‘LATE’ COMMON NOUNS IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

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1. Introduction

Previously I surveyed the books of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles with reference to the chronology of biblical Hebrew. I looked generally at presuppositions and methodology and I examined specifically fifteen linguistic features of these books for which the conventional diachronic explanation is inadequate. Additionally I offered preliminary observations on the vocabulary of Chronicles. Here I will give the data which support my earlier observations and also offer additional thoughts on the use of vocabulary for dating BH (‘Biblical Hebrew’) texts. The main conclusions of this essay are: (1) Chronicles ‘late’ common nouns amount to a trivial percentage of the book’s total vocabulary. (2) Chronicles ‘late’ common nouns rarely substitute for ‘early’ counterparts. In contrast, Chronicles shows a fusion of (mostly) ‘early’ and (occasionally) ‘late’ vocabulary. (3) Chronicles’ ‘late’ common nouns are seldom late absolutely as shown by extra-biblical attestation. For example, Chronicles’ ‘late’ μυτλχμ is attested in ‘early’ Ugaritic μςλθμ. (4) Chronicles’ ‘late’ common nouns are habitually explainable by recourse to non-chronological interpretations. Backed by text-critical evidence and/or literary analysis, many occurrences of ‘late’ words in Chronicles can be shown to be orderly and purposeful rather than haphazard and inescapable.

Rather than belabour again certain reservations about diachronic lexicographical analysis of BH, I begin by briefly discussing several...
important issues. First, common nouns are the most productive part of speech in BH which has over 3,000 unique common nouns with 100,000 plus total occurrences. Also, Chronicles is the main source for LBH (‘Late Biblical Hebrew’), making up about half of the undisputed LBH corpus. Therefore, by coming to grips with the body of common nouns in Chronicles we will have a good understanding of the vocabulary of a ‘late’ book and of LBH. Turning to numbers, Chronicles has some 700 unique common nouns with about 8,000 total occurrences. Of these, 91 of 700 are absent from the Pentateuch and Former Prophets. These are the main focus of this essay. Genesis–Kings as an initial point of comparison may seem arbitrary, but regardless of one’s view on the composition of these books, scholars characterise their language as EBH (‘Early Biblical Hebrew’ = CBH [‘Classical . . .’]/SBH [‘Standard . . .’]), rather than the LBH of Esther–Chronicles and other books. Here I will also explore several verb forms used as substantives, some common noun phrases and proper names, and alleged cases of semantic development among the 600 common nouns which are found in Genesis–Kings and Chronicles.

Second, besides bringing the data together in one place, another objective is to practically evaluate two of the three methodological criteria which Avi Hurvitz uses for identifying ‘late’ texts. Here I am concerned with the principles of (1) frequency, concentration or accumulation and (2) contrast or opposition. How prevalent is ‘late’ vocabulary in Chronicles and how different is it to EBH vocabulary? Hurvitz’s third principle, external sources or extra-biblical attestation, is not my concern here. My discussions are neither comprehensive nor intended to replace lexica and other LBH resources. On one hand, space keeps me from giving extra-biblical data related to over a hundred lexical items. On the other hand, Ian Young and

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between EBH and LBH, and the factors affecting a language’s lexicon, especially random attestation in written language. In the earlier essay I also broadly addressed significant problems in research on Samuel–Kings and Chronicles: generalised impressions rather than comprehensive investigations, unwarranted literary assumptions, and explanations restricted to chronology and authorship when equal weight should be given to non-chronological and editorial and scribal factors. See Rezetko, ‘Dating Biblical Hebrew’, pp. 238–49.

5 I mention Hurvitz because he is the most significant scholar of LBH. However, others have adopted his methodology (e.g., Bergey, Rooker).