Nominal Morphology

5.1 The qå̄ṭōl (כַּמֶּל) Nominal Pattern (for the nomen agentis)

Among the many substantives in Hebrew with the qå̄ṭōl pattern, one group that stands out semantically, morphologically, and phonologically is the nominal template qå̄ṭōl for marking the nomen agentis. Semantically, nouns in this pattern typically refer to an occupation or some other persistent characteristic. Morphologically, the plural forms of nouns in this pattern take נ- rather than י-, even in the masculine. Phonologically, the initial å̄ vowel in nouns of this type—against the norm in Hebrew—is preserved as a full vowel even when, due to the addition of a plural or feminine suffix, it is more than one syllable distant from the primary word stress. The origin, etymology, and date of development of the pattern within Hebrew are all disputed issues.

5.1.1 The mt

There is some debate among scholars concerning which words—biblical and otherwise—belong to the category in question. For purposes of the discussion here forms included must (a) have a first root letter vocalized with qamas.

1 More common biblical nominal patterns with the same meaning include the participle of the various active binyanim and qattål.


3 Avineri (1976: 344–345), who holds that the nominal pattern in question can also refer to 'instruments', considers אֲרוֹן 'chest, ark' a member of the class, despite the vocalization of the first syllable (see also Segal 1936: §114; JM §88Ea). Bar-Asher (1977: 96, n. 76) gives a convincing argument against including instruments, which would also apply to נְקָצַּת 'horn, trumpet' (Ezek 7.14). The amended form שָׁדוֹדָה 'destroyer' (Ps 137.8), replacing the apparently passive שְׁדוּדָה, has also been proposed as a member of this class. Indeed, the context would seem to call for an active, rather than passive form. Be that as it may, active meanings are not unknown in the case of pâ‘ūl (כַּמֶּל) forms; cf. רֵיחַ נַפְס 'and familiar with disease' (Isa 53:3), רֵיחַ נַפְס 'wielders of swords' (Song 3.8), and נְפָזָר (כַּמֶּל) 'he remembers that we are dust' (Ps 103:14); cf. such English forms as learned, experienced, and drunk. Since the vocalization as it stands is admissible, it seems preferable to avoid emendation.
and (b) refer semantically to a vocation or persistent attribute. Along with the suggested qāṭōl form, its meaning, and references, the following list includes classical alternatives:

1. ‘artisan, craftsman’ (Jer 52.15; Prov 8.30) ≈ אָמוֹן (Exod 28.11), שֶׁחָרָ (1 Kgs 7.14), שֶׁחָרֵ (1 Kgs 9.27), and חֹשֵׁב (Isa 40.20); הָבְזָ מ ‘traitress’ (Jer 3.7, 10) ≈ בָּחוֹן (Jer 3.8, 11); חָכָם (Exod 40.20), שֶׁחָרָ (Exod 28.11), שֶׁחָרֵ (1 Kgs 7.14), יֹדֵעַ (1 Kgs 9.27), and בָּגוֹדָה ‘traitress’ (Jer 3.7, 10) ≈ בֹּגֵדָה (Jer 3.8, 11); בָּחוֹן ‘assayer’ (Jer 6.27) ≈ בֹּחֵן (Jer 11.20; 17.10; 20.12; Ps 7.10; Prov 17.3; 1 Chr 29.17);7 חָלוֹם ‘*dreamer’ (Jer 27.9; 29.8; Zech 10.2 [?]) ≈ חוֹלֵם (Deut 13.5–6), חֲלוֹמוֹת בַּעַל (Gen 37.19); חָמוֹץ ‘oppressor’ (Isa 1.17) ≈ חוֹמֵץ (Ps 73.21); חָמוֹץ ‘oppressor’ (Ps 124.7; Jer 5.26; Ps 71.3; Prov 6.5);9 שׁוֹ יָק ‘fowler’ (Hos 9.8) ≈ שׁיֹק (Ps 124.7), שׁיֹק (Jer 5.26; Ps 71.3; Prov 6.5);10 עָכוֹר ‘troubler’ (Josh 7.24–26)11 ≈ עָכָר (1 Chr 2.7);ACHI. 4 Cf. אָמָּן ‘artisan’ (Song 7.2). Textual debate attaches to the form in Jer 52.15 (cf. 2 Kgs 25.11 and Jer 39.9) and semantic debate to that in Prov 8.30. There are several potential early synonyms, especially שׁוֹ יָק .

5 The verse is difficult. Arguably, the most attractive interpretation assumes a double entendre, according to which בָּחוֹן should be understood to denote both ‘assayer’ and ‘tower’; see Qimhi; Avravanel; Bula 1983: 87; Kaddari 2006: 94a.

7 All purported cases are disputed, though a form referring to an occupation ‘dreamer’ is arguably more appropriate in each case than a form referring to ‘dream’. This seems especially true of the two cases in Jeremiah, where both the immediate context and the literary dependence on Deut 13.2–6 seem to call for reference to a dreamer. The נָל - plural ending is also thus explained. Many ancient and modern interpreters render accordingly. The loss of a full vowel with the first root letter is to be explained (with Bar-Asher 1992: 660, n. 13) as a result of “quantitative dissimilation,” according to which הָלָמָּ֨ מֶ֨קֶמ  > הָלָּ֨ מֶ֨קֶמ due to the sequence of multiple long vowels. Bar-Asher compares the form צֵדְנִיּוֹת ‘Sidonian women’ (1 Kgs 11.1), which he opines has the form שְׁדָּנָּ֨ יַ֪֨֨ יַ֪֨ ֨וֹת rather than שְׁדָּנָּ֨ יַ֪֨ יַ֪֨ ֨וֹת for the same reason.

8 The verse is difficult in part because of the verb דָּשָּא, which is taken variously. Some take כָּמַּה as a passive, ‘oppressed,’ as if it should have been vocalized כָּמַּהוֹ, but see above n. 3.

9 Based on the qatât form of this verb, e.g., כָּנֵי, ‘I have set a trap’ (Jer 50.24), which preserves the pa‘al pattern, it is not impossible that the apparent qāṭōl form in question is in reality the participle/verbal adjective of the pa‘al form.

10 The active force of קָשָׁ ‘fowler’ is admittedly unexpected, but see above, n. 3.

11 The relevance of this form, a toponym, is somewhat doubtful. The place name is explained in Josh 7.24 in a wordplay involving the personal name כַּפָּ ‘Achan’ and the verb כָּר ‘to trouble’. The same individual is referred to as כָּר עָכָר תַּנְאֵר ‘Achar the troubler of Israel’ in 1 Chr 2.7. It seems farfetched to construe the etiological explanation of a toponym as evidence for the early use of the qāṭōl pattern to mark the nomen agentis. However, it is not out of the question that a late writer, such as the Chronicler, may have interpreted a name like כָּר עָכָר as just such a form, though this is admittedly unnecessary for the wordplay in question.