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THE D-STEM IN WESTERN SEMITIC

by

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*Dedicated to
Stuart A. Ryder*

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FOREWORD

Consideration of the origins and functions of the D-stem in the Western (or Eastern) Semitic languages confronts one with a complex and often confusing exercise in historical, comparative and structural linguistics, raising considerable doubt about the validity of the so-called 'traditional' explanation of this form without providing evidence of sufficient weight to enable one to substitute for it some certain alternate solution. Indeed, this study raises more questions than it will answer. Probably no final statement is either possible or desirable. This is the case, because the practice of a spoken language, as it develops through such devious and deceptive means as leveling and analogy into a set of fairly stable rules (or a grammar, as we call it), will necessarily rest upon the shifting sands of the linguistic substratum, which will from time to time work their way to the surface as the 'exceptions' which may plague and confound us in the literature.

This study, though, does not purport to resolve all the problems involved in consideration of the D-stem. Rather its purpose is, first, to state some of these problems and, second, to provide linguistic data from which the reader like the writer may draw his own conclusions. These data will be of two principal types. First, data from historical, structural and comparative linguistics, derived primarily from Semitists but also from specialists in other languages. Second, examples collected from texts in the three languages which we are taking as representative of Western Semitic: classical Arabic, Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, including Targumic Aramaic, Reicharamäisch and Syriac. Illustrative material obtained second-hand from Ugaritic, Ethiopic, Akkadian and the Hamitic languages will be introduced when it supplements or illuminates the material compiled for this study, but such material will not, since these languages lie outside the writer's area of competence, form the basis for any conclusion, explicit or implicit, which the study may produce.

I

THE D-STEM: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

The traditional approach to the D-stem has been predicated upon three assumptions, the first two of which have usually been implicit, the third explicit.

(1) The verbal stem with 'strengthened' (or 'geminated' or 'lengthened') middle radical found in all the major Semitic languages has a single origin and a basic function to which its usages in those languages may be traced.

(2) This stem is 'derived from' (or 'constructed upon') the so-called B(ase)-stem or G(rund)-stamm, which conveys the 'simplest' meaning of the verbal root. It thus resembles those stems employing a prefix or infix²/, /n/ or /t/, therefore its meaning must be distinct from that of the B-stem.

(3) The initial connotation of this stem was a 'strengthening' or 'intensification' or 'pluralization' of the verbal concept expressed in the B-stem, symbolized by the doubling or 'strengthening' of the middle radical. Other usages, such as the causative, denominative, factitive and declarative, are subordinate to and derivable from the connotation of intensity in the performance of the activity.

One must remember that these are indeed assumptions, or better, hypotheses, no matter how obvious any or all of them may appear to be. As hypotheses, they are subject to trial, and may accordingly be accepted or rejected. One could conceivably formulate these three alternate hypotheses.

(1) In an individual Semitic language, gemination of the middle radical may have had two or more phonological and/or morphological origins and thus have expressed two or more functions of the verbal root. Furthermore, any one or more of these functions may be unique for that Semitic language, or may be common to one or two rather than to all of its sister languages. In short, the 'Semitic D-stem' may be a conglomerate of forms similar only orthographically.

(2) This stem may have developed independently of the B-stem, either directly from the verbal root or indirectly through the medium of nominal formations. In this case it would properly be described as a form parallel to rather than derivable from the B-stem, and would not need to be related semantically to the latter.

(3) This semantic independence would obviate the need for the pseudopsychological correlation of 'strengthening' between form and meaning (a confusion of linguistic

forms with that which they symbolize), and one of the usages of the stem now considered 'subordinate' or 'secondary' could, as a result of comparative study of texts, emerge as the 'original' usage, if such exists. This would not, of course, rule out the possibility that intensification of action became a function of the stem in one or more individual languages.

Before affirming either of these contradictory sets of hypotheses or some third set combining elements or emphases of each, we shall examine much linguistic evidence. But first we will consider the 'traditional' first set of hypotheses as earlier grammarians and modern scholars have handled them.

The view that the D-stem originally signified intensification has been based upon the work of early Arab grammarians. Though these scholars were mostly indifferent to the morphological or phonological aspects of the development of the D-stem it is useful to consider a few of the brief comments they offer concerning the meaning of the stem, since we can find here an original and spontaneous response to the need for definition. Sibawaihi finds it necessary to consider the D-stem in conjunction with the causative Stem IV. The latter he describes as having been "rejected" in some verbs in favor of the D-stem (II), citing such pairs as *zarufa-zarraftuhu* 'it is elegant'-'I adorned it', and *nabula-nabbaltuhu* 'He is noble'-'I ennobled him'.¹ In other cases Stem IV 'shares' its causative function with the D-stem, e.g. *nazzala* and 'anzala 'he sent down' and *kaṭṭarahum* and 'akṭarahum 'he increased them'. One may note in Sibawaihi's account that *nazzala*-*'anzala* provides the only case of causative usage of the D-stem for which the corresponding B-stem is not a stative-type verbal. Furthermore, although he cites several examples of D-stems related to stative verbs without any Stem IV counterpart, he offers no example illustrating that the reverse situation can also exist. Finally, although he cites *mallaḥtu* 'I have beautified' as the regular causative corresponding to *maluḥa*, he states that he has 'heard from the Arabs' some who say 'amlaḥtu.

The inference drawn by the modern reader is that these D-forms, rather than sharing the causative function of Stem IV, represent the normal means for transitivizing the stative verb, a usage upon which Stem IV, normally employed for double transitives, will sometimes impinge by false analogical extension, even as the D-stem sometimes impinges upon the normal semantic province of Stem IV. This inference is strengthened by Sibawaihi's listing of several D-forms which are employed to form a transitive verb from deverbals (what we call a denominative-factitive usage), such as *zannaytuhu* 'I have called him an adulterer', literally 'I have caused (brought) adultery upon him', and *ḥayyaytuhu* 'I have greeted him', literally 'I have made the greeting *ḥayyā* to be upon him'. The connection between these and the preceding group of D-forms is clear. One is safe in inferring that within this grammarian's scheme the basic function of the D-stem is denominative-factitive (bringing someone into a state of being embodied or described in a noun or adjective or stative verb), as opposed to

¹ Sibawaihi, *La Livre de Sibawaihi*, H. Derenbourg, ed., 2 vol. (Paris, 1881-1889), section 444.

the primary causative function of Stem IV (bringing someone into a state of activity embodied in an active verb). However, either will at times infringe upon the domain of the other.

In addition, Sibawaihi discerns a second, more distinctive function of the D-stem “in which Stem IV does not share”,² namely its use to express “more of an activity” (Ar. *takṭīr*), as in the pair *kasartu-kassartu* ‘I broke’-‘I continued breaking’ or *yajūlu-yuwajjilu* ‘he wanders’-‘he increases his wandering’ (i.e. ‘he wanders about’). Moreover, he cites such instances as *mawwamat* ‘they died’ and *qawwamat* ‘they stood’ as being in the D-stem as a result of a plural subject. Presumably an increase in dying or standing takes place when a group is involved. It is possible to express continuity of action without employing the D-stem, but this stem serves as a ‘clarification’ of the increase, much as the *maṣḍar* acts as a special construction to emphasize the force of the verb. Thus in the sentence *mā ziltu ʿuftahu ʿbawāban waʿuḡliquhā* ‘I continued opening the gates and shutting them’ Sibawaihi declares that the D-form *fattaḥtu* would be a “preferable” construction as compared with *ziltu ʿuftahu*, as in the sentence *fajjarnā ʿParḍa ʿuyūnan* ‘we continued to pour forth streams on the earth’. One may well wonder why, if the augmentative force of the D-stem was so strong, it was NOT employed in the former sentence. Nevertheless, where such forms as *mawwamat* and *qawwamat* exist, one must give serious attention to Sibawaihi’s assertion that in some case gemination possesses augmentative significance, or at least allow for the possibility that in Arabic it came to have such significance in some contexts.

The comments of the grammarian Ibn Jaiš are even briefer. He calls the D-stem the “brother” of Stem IV in transitivizing, and notes additionally that in some cases the stem is employed for a negative connotation.³ He cites such examples as *fazzaʿtuhu* ‘I have frightened him’, *qaḍḍaytu ʿaynahu* ‘I have irritated his eye’, *jalladtu ʿlbaʿira* ‘I flayed the camels’ and *qarradtuhu* ‘I deloused him’. Ibn Jaiš apparently groups two slightly different uses of the D-stem for semantic reasons. All four are denominatives but the latter two are what we call ‘privatives’, i.e. they involve the removal of something from the object of the action (English *delouse* is a perfectly parallel denominative, as is *skin*). Finally, comparing the D- with the B-stem, Ibn Jaiš like Sibawaihi concludes that “its presence is for augmentation”, but goes beyond Sibawaihi to declare that this is true in a majority of the occurrences of the D-stem, as *rabbada ʿššāʿu* ‘the sheep lay down’. He notes also that the D-stem can be used in connection with a plural object.

These two classical grammarians essentially prefigure most scholarly comment concerning the D-stem which has since transpired. For instance, the early Hebrew grammarian Saadia-ha-Gaon described the D-stem thus: “When a verb is changed from intransitive to transitive it takes a dagesh, as, e.g. *lāmaḍ* changed to *limmēḍ*;

² Sibawaihi, *Livre de Sibawaihi*, section 445.

³ Ibn Jaiš, *Commentar zu Zamachšaris Mufaṣṣal*, nach den Manuskripten zu Leipzig, Oxford, Constantinopel und Cairo, herausgegeben von Dr. G. Jahn (Leipzig, 1882), section 449.

or when it is changed to denote a modification in meaning, as *šālah* 'he sent' and *šillēh* 'he sent away' ...; or when the verb denoting a single action is changed to denote a repeated, as *rāṣah* and *riṣṣēh*, or an intensive action, as *šābar* and *šibbēr*. In all these and similar instances there is a distinct modification in meaning".⁴

Most significant in the accounts of Sibawaihi and Ibn Jaiš is their failure to mention that which Western scholars have usually called the 'intensive' function of the stem, that which Reckendorff describes as "sich um die von der ersten Konjug. bezeichnete Handlung bemühen, mag die Handlung vom Subj. selbst ausgehen (intensive) oder von einem andern (kausativ)".⁵ What Western Semitists have often inferred from Arabic *takṭīr* is a kind of subjective heightening of experience, a greater physical effort or special enthusiasm.⁶ Such an 'energetic' interpretation is inapposite to the examples proposed by the Arab grammarians we have cited. While they refer to 'increase', their examples clearly show that they mean by this an expansion of the scope of the action of the root, whether expansion in time (continuative/iterative) or expansion over a number of subjects or objects (plurative): what Höfner in his description of the putative Old South Arabic reduplicated form *qatātala* calls "(eine) Mehrheit, die nicht als geschlossenes Ganzes, sondern in einzelne Gruppen unerteilt erscheint. So ist es verständlich, dass reduplizierte Formen einerseits verstärkende, andererseits aber, eben auf Grund jener Unerteilung und Zerstückelung, abschwächende Bedeutung erhalten können, je nachdem, ob die Mehrheit als solche oder die einzelnen Stücke, aus denen sie aufgebaut ist, ins Auge gefasst werden".⁷ Thus, for example *qatṭa'a* might have been conceived by Sibawaihi as having had an original meaning 'continue to cut', which could serve as the basis for either a specialized syntactic use '(many) cut' or 'cut (many things)' or a specialized semantic use 'continue cutting (into ever smaller pieces)'. It is the latter which presumably is reflected in the classic example *šabar-šibbēr* 'break'-'smash'. While such a semantic development could have been projected by Sibawaihi and Ibn Jaiš from the grammatical origins of the form, no such projection is explicitly noted by either grammarian.

Even allowing for a misinterpretation of the term *takṭīr* on the part of later grammarians, however, one finds the same weakness in the two Arab grammarians as in their successors of the West, namely that no clear connection is made between the 'augmented' meaning of the D-stem on the one hand, and the causative and denominative/factitive meaning on the other; nor is the link between the latter two unambiguously demonstrated. One may say, echoing Flügel, that "im Ganzen und Grossen hat die ordnende Überblick und eine rationelle Behandlung gefehlt und durch den Gang, den die grammatischen Studien von ihrem Ursprung an nahmen, war allem folgerichtigen Systematisieren der Weg abgeschnitten".⁸ This weakness has proved fatal

⁴ S. L. Skoss, *Saadia ha-Gaon, the Earliest Hebrew Grammarian* (Philadelphia 1955), 17.

⁵ H. Reckendorf, *Die syntaktischen Verhältnisse des Arabischen* (Leiden, 1895).

⁶ H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache*, (Halle 1922), 281.

⁷ M. Höfner, *Altsüdarabische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1943), 86.

⁸ G. Flügel, "Die grammatischen Schulen der Araber", in *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, II Band: No. 4 (Leipzig, 1862), 74.

for any consistent definition of the place of the D-stem in Semitic grammar, and accounts for the feeling of one careful scholar surveying the data available, that the stem is 'ill-defined'.⁹

Generally speaking, European Semitists of the early 19th century were less pre-occupied with the 'energetic' view of the D-stem than some of their successors have been. In 1831, de Sacy noted that "La seconde et la quatrième forme donnent aux verbes neutres et aux verbes actifs absolus, la signification doublement relative".¹⁰ He continues: "Les verbes, à la seconde forme, sont fréquemment synonymes de ceux de la première forme". He finally describes the denominative, including the privative aspect of the D-stem. Two years later Caussin de Perceval, in his *Grammaire Arabe Vulgaire*, wrote: "L'on ne peut réduire à des règles bien précises les altérations que les formes dérivées apportent au sens de la racine; mais, en général, la deuxième forme donne au verbe la signification transitive".¹¹ He then mentions also the 'doubly transitive' and 'energetic' aspects. And finally, Fürst, writing from the standpoint of an Aramaist, carried over the conceptions of the Arabist thus: "Die semitische Intensivform ist ganz imperfectiv, sie drückt sowohl die Stetigkeit der Handlung oder des Seins".¹²

It is only in the later 19th century that we find the beginnings of an effort to make a general statement related and relevant to all the semantic categories previously associated with the D-stem. Porges, noting that vulgar (*i.e.* colloquial) Arabic had in many cases substituted the D-stem for Stem IV where the written language would require the latter, speculates that "doch unterscheidet sich wenigstens ursprünglich der Intensitätstamm mit annähernd kausativer Bedeutung von eigentlichen Kausativum erstens dadurch, dass ersterem die Kraft eines ächtens Kausativum, aus einfachen Transitivity doppelt transitive Verba zu machen, völlig abgeht".¹³ He appears to have inferred this from such examples as Heb. *yillēd-hōlīd* 'act as midwife'- 'beget', and *giddēl-higdīl* 'bring up'- 'make large', in which the true causative function is vested in Stem IV, while the D-stem "immer den Nebenbegriff der eifrigen beabsichtigen, mit Mühe und Sorgfalt verbundenen Thätigkeit hat, welcher dem eigentlichen Kausativum stets fehlt".¹⁴

The acceptance of this hypothesis as a universal principle of the Semitic languages would demand, of course, that in such a case as Ar. *kaṭṭara-ʾakṭara* such a distinction was originally present but was later lost. A more likely alternative explanation would be that, if Hebrew can be shown consistently to reflect this distinction between Stems II and IV, this represents a specialized development in that one language. Yet, thirty years after Porges wrote, and throughout subsequent editions of his *Grundriss*

⁹ A. Götze, "The So-Called Intensive of the Semitic Languages", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 62 (1942), 12ff.

¹⁰ S. de Sacy, *Grammaire Arabe*, 2 vol. (Paris, 1831), 130-132.

¹¹ A. P. Caussin de Perceval, *Grammaire Arabe Vulgaire* (Paris, 1833), 39.

¹² J. Fürst, *Lehrgebäude der aramäischen Idiome* (Leipzig, 1835), 126.

¹³ N. Porges, *Über die Verbalstamm-bildung in den semitischen Sprachen* (Vienna, 1875), 45.

¹⁴ Porges, *Über die Verbalstamm-bildung*, 45.

der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, Brockelmann maintained that: “Diese Bemühung um das Zustandekommen einer Handlung führt ... oft zur kausativen Bedeutung, der aber meist noch der Nebensinn der Sorge und des Eifers anhaftet”.¹⁵ The example he cites is, once more, *giddēl-higdīl*. König posits a similar link between the causative and ‘intensive’ meanings of the D-stem, but defines this link more appropriately as “Steigerung einer Handlung ... welche soweit gehen kann, dass Andere unter die Einwirkung der vom Qaṭal bezeichneten Handlung gerathen oder zur Versetzung in dem vom Qaṭal bezeichneten Zustand veranlasst oder als mit demselben behaftet erscheinen”.¹⁶ He then goes on to distinguish between Stem II (‘directly causative’) and Stem IV (‘indirectly causative’). In the latter a middleman would be brought to the state or action indicated by Stem I, while in the former the state or action is itself brought to realization. Presumably he would have regarded an example such as *yillēd-hōlīd* as appropriate to his contention.

Nevertheless, any such link between ‘intensivity’ (arising from the iterative) and causation fails to satisfy in two respects. First, it demands that a long list of apparent exceptions be regarded as resulting from some weakening in the force of the form. Second, it does not account for the existence of other categories of D-stems, notably denominatives and factitives (which sometimes have a transitive meaning but sometimes do not) and cursives. Yet the basic weakness of the argument, the reason that we must regard it as an artificial, ex post facto line of reasoning, is that it begins with the origins of meanings rather than with the origins of the form. Aware that difference in form implies a difference of function, yet aware also that a diversity of functions seem to be associated with the D-stem, as reflected in the ‘meanings’ of some D-stems in various Semitic languages, solutions such as those just cited attempt to find a link between these functions, not by analysis of the original form of the D-stem in an attempt to determine how it might have served as the basis or vehicle for the development of these later functions, but by a kind of verbal rationalization based on the effort to find a lowest common denominator of ‘meaning’, a common denominator which has in fact been too often drawn from the meanings as translated into the Indo-European languages. This method seeks to impose upon the D-stem a type of semantic uniformity which it in fact lacks, and the lack of which is inevitably reflected in the qualifications expressed or exceptions noted in such accounts. Form-analysis, however, may turn out to reveal a common structural element within this diversity of functions which will reveal these functions as being mutually consistent, though not necessarily mutually dependent or engendered by the same process of development. We may indeed find that, as Nyberg remarked in a different context, “in der Reduplikation des Stammes nur das Bildungsprinzip ursemitisch ist”.¹⁷

¹⁵ C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (Berlin, 1908), 508.

¹⁶ E. König, *Historisches-Kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1895), 186.

¹⁷ H. S. Nyberg, “Zur Entwicklung der mehr als dreikonsonantischen Stämme in den semitischen Sprachen”, in *Westöstliche Abhandlungen R. Tschudi*, ed. Meier (Wiesbaden, 1954), 129.

In Chapter II we shall attempt to analyze this principle of construction and to relate it to the meanings which have developed around it. Presently, however, we are concerned with those Semitists who have sought to approach the D-stem from a fresh viewpoint, who have indeed sought, not a synthesis of apparently inconsistent 'meanings' but a linguistically viable explanation which as Christian demands, "muss an die Entstehung der Form anknüpfen".¹⁸ It is significant that all three of the scholars whom we shall cite here, Poebel, Götze and von Soden, are specialists in Akkadian. Not only are Akkadian studies a comparatively recent phenomenon, less bound by traditional scholarship; in addition Akkadian texts from the start have received only objective analysis, since unlike the Hebrew and Arabic texts which provided the material for early Semitic grammar, they possess no sacred status for their interpreters, nor has the 'meaning' of the texts necessarily been the over-riding consideration in linguistic study of them.

Poebel seems to have been the first to deny in any systematic way the intensive meaning of the D-stem, yet he came to a conclusion already suggested by Sibawaihi but later rejected by Götze and von Soden when he wrote, "... there cannot obtain the slightest doubt that the function of the pi'el is to express not the idea of intensity but that of plurality".¹⁹ He then goes on to posit, as did Bauer and Leander,²⁰ a proto-Semitic doubling of the entire root, the plurality of which indicates to him a plurality of action as well. He goes on to buttress this hypothesis by an appeal to the nomina professionis, which he sees as representing men who repeatedly perform the action denoted by the stem. This part of his statement applies, however, only to verbs which are originally transitive in the Qal and remain transitive in the D-stem. He continues, in an effort to explain those D-stems which do not fulfill both conditions, by describing as a second function of the stem that of giving a 'transitive-causative' meaning to intransitive B-stems. He believes that there was in proto-Semitic a transitive and intransitive *Qal* theme of each verb, each having a corresponding (but distinctively vocalized) *Pi'el*, but that the intransitive *Pi'el* then dropped out, so that the transitive *Pi'el* (which already was serving the 'pluralic' function for transitive B-stems) was forced to serve also as the causative for the intransitive B-stems. Thus, in his scheme ...

	<i>Qal</i>	<i>Pi'el</i>		<i>Qal</i>	<i>Pi'el</i>
Trans.	<i>qatal</i>	<i>qattal</i>	became	<i>qatal</i>	<i>qattal</i>
Intr.	<i>qatil</i>	<i>qattil</i>		<i>qatil</i>	

Such a formulation, of course, does nothing to explain the origin of the gemination in 'causative' D-stems. In effect, it solves the problem of establishing a link between intensive and causative by denying that such a link existed in the early stages of the

¹⁸ V. Christian, "Zur inneren Passivbildung im Semitischen", in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 42 (1935), 267.

¹⁹ A. Poebel, *Studies in Akkadian Grammar* (Chicago, 1939).

²⁰ Bauer and Leander, *Historische Grammatik*.

Semitic languages, and attributes the apparent link to orthographic similarity and combination of forms. Insofar as it raises the possibility that there is no need to reconcile the variant functions of the D-stem semantically, that *qattala* is in fact a 'portmanteau' form, Poebel's hypothesis represents a useful departure from the work of earlier Semitists, even though his execution of it may well seem arbitrary and confusing to the reader.

Götze's article, "The So-Called Intensive of the Semitic Languages",²¹ was the first serious effort to reconstruct the original significance of the D-stem on the basis of forms actually occurring in a Semitic language, in this case Akkadian, and on the basis of morphology rather than semantics. He reaches conclusions which he feels may well be applicable to the West Semitic languages as well as to Akkadian, on the tacit assumption that the grammar of proto-Semitic is likely to have been better preserved in Akkadian than in its western counterparts. The notion of 'intensity' he rejects outright, at least as regards Akkadian. In his view the primary force of the D-stem is that of a denominative-factitive formation. In Akkadian, he holds, this stem was derived from and parallel to the stative verbs, which were themselves basically nominal forms; and it stands in a more or less causative relationship to these forms.

There are three types of stative verbs.²²

(1) The Durative Stative, which "denotes an inherent quality of a person or things", e.g. *ṭāb* 'is good'. This is "identical with the predicative form of the adjective".

(2) The Perfect Stative, which "denotes a condition which results from the subject's own action with reference to a person or thing", e.g. *aḥiz* 'holds' or *lamid* 'has learnt'. The object which the subject 'has' or 'holds' is invariably indicated. This category may also incorporate some intransitive verbs, in which case it "denotes the rest after movement", e.g. *wašib* 'is seated'.

(3) The Passive Stative, which "denotes a state of affairs which results from another person's action, but the agent remains unspecified. This type always goes with transitive verbs; one may call it a passive participle in predicative use", e.g. *aḥiz* 'is held' and *walid* 'is born'.

For each of these there is a corresponding D-stem formation.

(1) Durative, i.e. "put a person or thing in the condition which the stative indicates" e.g. *ṭubbum* 'make good'.

(2) Perfect, i.e. "make somebody have something", e.g. *lummudum* 'make somebody instructed, teach' or *zuzzum* 'make somebody divide'.

(3) Passive, i.e. "put a person or thing in the state which the stative describes", e.g. *uḥḥuzum* 'make something fitted (held)' or *zuzzum* 'make divided'.

²¹ Götze, "The So-Called Intensive".

²² Götze, "The So-Called Intensive".