that, besides showing serious scribal training in the fourteenth century, show a close literary affinity with the literary culture of Hebrew from its earliest days.

One may object that Amarna reflects Canaanite, not Israelite culture. However, there was indeed a connection. While most are familiar with the Hyksos Asiatics driven out of Egypt in the sixteenth century, Manfred Bietak has also shown that there was a large mix of Semitic-speaking peoples—including Levantine Canaanites—who lived in Avaris (biblical Goshen) from the Middle Bronze Age until after the Hyksos period (2018: 79–98). Many of these were employed as soldiers (2018: 84). Bietak argues, based on Akkadian letter remains found in the Hyksos Palace there, that it was these Asiatics who introduced long-distance cuneiform diplomacy to Egypt, such as in the Amarna Letters centuries later (2018:87). This makes all the more plausible Israelite participation

[14] The publication of the purportedly Hebrew defixio from Mt. Ebal by Scott Stripling, Gershon Galil, et al. (2023) is not widely accepted and seems qualitatively to differ dramatically from the Canaanite inscriptions of the same period in the Southern Levant (Mazar 2023; Maeir and Rollston 2023; Haughwout 2024). It may in time be vindicated, for example, if and when the tablet is opened. In the meantime, if it be allowed, for the sake of argument, that the inscription is Hebrew, the most methodologically conservative dating given by the authors is "no later than ca. 1250 BCE." This does not change the nature of the argument put forward in the present paper.

[15] E.g., the Izbet Sarta Ostracon (ca. 1200–1050), Beth-Shemesh Ostracon (ca. 1150–1100 BCE), Khirbet al-Raʿi (Jerubaal) Ostraca (ca. 1150–1050), and Tel Zayiṭ Abecedary (ca. 900). But see also on Lachish below.

in both (a) the scribal profession and (b) Canaanite language change. An unbroken chain of scribal schools or a transference of literacy somehow during the Israelite Conquest of Canaan are entirely unnecessary for the writing of the Torah or the book of Joshua. The origins of these books are, after all, attributed in the Bible to two exceptional individuals, not to a scribal school.[16] The next book thereafter, Judges, may have been written centuries later.

To summarize the inscriptional evidence, there was indeed stable alphabetic writing in the southern Levant of the LBA in some Canaanite dialects. This combined with the evidence of longer text compositions in alphabetic Ugaritic, plus the poetic and other literary techniques pointing to scribal schools in Amarna Canaanite, all make entirely plausible an Israelite scribal culture on the border of Sinai-Canaan from the LBA forward. While ABH may, in fact, represent an old poetic style distinct from CBH_1 and while it has affinities with pre-monarchic Hebrew writing, it does not appear to have been the normal pre-monarchic chronolect *simpliciter*. However, while the whole Torah seems to reflect linguistic contemporization, there is abundant evidence for its antiquity relative to CBH_2 and plausibility for the pre-monarchic, second-millennium origins that it implicitly claims. Going forward, the discussion will continue to center around the Canaanite-Hebrew turning point (or perhaps better, continuum).

5. Implications for an Evangelical View of Scripture

There will, of course, always be parts of the compositional history of the OT that we cannot confirm. Nor do we base our doctrine of Scripture on such external confirmation. Yet, the external confirmation has apologetic and pastoral value to be used by God for evangelism, for the encouragement of believers, and, most importantly I would say, for the exposing of His glory in how He worked through human history—broken, fragmented, and tangled—to give and preserve His inerrant Word to us. We ought not, therefore, dismiss the findings of biblical studies but confidently engage them, as those of you in this room are doing. We ought not, on the other hand, over-extend the evidence in our favor. We do not need exhaustive confirmatory evidence to believe what Scripture says. We also ought to be careful to obey Scripture's command "not to go beyond what is written" (2 Cor 4:6) in our establishing of unassailable presuppositions.

One risk that we face as inerrantists is to restrict that which was inerrant, i.e., the "original autographs," beyond what Scripture says about its autographs. Another risk is assuming that the words of Moses' autographs were orthographically isomorphic to the text we have received in the MT today, albeit confirmed by the practice of textual criticism. Yet, this is not how Scripture presents its history to us textually, literarily, or linguistically. Nor would an unchanged Hebrew language accord with the normal history of human languages over the course of a thousand years, as seen in how we continuously translate the Bible in our own language today. The other side of the ditch is, of course, that we erode the doctrine of verbal plenary inerrancy, on which the Lord Jesus relied down to the very morphemes of the inspired text to do His own exegesis.[17]

Thus, I believe evangelicals need a strong doctrine of inspired textual updating or prophetic redaction to better align with Scripture's view of Scripture. In suggesting this, I mean to stand in line with attempts made by inerrantists like Grisanti (2001), Merrill (2019), and Averbeck (2012; 2020). Such a doctrine may involve several points.

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[16] Cf. Exod 24:4, 7; 34:27; Deut 31:9, 24–26; Josh 8:31, 32, 34–35; 18:9; 23:6; 24:26.

[17] For Jesus' arguments leveraging crucial lexemes, see Matt 22:41–46 (on Ps 110:1); John 6:45 (on Isa 54:13); and John 10:34–36 (on Ps 82:6); for morphology, see John 8:58 (leveraging the progressive use of *yiqtol* in Exod 3:14 MT [reflected in LXX: ἐγὼ εἰμί]); for syntax, see Mark 12:26–27 (leveraging the implied present tense of the nominal clause אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ in Exod 3:6 MT [or LXX: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρός σου]).

First, it may involve that we recognize, as many have already done, that Moses wrote in a so-called "Proto-Hebrew." We may choose to use the name "Proto-Hebrew" (Merrill 2019; Averbeck 2020) as expressing its continuity with biblical Hebrew. Semitists may typically choose to call this same phase "(Proto-)Canaanite" as expressing its relationship with other languages of the LBA/IA Levantine states. Of course, I would not naively assume that there can never be an apologetic motive in the latter's denial of earlier identifications of Hebrew than are currently admitted. Yet, the distinction between Proto-Hebrew/Canaanite and CBH as it stands in the majority of scholarship today is legitimate. Still, the language change between them was piecemeal and incremental, mediated through, perhaps ABH, then through CBH_1, then CBH_2. None of these shifts would render the previous generation's language indiscernible to native speakers or readers, just as LBH did not render ABH or CBH indiscernible.

Second, our doctrine should involve that God permitted and even superintended the linguistic contemporizing of His Word for the benefit of His people. Hence, it is not a problem for the antiquity of the Torah—for Mosaic authorship—if God, in His wisdom, allowed for subsequent inspired authors to make changes to the text or allowed subsequent uninspired scribes to make linguistic updates to the text, granted that His superintendence did not permit irrecoverable corruption.

Finally, I would say that I hope it is time for an inspired update to the "inspired textual updating" article written by Grisanti now twenty-four years ago.

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7. Appendix 1: Summary of Features in *Diachronic Diversity*

	Feature	Torah	Other CBH	LBH	Later	Confirm.
Ketiv and *Qere*	1. Onomasticon with and without *-yahu* names	none *יְהוֹשַׁע, יוֹכֶבֶד	יָהוּ- common	יָהּ- common		
	2. 1st-person *wayyiqtol* weak-verb morphology short: ואקטל ואקם ואעד ואעש <*aqtul* long: ואקטל ואקום ואעיד ואעשה <*aqtulu/a* augm: ø ואקטלה ואקומה ואעידה <*aqtulan(na)*	almost all 14% (3/21) 4% (4/105)	common 57% (45/79) 10% (27/280)	minority 72% (18/25) 54% (69/127)	NBDSS / Ben Sira rare / rare 90% / 100% 73% / 57%	Mesha is always short (if weak), never augm. (if strong)
	3. *Qal* vs. *hiphil* of יס״ף “add” (both partial prdgm.)	16:1	16:4	1:6	NBDSS 2:16; Ben Sira 0:3; Mishna 1:75	Mesha 2:0; Zakkur 0:1
	4. Construct מְאַת vs. absolute מֵאָה “hundred”	27:5	0:34	3:14	NBDSS 4(1):5(4)	Siloam
	5. *Qal* internal passive vs. *niphal* morphology	mixed	*niphal* dominance	*niphal* dominance	*niphal* dominance in post-BH (always in RH)	*niphal* present in Lachish, Arad, Siloam
	6. צע״ק vs. זע״ק “cry, muster”	27:2	46:77	3:12	Ben Sira, SP archaize (> Torah)	nearly all Aramaic post-5th c. excludes צע״ק
	7. 1cp נַחְנוּ vs. אֲנַחְנוּ “we, us”	4:28	1:62	0:31	N/BDSS אנחנו; RH, QH אנו	Lachish נחנו
Ketiv not *Qere*	8. Feminine sg. הוא vs. היא “she”	194:18	9:282		—	—
	9. Feminine pl. ending ן- vs. נה- on prefix conj.	27:44	12:244	0:11	all post-BH נָה-	—
	10. נער vs. נערה with fs referent “girl”	34:1	all נערה	all נערה	normally נערה	—
	11. Abstract nouns ending in *-ūt** (*ת֫- vs. וּת-)	35:10	1:114		normally *plene*	—
	12. Defective orthography	most defective AF: Exod→ Lev→ Num→ Gen→ Deut	more *plene* AF: FP→ LP	most *plene* AF: Writings→ Ezra-Neh	BDSS some < MT, some = MT, some > MT	IA inscr. are regularly def. medial (even > CBH_1) and *plene* final

LBH	Esth; Dan; Ezra-Neh; Chron	
AF	Andersen and Forbes 1986	
Mesha Stele	Moabite	ca. 840 BC
Zakkur	Old Aramaic	ca. late 9th/early 8th c. BC
Siloam	Hebrew	ca. late 8th c. BC
Lachish	Hebrew	
Bib./Non-bib. Dead Sea Scrolls (N/BDSS)	Hebrew (excl. Aram.)	ca. 250 BC–AD 150
Ben Sira	Hebrew	ca. 200–150 c. BC

NB: Since Hornkohl does not always further stratify the data with TBH or his “LBH+” designation (a maximal but less secure scope for the LBH corpus), for purposes of this table, “Other CBH” includes all non-LBH Writings (with respect to the more secure, restricted scope of the LBH corpus) and all TBH, as distinct from LBH and the Torah.