

From Formula to Expression in Some Hebrew and Aramaic Texts

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Biblical books conclude in several ways. Sometimes the text employs specific terms that mean “conclusion.” An example of such a formula would be, “Thus far the words of Jeremiah” (Jer. 51:64), using the term *עַד הַנְּהָה*.¹ Another style of ending relies on the events of the plot: the passing of a major character—Joseph at the end of Genesis, Moses in Deuteronomy, Joshua in the book which bears his name—winds down the story and simultaneously heralds the completion of the book. The completion of a chapter in history and the onset of a new one is a variation on this theme—the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy about seventy years marks the end of Chronicles.² The first sort of ending is formulaic, the second is literary.

In several books we find both patterns of conclusion, the formulaic and the literary, combined. In such cases, the formula is grammatically adapted to the literary conclusion. An example of this would be, “And when you finish reading this scroll” (Jer. 51:63), which refers to the scroll Jeremiah gave to Seraiah (v. 61). Events of the story aside, the verb “finish” *כִּכְלַתְךָ*, though integrated into the syntax of the sentence, is a formulaic term of conclusion that signals the imminent end of the book of Jeremiah.³ Indeed it is found as a formula, appended to the text rather than integrated into it, in Ps. 72:20: *כָּלוּ תְּפִלּוֹת דָּוִד בֶּן יֵשׁוּעַ*, “End of the prayers of David son of Jesse.” Returning to Jeremiah, the literary ending we have just seen is reinforced by another formula of conclusion in the next verse (64), *עַד הַנְּהָה*, already discussed above.

A second example of the formulaic combined with the literary, quite similar to the case of Jeremiah, is to be found in Daniel, who is told to “seal the book until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4). The book to be sealed was introduced at the beginning of the chapter (12:1), but no doubt the author had in mind “sealing up” the book of Daniel as well; no less than three words from the lexicon of ending appear in this sentence: *סֵתֵם, חֲתֵם, קַץ*.⁴ Here too, the end of the external book of Daniel is bound up with the events of the internal story, and the vocabulary of ending is worked into the conclusion.

1. Though there is yet another chapter in Jeremiah, Yair Hoffman, *Jeremiah, Mikra Le-Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv, 2001), 2.868 (Hebrew) notes about *עַד הַנְּהָה*: “The formula of conclusion (*nushat ha-ḥatima*) . . . comes to say that all that follows, i.e., chapter 52, is not part of Jeremiah’s words.”

2. The new beginning in 2 Chron. 36:22–23 is literally the opening of Ezra 1:1–3.

3. In Chronicles we also find the same root: *לְכַלּוֹת דְּבַר ה' בְּפִי יִרְמְיָהוּ* (2 Chron. 36:22), making this a combined ending as well. In each case the root *כלה* is grammatically suited to the context.

4. On sealed books, see Isa. 29:11–12.

The end of the Scroll of Esther has Mordecai and Esther addressing books (*sēfārīm*) or a letter (*ʿiggeret*) to the Jews in the Persian Empire (Est. 9:20, 29). Although no formula of conclusion is associated with this writing,⁵ recording the events that had occurred seems, as in Jeremiah and Daniel, to allude to the impending end of the external Book of Esther.⁶

Where do the formulaic words for “end” come from?⁷ It cannot have escaped the reader’s attention that the endings of Jeremiah, Daniel, and Esther are tied up with the business of writing books and scrolls. The preoccupation with writing may be related to extensive scribal activity at the time these books were composed, or to the fact that archival material (letters, legal documents) was included in them.⁸ The earlier records might have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and they may have been Jewish or gentile in origin. Possibly from such documents formulaic words were taken into the Bible, not only for conclusions but for beginnings and for transitions in the middle of compositions as well.

Thus not only endings combined set formulae with a literary setting of conclusion. So too in the case of opening formulae, e.g., *bērēšit* “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1), paralleling Akkadian *ina šurri*.⁹ These terms have been worked into literary units whose content speaks of the beginning events of creation, but they simultaneously mark the opening of the narrative or the incantation, and in the case of Genesis, the opening of a book.

In an earlier article I compiled a list of endings in biblical books; in that study my treatment of more than forty examples was necessarily brief and schematic.¹⁰ I would like to concentrate here on phrases for “beginning” and “end” whose origins lay in different contexts, such as letters or legal documents. Originally formulaic, these words have been worked into their new literary settings in the Bible. Since the original lists, letters, legal documents, and epigrammatic collections from which they were taken had long been forgotten, these fixed terms were now understood as integral parts of the biblical text, often not without difficulty.

Stock expressions and formulaic vocabulary in Biblical and Near Eastern writings from the realms of law, letters, and literature have been the subject of books and

5. But a formulaic term for “end,” יסוף, is found in 9:28.

6. Whether the act of writing alludes only to events in the plot or to the composition of the Book of Esther is debated by medieval exegetes. Rashi would have it that Mordecai’s writing is a reference to the actual Megillah: “And Mordecai wrote—this Megillah, as it is” (Est. 9:20). Ibn Ezra limits the letter Mordecai wrote to an event within the story: “Mordecai wrote that they observe Purim as joyous days next year and in all the successive years” (ibid.).

7. It is of interest to note that Deuteronomy 31 records the act of writing a book (*sefer hattōrah*) “until its completion,” using the term תָּמַם “completion” (31:24), and repeating this verb in the phrase עַד תָּמַם in the final words of the chapter (31:30). As in the case of Esther, there is a double allusion here, both to the *sefer* or *širāh* that Moses wrote and to the Book of Deuteronomy.

8. Adele Berlin, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther* (Philadelphia, 2001), 88, has noted that the story has a “propensity for written documents.” Qohelet as well mentions books near its conclusion: “The making of many books is without limit” (12:12).

9. E.g., “In the beginning, before creation . . .,” see B. Landsberger, “Corrections to the Article, ‘An Old Babylonian Charm against *Merhu*,’” *JNES* 17 (1958), 56.

10. I. B. Gottlieb, “*Sōf Davar: Biblical Endings*,” *Prooftexts* 17 (1991), 216–18.

monographs.¹¹ Fitzmyer gathered a list of Aramaic epistolary terms, “items that are formulaic or somewhat stereotyped in Aramaic letters.”¹² Many of these expressions are transitional words (“Now,” “Whereas,” “Therefore”). Among them he cites: כעת, וכעת, וכען, כעת, כען. This word in one of its forms follows the initial greeting in Aramaic letters, and means “and now.”¹³ According to Fitzmyer, this word

introduces the body of the message or is repeated in the course of it as a sort of message divider; it marks logical breaks in the letter and has often been compared to English “stop” in telegrams. The word was often misunderstood in the past, being taken to mean “et cetera,” and was wrongly linked to the preceding greeting¹⁴ (see Ezra 4:10, 11b, 17; 7:12 [following גמיר]).¹⁵

Likewise Paul identified the phrase ולתקפה אסר in Dan. 6:8 “that a royal ban should be issued” and the phrase את כל תקף at Est. 9:29 “with full authority” as reflections of an ancient legal term.¹⁶ In both cases, the origins of the words were long forgotten, and their meaning in the biblical context is hence not obvious. To draw an analogy with our subject, biblical words or phrases that were originally formulae to indicate “beginning” and “end” might not be obvious at first glance because they are now integrated into and translated as “literary” expressions. In the following paragraphs we will point out four terms in the Bible and three extra-biblical phrases whose meaning and function should be examined in light of possible formulaic origins.

1. *Sôf dāvār* (Qoh. 12:13): “The sum of the matter, when all is said and done”¹⁷

Coming as it does in the penultimate verse of the book, סוף דבר most certainly functions as a marker to signal the end of the Book of Qohelet. This is supported by the

11. J. C. Greenfield, “Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” *Acta Orientalia* 29 (1965), 1–18; idem, “Some Aspects of Treaty Terminology in the Bible,” *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1967), 1.117–19; idem, “Studies in the Legal Terminology of the Nabatean Funerary Inscriptions,” in *H. Yalon Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1974), 64–83 (in Hebrew); Y. Kutscher, “Concerning the Terminology of Legal Documents in the Talmud and in Gaonic Literature,” *Tarbiz* 17 (1946), 125–27 (in Hebrew); *ibid.*, 19 (1947/8), 53–59; *ibid.*, 125–28; Y. Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine* (Leiden, 1969).

12. J. A. Fitzmyer, “Aramaic Epistolography,” *Semeia* 22 (1982), 25–57. An earlier version of this article appeared as “Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography,” *JBL* 93 (1974), 201–25, reprinted with slight revisions in the author’s *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, *SBLMS* 25 (Missoula, 1979), 183–204.

13. D. Pardee, “Letters (Hebrew),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 4.284, calls it “an explicit marker of transition from the opening formulae to the body of the letter.”

14. In other words, Fitzmyer found the word כענת misunderstood in the Bible. It is not clear who “wrongly linked” the term כענת to the preceding greeting. Perhaps we may compare the case of Isa. 8:23, where the word כעת has been taken by Michaelis and Tur-Sinai to belong to the first part of the verse, לאשר מוצק לה כעת, against the Masoretic cantillation signs; see J. A. Emerton, “Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah viii. 23,” *JSS* 14 (1969), 151–75; Y. Komlosh, “*Ve’a’fu – Mu’af*,” *Bar-Ilan* 4–5 (1967), 42–49 (Hebrew). Fitzmyer’s particular consternation at the syntax of Ezra 7:12 גמיר וכענת is surprising, since he himself (*Semeia*, 22, n.30) had already noted that the meaning of *gmyr* is “problematic.” He added (*loc. cit.*) that “H. L. Ginsberg . . . takes it as ‘et cetera’.”

15. Fitzmyer, “Epistolography,” *Semeia*, 35.

16. S. Paul, “Dan 6,8: An Aramaic Reflex of Assyrian Legal Terminology,” *Biblica* 65 (1984), 106–10.

17. NJPS *Tanakh* (1985).

reading tradition in the synagogue, in which the congregation and the reader repeat the penultimate verse after the conclusion of the book to make it the ultimate verse.¹⁸ This tradition received textual expression already in the Aleppo Codex (c. 930 C.E.) where verse 13 was recopied after verse 14. The phrase *sôf dāvār* therefore heralds the final words of the book.

However the phrase can easily be taken as part of its context, parallel to **הכל נשמע**. That is how it was translated in NJPS, cited above. It seems to me that *sôf dāvār* is indeed a stock scribal phrase that indicates “the conclusion of the text.” One of the signs of “formularly” or “scribal vocabulary” is a phrase without contextual meaning, one that stands outside the particular text, e.g., “The End,” **כענת** “and now,” **עד הנה** “till here.” I think that *sôf dāvār* in Qohelet is of this nature. I make use of the NJPS version for Qoh.12: 9–13 to support the point:

- 9 A further word: Because Koheleth was a sage, . . . He listened to and tested . . .
 12 A further word: Against them, my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit . . .
 13 The sum of the matter, when all is said and done. . . .

(ט) וְיִתֵּר שְׁהִיָּה קִהְלֵת הַכֶּסֶם עוֹד לְמַד דַּעַת אֶת הָעַם וְאַזְנֵן וְחִקֵּר תִּקְוֵן מִשְׁלִים הַרְבֵּה:
 (יב) וְיִתֵּר מִהֶמָּה בְנֵי הַזֶּהָר עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קִץ וְלִהְיֵג הַרְבֵּה יִגְעַת בְּשׂוֹר:
 (יג) סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים יָרָא וְאֵת מַצּוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר כִּי יֵה כֹל הָאָדָם:

Traditionally, *wěyōter* was translated “and more than” and read in conjunction with what follows: “and more than [the fact that] Koheleth was a sage (9),” or “and [of] more than these, my son, be warned! (12),” but such readings make for syntactically difficult sentences.¹⁹ In the NJPS version given above, “a further word” translates the Hebrew *wěyōter* and is marked off by a colon in translation. **וְיִתֵּר** is clearly taken to be a scribal term introducing an additional comment or comments that were not made by the narrator “Koheleth.” That is why “Koheleth” is referred to in verse 9 in the third person. In verse 12, *wěyōter* appears again, this time introducing a proverb addressed to “my son.” Wisdom sayings related by a father to his son are common in Proverbs but not in Qohelet.²⁰ It is logical to conclude that the term *wěyōter* prefaces two comments that were not original to the text but were added by a scribe or compiler.²¹ **וְיִתֵּר** is therefore a formula.²² The traditional understanding which reads this

18. This is the custom today when Qohelet is publicly read in the synagogue during Sukkot (mainly in Ashkenazic traditions).

19. **וְיִתֵּר מִהֶמָּה בְנֵי הַזֶּהָר** and **וְיִתֵּר שׂוֹר** are problematic constructions.

20. This is the sole instance in the entire book. Thus, Michael Fox’s remark that “The narrator of Qohelet speaks to ‘my son’ (12:12)” in the context of a section entitled “Fathers as Teachers” (*Proverbs 1–9, AB* [New York, 2000]) is misleading. Nor does it matter if Fox thinks “that Qohelet is ‘by’ the epilogist”; see M. Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition in Qohelet,” *HUCA* 48 (1977), 91; the appearance of the address to “my son” is still exceptional.

21. There is also the (unlikely) possibility that the original author intended to make the end of Qohelet seem like an epilogue by an additional hand. See Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition.”

22. **וְיִתֵּר**, **יִתֵּר**, “more than,” appears only in Qohelet (7x), Esther (1x) but is common in Mishnaic Hebrew. Perhaps the examples from Qohelet 12 that function as scribal terms for “postscript” are related to the summary phrase **וְיִתֵּר דְּבַרִּי**, “the rest of,” “remainder,” punctuated as *yeter*, found at the end of chapters in Kings and Chronicles.

term as a parallel to the following stich is itself proof that we are dealing with scribal formulary, reminiscent of Fitzmyer's claim about the misunderstanding of כענת and Paul's observation about a legal term that was misunderstood to be part of the text.²³

Thus far, we have identified two scribal terms in Qohelet: *sôf dāvār* and *wěyōter*. The NJPS reading of the above verses in Qohelet, which supports this interpretation of *wěyōter* seems to be based on an observation made by H. L. Ginsberg. Ginsberg had earlier authored an independent Hebrew commentary on Qohelet and edited a translation of the five Scrolls for JPS in a separate volume.²⁴ In his commentary, Ginsberg took the word 'ōd in verse 9, like the term *wěyōter*, to indicate a scribal addition. According to Ginsberg, the end of Qohelet is marked by no less than three additional comments, each prefaced by a formulaic word:

9. *Further*: Kohelet was a sage; *moreover*: he instructed the people . . .

12. *Further*: Do not be hasty, my son, beware!²⁵

As I understand Ginsberg's commentary, each formula stands apart from the following text. To these three scribal addenda, then, I would add a fourth: *sôf dāvār*, which originally indicated "the final addition." This term was followed by an epigram that "all is heard [on high],"²⁶ therefore one should "Revere God and observe His commandments!" All three terms יוֹתֵר, עוֹד, טוֹךְ דָּבָר are indeed scribal formulae to introduce a number of postscripts, with *sôf dāvār* doubling as a closing formula for the entire book. These terms in Qohelet parallel Greenfield's "reflection"²⁷ of a legal formula when found in non-legal contexts. In the case of Qohelet, original scribal terms are now used (or understood) as ordinary phrases in a literary text, but should be understood in their original meanings.

As for the origins of v. 14, the last verb in Qohelet, which comes after "the end" and is preceded by no formulaic term, I would reconstruct the following course of events: despite the clear indication of closure in v. 13, yet another verse was appended to the book to introduce several staples of Second Temple Judaism such as judgment day, reward and punishment, divine providence, and observance of the commandments. These cardinal ideas in rabbinic Judaism were found to be seriously wanting in the body of Qohelet. However, in order to restore the original ending of the book as marked by *sôf dāvār*, v. 13 was repeated both in the Masoretic scribal tradition and in the synagogue reading.

23. See nn. 15–16 above.

24. H. Louis Ginsberg, *Koheleth* (Tel Aviv-Jerusalem, 1961) [in Hebrew]; idem, *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* (Philadelphia, 1969). The NJPS volume of *The Writings* was first published in 1985.

25. The translation and italics are mine, following Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 133–34 and 138. In the last reference he vocalizes מְהֵמָה as the imperative form of the verb *mhmh* "to delay, take one's time."

26. This is my understanding of the epithet הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע, cf. M. *Abot* 3:15 הַכֹּל צִפּוּי "All is seen." The relationship between "all is heard" and fear of God in Qoh. 12:13 is paralleled by M. *Abot* 2:1: "Consider three things and thou wilt not fall into the hands of transgression: know what is above thee—a seeing eye and a hearing ear and all thy deeds written in a book." On parallels between Qohelet and M. *Abot*, see I. B. Gottlieb, "Pirque Abot and Biblical Wisdom," *VT* 40 (1990), 152–64.

27. See, e.g., "The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar," in *Hommages à A. Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1972), 49–59, where he finds that the words of the proverb "reflect the legal practices and presumptions of that Empire" (p. 59).

2. *Reš millin* (Dan.7:1)

Avi Hurvitz recently noted that biblical *rōš dāvār* (Ps. 119:160) and *sôf dāvār* (Qoh. 12:13) are “analogous opposites” which denote “the beginning of the matter” and “the end of the matter.”²⁸ Both compounds find their exact correspondences in Biblical Aramaic *reš millin* and *sōfā dī millētā*²⁹ in Daniel 7. Hurvitz identified the Biblical Aramaic phrases as a pair of technical terms: ראש מליך indicates the start of “an authentic written (‘he wrote down’) account of Daniel’s vision”;²⁹ סופא די מלתא “marks the end of the quoted text.”³⁰ Both “evidently form part of the scribal vocabulary current at the time.”³¹

The two Aramaic scribal terms, claimed Hurvitz, determine the provenance and chronological setting of the Hebrew expressions *rōš dāvār* and *sôf dāvār*. Both Hebrew phrases reflect the linguistic milieu of the Second Temple or late biblical period, when the language came under the influence of Imperial Aramaic. To prove this, Hurvitz carried out a lexical study of words that mean “end” in classical Biblical Hebrew and concluded that *sôf* makes a late appearance. While neither component of the parallel expression *rōš dāvār* is lexically late, Hurvitz noted that the two apposite phrases stand in antithetical relation, “‘twin’ phrases which echo each other in form and meaning.”³² Finally, he surveyed the function and semantic range of these terms within Biblical Hebrew based on the function of the Aramaic terms in Daniel as cited above.³³ His conclusion is embedded in the title of his article—the Hebrew terms are reflexes of scribal terms used in the Imperial Aramaic formulary.

Presumably Hurvitz chose “reflexes” over “cognates” because very near the conclusion of his brief study, the close correspondence that he had developed between the Aramaic and Hebrew phrases comes to an abrupt end:

Obviously, the terminological connotation, attested by the Aramaic technical idioms used in Daniel 7, is missing in the Hebrew counterparts employed in Qoheleth and Ps 119; ראש-דבר and סוף-דבר have become ordinary phrases, denoting “the beginning of the matter” and “the end of the matter” (also, in extended applications, “the first/primary part of the matter” and “the conclusion/ summing-up of the matter”), instead of the scribal “beginning/end of a [written] word (=text).”³⁴

As to the question of why two phrases in late Biblical Hebrew that are identical to their Aramaic counterparts in every way should end up having different meanings and functions, Hurvitz attributed this to the “phenomenon of ‘semantic erosion’.”³⁵

28. A. Hurvitz, “ראש-דבר and סוף דבר: Reflexes of Two Scribal Terms Imported into Biblical Hebrew from the Imperial Aramaic Formulary,” in M. F. J. Baasten and W. T. van Peursen, eds., *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka* (Leuven 2003), 281–86.

29. *Ibid.*, 285.

30. *Ibid.*, 286.

31. *Ibid.*, 285.

32. *Loc. cit.*

33. Hurvitz never cites the two phrases *rōš dāvār* and *sôf dāvār* in context—the verses in Ps. 119:160 and Qoh. 12:13 are not quoted in the article, neither partially nor in full.

34. Hurvitz, *ibid.*, 286.

35. *Loc. cit.*

This process resulted in “the ‘worn-out’ sense of ראש-דבר and סוף-דבר observable in Hebrew.”³⁶

The pattern of analysis employed by Hurvitz in this study has become his hallmark.³⁷ Occasionally however, one yearns for monographs that treat words and phrases idiosyncratically, as unique individuals whose behavior is unparalleled. The search after a lexeme’s trail can take surprising turns and twists, and the outcome, for all the rules of phonology, morphology, and semantics, is never predictable.³⁸ Such may be the case with ראש מלין and סופא די מלתא.

Hurvitz posited that the Aramaic words ראש מלין and סופא די-מלתא could shed light on the origin and history of the Hebrew terms ראש דבר and סוף דבר not only by virtue of their function and meaning, but also by their position: both Aramaic phrases are found in a single chapter, most appropriately in the first and last verses:

Dan. 7:1 באדין חלמא כתב / ראש מלין אמר 1
 Dan. 7:28 ער-כה סופא די-מלתא 28

Hurvitz gives the following translations, taken from the NJPS version:³⁹

Dan. 7:1: In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream (. . .) he wrote down the dream. Beginning the Account (ראש מלין), Daniel related the following: “In my vision . . .”

Vv. 27–28: [“] . . . His kingdom shall be. . . Here the account ends (סופא די-מלתא [ער-כה]).

Note that the NJPS sentence division for the verses in Daniel cited above differs from MT. The MT Hebrew for “Beginning the account” (ראש מלין אמר) comes at the end of verse 1 and does not begin a new sentence.⁴⁰ Further, “Here the account ends” is

36. *Ibid.*, 286, n. 23.

37. Beginning with his identification of post-exilic psalms on a lexical basis, the comparative study of the language of Ezekiel and Leviticus, through his book on Wisdom psalms and countless articles which employ these methods to study individual expressions, he has put the chronology of biblical texts on a scientific footing and has enriched the dictionary of post-exilic and late Biblical Hebrew with many previously unidentified words and phrases.

38. See Y. Malkiel, “Each Word Has a History of its Own,” in *idem, From Particular to General Linguistics: Selected Essays 1965–1978* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1983), 217–26; *idem*, “Etymology and Modern Linguistics,” in *ibid.*, 497–511, in which he bemoans “the estrangement between etymology and modern linguistics” (497). One of the explanations he offers is that “the passionate, not to say occasionally morbid, interest in theory places any intellectual pursuit that hinges on chance discoveries, flashes of imagination, and irremediable lacunary records in a vulnerable position” (*ibid.*, 499). Another practitioner of the idiosyncratic study of terms and expressions who eschewed stock classifications was the late J. C. Greenfield; see S. M. Paul et al., eds., *‘Al Kanfe Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 2001). S. Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Oxford, 2000), 139, cites an unnamed French dialectologist who proposed that “chaque mot a son histoire.” Malkiel, “Each Word,” 218, ascribes the title of his article to Jules Gilliéron, a French-Swiss scholar at the end of the 19th century who authored *Atlas linguistique de la France*.

39. I follow Hurvitz exactly in copying the verses, Hebrew insertions, brackets, parentheses, capitalization, and slight changes to the text; the ellipsis in the middle of the line in vv. 27–28 is mine.

40. Strictly speaking, Hurvitz should have noted that he was quoting a translation of Dan 7:1 and 2, not 1 alone. NJPS actually left out the first three words of 7:2, *‘anē Dāniyyēl wē’āmar*, about which see further.

the concluding sentence in the NJPS version: it takes a period and stands alone. In MT 7:28, it stands at the beginning of a much longer sentence which continues: “I, Daniel, was very alarmed . . .” The remainder of the MT verse is typeset in NJPS not only as a separate (unnumbered) verse, but as a separate paragraph. Put differently, *rēš millin* “beginning” comes in MT at the *conclusion* of verse 1 and *sōfā dī millētā* “the end” stands at the *beginning* of verse 28, while the NJPS translation makes each term respectively a beginning or an ending both in meaning and position within the sentence. These differences are not solely stylistic: they imply what Hurvitz has set out to prove, that each phrase is a so-called *terminus technicus* or “scribal phrase.”

However, I find reason to support the sentence division of MT, for it lends poetic balance and parallelism to the first verse (7:1):

דניאל חלם חזה / וחזוי ראשה על משכבה
באדין חלמא כתב / ראש מלין אמר

The arrangement of the four stichs is marked by the repetitions/variations *ḥāzā/ ḥezwē* in 1 and 2, *ḥēlem ḥāzā/ ḥelmā kētab* in 1 and 3, *ḥezwē rēšē/ rēš millin* in 2 and 4. In stichs 3 and 4 parallelism indicates that *rēs millin* *ʿamar* seconds the clause *ḥelmā kētab*.⁴¹ I would attempt to convey the rhythm, meaning, and poetry of these lines with the following translation:

Daniel saw a dream/ a vision upon his bed,
Then he wrote the dream/ this is what he said:

As the fourth and final stich, *rēš millin* *ʿamar* provides repetition (*rēšēh/ rēš*), parallelism (*kētab/ʿamar*), and balance to the entire sentence. Clearly it is an integral part of the verse. But if I sever it from verse 1 and attach it to verse 2, as did NJPS (“Beginning the account”), what purpose does it serve? If indeed it is a *terminus technicus* to indicate the start of quoted text, its form should have been *rēš millin* alone, without the verb *ʿamar*. At present, the word *ʿamar* is totally superfluous and makes for bad prose, followed as it is by *ʿanē Dāniyyēl wē-ʿamar* in verse 2. Quite the contrary, the real *terminus technicus* is to be found in the words *ענה . . . ואמר* “he said,” a phrase which introduces direct speech in Daniel over thirty times. If, however, *rēš millin* serves to introduce Daniel’s account of the dream, what need was there to duplicate with the stock expression *ʿanē . . . wē-ʿamar*?⁴²

One is tempted to compare our case with Fitzmyer’s *כענת*, cited above, as both seem to be formulae introducing a quotation. The difference, however, between Fitzmyer’s term and our case is that *rēš millin* *ʿamar*, as I have argued, seems particularly suited to its context in verse 1; detaching it adversely affects the poetry and renders either the word *ʿamar* or the following formula *ʿanē . . . wē-ʿamar* superfluous.⁴³ Further, as we shall soon see, *rēš millin* can also mean “the entire matter,” the entire dream and its interpretation, and is thus not necessarily a technical term for “the beginning.”

41. This is not necessarily synonymous parallelism. While *ʿamar* may be the equivalent of *kētab*, *rēš millin* may indicate a specification of *ḥelmā*, i.e., “the beginning of the dream.”

42. This explains why NJPS deleted it; see above, n. 40.

43. Indeed MS Theodotion omits *ענה דניאל ואמר*.

3. *sōfā' dī millētā'* (Dan. 7:28)

Turning to the expression at the end of Daniel 7, *sōfā' dī milletā'*, “the end of the matter,” it certainly appears to be a formulaic marker, combined with another formula to stand as a complete sentence: *עד־כֹּה סוּפֵא דִּי־מִלְתָּא*, “Here the account ends.”⁴⁴ But if *sōfā' dī milletā'* signals “endquote,” it should have been the final phrase in the verse, as taken by NJPS. Instead, Dan. 7:28 in MT continues on, bringing Daniel’s first-person monologue to a conclusion. I think we should take the entire clause “Here the account ends” as part and parcel of Daniel’s first-person speech, a literary ending which is worked into the story itself and comes to herald the end of the entire chapter. In its current setting, it has other nuances as well. Chapter 7 is divided into two equal parts of fourteen verses each. The first half (7:1–14) describes Belshazzar’s dream, the second (7:15–28) its interpretation. The chapter has a double closing: *סוּפֵא לְהַשְׁמֵדָה וְלְהוֹבִידָה עַד סוּפֵא* in verse 26 means, in context of the narrative, “to be destroyed and abolished for all time,” but *עַד סוּפֵא*, literally “until the end,” also marks the impending end of the chapter.⁴⁵ The second ending is found in 7:28, *עד־כֹּה סוּפֵא דִּי־מִלְתָּא* “Here the account ends.” Further, if we assume together with MT that *rēš millin* appears at the end of 7:1, a frame structure is provided by the first and final verses: *רֵאשׁ מִלִּין / סוּפֵא דִּי מִלְתָּא*, “the beginning of the matter, the end of the matter.” Clearly these expressions which bear a role in the structure of the chapter are part of the literary context and do not serve as formulaic terms alone.

There is, however, another obstacle to seeing the Aramaic phrases as technical terminology. Even were I to accept the NJPS translation which supports Hurvitz’s claim to see the phrases in Aramaic as scribal expressions for “open quote,” “close quote,” the fact that these two expressions appear only in Daniel and nowhere else—neither in the Bible nor in any Aramaic text—is hardly indicative of the “Imperial Aramaic formulary” of the period.⁴⁶ By way of comparison, *כַּעֲנַת* and its variations are clearly scribal terms. Aside from the fact that they stand as a form of punctuation outside the contents of a specific letter, they are formulaic because they are found very often.

4. *Rōš dāvār* (Ps. 119:160)

If frequency of appearance is a requirement for an epistolary or scribal term, it must be noted that the Hebrew phrases *rōš dāvār* and *sōf dāvār* also appear but once each in the Bible. Further, the first term appears only in the phrase *rōš dēvārēkā: רֵאשׁ־דְּבַרְךָ אִמְתָּ / וְלְעוֹלָם כֹּל־מִשְׁפַּט צִדְקָךָ* (Ps. 119:160). This phrase, whose original meaning is purportedly “beginning,” stands as far from the beginning as can possibly be: within the psalm it is found in the 160th out of 176 verses. Further, Psalm 119 is an acrostic that repeats each letter eight times, and our verse is the *final* example—

44. So NJPS. Compare *עד כֹּה* with *עַד הִנֵּה* “Thus far the words of Jeremiah” (Jer. 51:64).

45. Like other complex endings we examined at the beginning of this article, e.g., *עַד הִנֵּה דְבַרִי יִרְמִיָּהוּ*, (Jer. 51:64), which combine the end of the prophet’s words and the end of the literary unit (chapter or book).

46. Not only does *sōfā dī millētā'* not appear, but “it must be admitted, that . . . סוּפֵא does not seem to be attested in extra-biblical Aramaic documents dated to the Persian period”; Hurvitz, “Two Scribal Terms,” 283, n. 10.

not the initial one—for the letter *rēš*. Moreover, the form with possessive suffix *dēvārēkā* completely changes the picture. A *terminus technicus* is not to be adapted to the context morphologically; if it is, it is no term at all!⁴⁷ Finally, parallelism would demand a meaning for *ראש-דברך* that corresponds in some way to *כל-משפט צדקך*: “The essence of your word is your truth, O Eternal One/ The content of your judgment is your justice.”⁴⁸

In Dahood’s translation, “essence/ content” are parallel. Another way to reflect the poetic symmetry is RSV “the sum of your word is truth,” paralleled by “and every one of your righteous ordinances endures forever.” By way of contrast, NJPS is apparently oblivious to parallelism here: “Truth is the essence of Your word; Your just rules are eternal.” However, all interpretations and translations must reckon with the fact that this final verse for the letter *rēš* must be a concluding statement about God’s law, and seeing parallelism here reinforces the sense of conclusion and totality. This accounts for the frequent translation of *rōš dēvārēkā* in its one biblical appearance as essence, sum total or the like. It most definitely does not have the meaning or function of a scribal term indicating “the beginning of a quotation.”⁴⁹

It must be said that Hurvitz conceded as much; in his opinion, the attenuated sense of the scribal phrase *rōš dāvār* in Hebrew denotes “‘the beginning of the matter’ . . . (also, in extended applications, “the first/primary part of the matter” . . .) instead of the scribal ‘beginning/end of a [written] word (= text).’”⁵⁰ But the meaning of *rōš dēvārēkā*—primary, essence, or sum—is quite removed from “beginning, first”; one could argue that “sum” is actually closer to “end.”⁵¹ Therefore, Hurvitz’s thesis that a purported *ראש דבר**—an asterisk is in order, since the actual form is nowhere attested—was originally a scribal term in late Biblical Hebrew remains tentative. His conclusion that “semantically, they [the two Hebrew phrases *rōš dāvār*, *sôf dāvār*] represent a mirror image, denoting ‘beginning’ vs. ‘end’” is not warranted by the meager evidence.⁵²

If *rōš dāvār/ dēvārēkā* bears little relation to its Aramaic counterpart, the case is otherwise with *sôf dāvār*. Without doubt, as Hurvitz pointed out, the phrase *sôf*

47. Grammatical adaptation makes it part of the literary context, see above.

48. M. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101–150, AB* (New York, 1970), 170. In a note (ibid., 192) he compares *rōš dēvārēkā* to *rēšit šēmānim*, “finest oils” (Amos 6:6), Phoenician *r’št nḥšt*, “the finest bronze.” One does not have to accept Dahood’s translation of other elements in the verse (*ū-lē’ōlām* as a divine epithet, *kol* as “the content of”) to agree with *ראש* “essence”; “*ōlām* is very questionably a divine epithet in the Bible” (private communication, Ed Greenstein). Further, *ōlām* clearly parallels *’emet* in other verses and both mean “forever” (Pss. 119:142, 146:6).

49. Note that between the RSV translation “the sum of your word” for Ps. 119:160 and the NJPS rendering “the sum of the matter” for Qoh. 12:13, *rōš dāvār* and *sôf dāvār* mean the same thing (!)—“the sum of.” This meaning is closer to “end” than to “beginning.”

50. Hurvitz, “Two Scribal Terms,” 286.

51. One might be tempted to cite *נשא ראש* as an idiom meaning “to take the sum of.” But this expression derives from the literal meaning “to lift the head of,” i.e., to count each individual.

52. Hurvitz, “Two Scribal Terms,” 285. Of course, some forms of *rōš* and *sôf* may be considered “mirror images” if they appear together in *merismus*, e.g., *קראש וצעד סוף* (Qoh.3:11) or, as in Babylonian Aramaic, to indicate the beginning and end of a tannaitic text (e.g., a Mishnah) in the forms *rēšā* and *sēfā*. In fact, it is their frequent appearance together in the Talmud in this sense that caused original *sōfā* to be vocalized as *sēfā*; see J. N. Epstein, *A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic* (Jerusalem, 1960), 175 [in Hebrew].

dāvār in its one biblical appearance functions as an “ordinary phrase,”⁵³ which I take to mean an original formulaic phrase that also fits neatly into its present literary context, a pattern of ending examined above. Since I have made a similar claim in this article for *sōfā’ dī millētā’*, the Hebrew and Aramaic phrases are indeed parallel.

In summation, I have traced a number of expressions that Hurvitz has seen as technical terms, originally indicating quoted text, but which I see as literary expressions that mesh with their contexts and indicate “beginning” and “ending.” Hurvitz included *ראש מלין* and *סופא די-מלתא* together with *אגרת* “letter,” *וכענת* “and now,” *דכרונה* “memorandum” and called them all “scribal vocabulary,” a single “lexical category.”⁵⁴ But there is a clear distinction to be drawn between those three epistolary terms which actually appear in letters and the pair of Aramaic phrases under scrutiny, which does not. By placing them together, Hurvitz was moved to seek a formulaic sense and function for the Aramaic terms and for their Hebrew counterparts as well.

I have tried to show that in Daniel the phrases *rēš millīn* and *sōfā’ dī millētā’* are not part of a particular jargon. Unlike epistolary terms or legal terminology, they are not technical additions to the text or stock phrases, but have been fully contextualized and individualized within the prose or poetry. Nor can we consider them terms, clichés, or stock phrases outside the context of Daniel, because we have no further examples of their use. Indeed, Fitzmyer already noted that “as for the biblical letters, those in Ezra supply the closest parallels to the extrabiblical material; those in Daniel less so—and there is a real question whether the latter should even be considered.”⁵⁵ If indeed these ever functioned strictly as technical terms, we might have anticipated a more exact correspondence between them, such as **rēšā dī millētā, sōfā’ dī millētā’*.

Likewise, if *sōf dāvār* functions in conjunction with the word *wēyōter* as a scribal term in Qohelet to indicate a final epigram, its analogous opposite might well have been **rōš dāvār*, as Hurvitz thinks.⁵⁶ Another possibility, however, suggests itself: **rēšit dāvār*, on the pattern of *rēšit hōkkmā*, “the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). Such an opposition lies behind *טוב אחריית דבר מראשיתו* “The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it” (Qoh. 7:8). The two expressions *rēšit dāvār* and *’ahārīt dāvār* have indeed become stock phrases for “beginning,” “end” in Modern Hebrew speech and writing.⁵⁷

53. Hurvitz’ expression for both *rōš dāvār* and *sōf dāvār*; “Two Scribal Terms,” 286.

54. *Ibid.*, 281.

55. Fitzmyer, “Aramaic Epistolography,” 39.

56. Analogous to Qoh. 3:11: *mērōš wē’ad sōf*.

57. *Rēšit* often means “beginning” in Biblical Hebrew; “On the basis of Prov. 9.10 (*tehillā*), *rēšit* [in Prov. 1:7, Ps. 111:10] is to be taken in the sense of ‘beginning’ and not of ‘principal part,’ ‘total,’ ‘best part.’” G. von Rad, *Wisdom In Israel* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), 66. However, von Rad notes that “in themselves, both translations (‘beginning’ or ‘best’) are possible. Indeed, the meanings are very close” (*ibid.*, n. 10). Another Modern Hebrew phrase related to our topic is *בסופו של דבר* “finally,” “in sum.” The lexical base is Qoh. 12:13 *סוף דבר* while the syntax is Mishnaic Hebrew (cf. *ribbōnō šela’ōlām* > *ribbōnō šel ‘ōlām*). However, the expression is not attested in rabbinic Hebrew save for a single occurrence, *ונראה מה סופו של דבר*, “the end of the matter,” in Midrash *Tanḥuma* (ed. Buber) *Vayera* 46 s.v. *לך-לך* p. [113]. It is also found thrice in the medieval Hebrew translation of Maimonides’ *Commentary on the Mishnah* (Sanhedrin 8:5; 11, 2; Kelim 5:10). I thank Gary Rendsburg for mentioning the Modern Hebrew phrase upon reading an earlier version of this study.

5. *Qadmat millôhî*

I would see a term for “beginning” in a phrase in Imperial Aramaic that has not been viewed as such. *The Wisdom of Ahiqar* found at Elephantine opens as follows:⁵⁸

¹*These are the words* of one named Ahikar, a wise and ready scribe, who taught his son . . .

²Before *his words* Ahikar had become great and had been counsellor of all Assyria.

The formulaic opening phrase is [אלה מ]לי “these are the words.” In line 2 we find the phrase קדמת מל[ו]הי “Before his words.” Subsequent translations, for the most part, have not added understanding. Jean-Hoftijzer render “avant ses mots (i.e., avant il disait ses mots) Ahiqar fut un homme grand (? , contexte endomm.).”⁵⁹ Porten-Yardeni’s “Before his words, Ahiqar became great” is identical.⁶⁰ Both are taken from Cowley’s rendition as cited above. Presumably, since the story opens with אלה שמה מלי אחיקר שמה, “These are the words of one named Ahiqar,” line 2 was understood as saying, “Before his words (i.e., prior to his proverbs and wisdom sayings), Ahiqar had become great.” “Before his words” is an odd construction; it seems to be a scribal term that was misunderstood and hence read as part of the following sentence.

I view the phrase as a marker to indicate the beginning of the story. *Qadmat* taken as a noun in the construct state dependent on *millôhî* means “the beginning of the matter.”⁶¹ Alternatively, it might carry the adverbial sense “first,” “first things first.”⁶² Either way, it comes to introduce the narrative which commences by relating that Ahiqar was a famous man. After the opening expression מלי אחיקר [אלה], an overall introduction to Ahiqar and his epigrams,⁶³ the narrative begins with a flashback to Ahiqar’s own beginnings, how “he grew to become the advisor of all of Assyria.” This flashback is prefaced by the phrase קדמת מלוהי “the beginning of the matter” to mark the inception of Ahiqar’s story.⁶⁴ There is a sort of play on words at work here, *millē* in line 1 referring to the words of the epigrams, *millôhî* in line 2 meaning “his matter, affair.”⁶⁵ Together they mark the beginning of this composition. In similar fashion the repeated use of *millētā’* in Dan. 7:28 signals the end of the chapter:

58. A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1923), 220. The Aramaic original is found on p. 212, lines 1–2. Italics (as found in Cowley) indicate restorations.

59. C. F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l’ouest* (Leiden, 1965), 252.

60. B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem, 1993), 3.27.

61. Babylonian Aramaic knows the fem. nouns קדמא, cs. קדמת “dawn” and the form קדמתא with the same meaning; M. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 987. It is conceivable that a word meaning “the dawn of” would also connote “the beginning of.”

62. Cf. *šlh ʾgrt qdmt* (Cowley 38:10) which Jean-Hoftijzer take as “envoyez premièrement,” an adverb. See too J. C. Greenfield and B. Porten, “The Aramaic Papyri from Hermopolis,” *ZAW* 80 (1968), 228, on *qdm̄t*.

63. Cf. ואלה דברי דוד האחרנים in 2 Sam. 23:1, followed by David’s words in first person, just as the opening expression in *Ahiqar* is followed by first-person speech: *br’ lm yhw̄h ly*.

64. “The phrase seems to mean ‘before this narrative begins’”; Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 225. See J. M. Lindenberger, in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1985), 494, who renders: “Prior to this, Ahiqar had [become a gre]at man.”

65. Cf. ומלוהי כתיב בספרא זנה (Kraeling 9:16); Jean-Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire*, 152: les détails, Kraeling, 242: “in the sense of ‘matters’.”

עד כה סופא די מלתא אנה דניאל שגיא רעיוני יבהלנני וזיוי ישתנון עלי ומלתא בלבי נטרט:

Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed; but I kept the matter in my mind.⁶⁶

So too in the case of *Aḥiqar*, I find formulaic openings that indicate the beginning of the work while also carrying an internal meaning: אלה מלי אַחיקר “These are Aḥiqar’s sayings,” קדמת מלוהי “The beginning of his story.”

6. *ʿAqdāmūt Millīn*

I did not find additional examples of *qadmat millōhī* in Aramaic inscriptions. The one parallel I have found is enshrined in the title of a medieval liturgical acrostic poem (*piyyut*) in Aramaic composed for the Festival of Shavuot, *ʿAqdāmūt millīn*, by R. Meir son of R. Isaac who lived in Worms, Germany, c. 1060.⁶⁷ The initial line ורתא מלין ושריות שותא is loosely translated by most interpreters as “before I begin to speak.”⁶⁸ A literal translation yields two parallel expressions, “the beginning of words (or composition) and the initiation of speech,” where *šārāyūt* is cognate to Akkadian *šurrū* (noun and verb) “beginning,” “to begin.”⁶⁹ *ʿAqdāmūt millīn* is but a variation of *qadmat millōhī* in *Aḥiqar*. Close to 1500 years separate Elephantine *Aḥiqar* from Ashkenazi *ʿAqdāmūt*, and no direct path can be traced between them. However, the fact that this poem was written in Aramaic to be recited right after the Torah scroll has been unrolled hearkens back to the ancient custom of reading the Torah and simultaneously translating each verse into Aramaic.⁷⁰ This practice is cited in Mishnah *Megillah* 4:4 but goes back to Neh. 8:8: “They read from the book of the law of God in translation to make it intelligible and so helped them to understand the reading.”⁷¹ It is feasible that the medieval composer drew on older Aramaic liturgical poems which prefaced the weekly Aramaic translation.

66. N. W. Porteous, *Daniel*, *OTL* (London, 1965), 95. NJPS: “Here the account ends. [new paragraph] I, Daniel, was very alarmed by my thoughts, and my face darkened; and I could not put the matter out of my mind.”

67. His name is worked into lines 21–29 of the poem. This is the person called *shaliaḥ tzibbur* “cantor, reader” in the Worms Mahzor. “R. Meir *shaliaḥ tzibbur* of blessed memory” is cited several times by the commentator Rashi (1040–1105). See A. Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem, 1981), 292–96 [in Hebrew].

68. So J. Frankel, *Maḥzor Shavuot* (Koren; Jerusalem, 2000), 385 (in Hebrew) in his explanatory notes. In the body of the text, however, the translation is literal: “The introduction of words and the initiation of speech.”

69. *CAD* Š/3, 357. Of course, the Akkadian word was mediated by Aramaic *šry* “to begin.” *Šūtā* in Aramaic is “talk, speech.”

70. *ʿAqdāmūt* is considered to be an introductory proem to the actual Aramaic translation of the Torah reading on Shavuot, which still prevailed in medieval times. See M. Ginsburger, “Les introductions araméennes à la lecture du Targoum,” *REJ* 73 (1921), 14–26. In the Worms Mahzor, Germany, 1272, *ʿAqdāmūt* is followed by the Targum to Exod. 19:1–11, the Torah reading for Shavuot. Grossman, *Ashkenaz*, 294–95, does not allude to this idea and instead explains the Aramaic of *ʿAqdāmūt* as an attempt to lend to the poem an ancient patina, or perhaps it is to be connected to the author’s reputed mystical leanings.

71. J. M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, *AB* (New York, 1965), 150. “Apparently Ezra read from the Hebrew while the Levites gave what he read in Aramaic . . .” (*ibid.*, 154).

7. 'Ahadrānā lēmillē qadmā'ē

Finally, a related phrase crops up in the Zohar, dated to the late thirteenth century in Spain. Several times we find the sentence אהדרנא למילי קדמאי translated as “Let us return to our subject” or “Let us return to the earlier words.”⁷² This phrase too is a literary convention to indicate *Weideraufnahme*, returning to the subject after a digression, here expressed as a return to “first matters.” Gershom Scholem studied the Aramaic of the Zohar and summed up his findings as follows:

The Aramaic of the Zohar is a purely artificial affair, a literary language employed by a writer who obviously knew no other Aramaic than that of certain Jewish literary documents . . . The expectation expressed by some scholars that philological investigation would reveal the older strata of the Zohar has not been borne out by actual research.

Nor must the stereotyped homiletical phrases be forgotten which are entirely foreign to the old Midrash and which the author has borrowed . . . chiefly from the stock of standing expressions habitually employed by the preachers of his age.⁷³

One such example of a stereotyped phrase or cliché which Scholem cites in the latter paragraph is none other than 'ahadrānā lēmillē qadmā'ē: “Let us return to the earlier words.” Unfortunately, I do not know where Scholem found the phrase “habitually employed” in contemporary literature, but it is entirely possible that the author of the Zohar coined the term “earlier words” or “first words” based on the Ashkenazic liturgical poem 'Aqdāmūt millin. The poem was copied into the famous Worms Maḥzor (1275) and also into the Northern French Miscellany (1273), which may indicate its then widespread popularity. There is another example of an Ashkenazic liturgical poem cited in the Zohar,⁷⁴ and the influence of the Ashkenazi rite on Sephardic mysticism has been the subject of various studies and a recent book.⁷⁵

Then again, the Zohar may have translated a Hebrew expression which appears in Rashi's biblical commentaries: כאדם האומר נחזור לענין ראשון, “As a man says [to his friend], ‘Let us return to the first matter’” (1 Sam. 1:31), or: “Like a man who shortened his words and then goes back to say, ‘I did not yet tell you the beginning of the matter’” (Rashi, Song 2:8), Hebrew ראשית הדברים. A fair translation of Rashi's phrase “the beginning of the matter” into Aramaic would be אקדמות מלין. But the possibility exists that the phrase in the Zohar is the evolution of a formulaic expression such as that found in Elephantine.⁷⁶

72. Zohar 1.203b; *ibid.*, *Sitre Torah*, 80b; *ibid.*, 2.148a. Some MSS read first-person pl. נהדר. The first translation is that of *The Zohar*, trans. H. Sperling and M. Simon (London, 1949), 2.274. The second is given by Scholem (see further).

73. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), 163; 167–68.

74. I. Ta-Shma, “The Sources of the Zohar,” *Tarbiz* 60 (1981), 663–65 (in Hebrew).

75. *Idem*, *Ha-nigle she-banistar* (Tel-Aviv, 2001) (in Hebrew).

76. Scholem's views on the Aramaic of the Zohar are being questioned. See Ada Rapoport-Albert and Theodore Kwasman, “Late Aramaic: The Liturgical and Linguistic Context of the Zohar,” *Aramaic Studies* 4 (2006), 5: “This article challenges the standard scholarly opinion whereby the Aramaic in which it was written was an artificially manufactured idiom.” Outlining a future project, the authors “propose to examine the relationship between the Aramaic of the Zohar and . . . Aramaic *Piyyutim*, liturgy, magical texts, legal documents and *Responsa*” (p. 9). Another article in the same issue by Yehudah Liebes, “Hebrew

The Aramaic phrases *qadmat millôhi*, *ʾaqdāmūt millîn*, and *millē qadmāʿē* seem to me to be expressions for “beginning.” Much as I would have liked to link their stories, I have no proof for any relation between them, nor have I found additional examples. Aside from the fact that they use the same two lexemes, they all must be considered, at this point, as coincidental coinages of their respective authors. However, they bear a marked resemblance to their biblical counterpart ראש מליך and like it, serve to open a text. Whether they are links in a long chain of scribal tradition, as I have tried to show for the biblical expressions, is a difficult question to answer.

and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar,” 35–52, also denies the label “artificial.” However, it is unclear if the respective authors think that Zohar Aramaic is related to a spoken dialect of the language or just to other literary texts.

