TERMINOLOGICAL MODIFICATIONS IN BIBLICAL GENEALOGICAL RECORDS AND THEIR POTENTIAL CHRONOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Avi Hurvitz

I. The Problem

It is widely recognized in biblical scholarship that in the wake of the Jewish exiles' return to Zion after the Babylonian captivity, they developed a profound interest in pedigree and genealogies, which became a distinctive hallmark of Second Temple period literature. Documentary evidence proving national and religious affiliation within the newly reestablished Jewish community in Palestine was of paramount importance in those formative years. Hence the wealth of genealogical lists and records included in the later sections of the Old Testament (first and foremost in the book of Chronicles).

An open, still intensely debated question in this connection concerns whether and to what extent we are able to identify within biblical literature genuinely ancient documents pertaining to ancestry and familial-tribal lineage; that is, texts based on authentic First Temple records. Particularly controversial in this regard are the Priestly-oriented genealogical materials contained in the Pentateuch,¹ which many scholars tend to date—together with the Priestly source² in which these texts are incorporated—to the exilic/postexilic era. According to the scheme suggested by these scholars, then, the entire corpus of Priestly texts preserved in the Pentateuch, and similar material in the book of Joshua that pertains to genealogical ties and connections, ought to be regarded as products of “postexilic Judaism.” This chronological issue has been discussed extensively over the years from various perspectives, mainly literary, theological, and historical. Unfortunately, however, the linguistic-philological aspect

¹ Some genealogically related material—e.g., descriptions of the borders of the tribal allotments—is to be found in the book of Joshua as well.
² The exact label employed (e.g., “Source,” “Document,” “Code”) and the specific assumptions adopted in regard to the literary and theological nature of P are of no consequence for the present discussion. The only issue that matters in this connection is that the biblical writings here under examination be recognized as having been handed down to us by Priestly writers. Cf. also n. 25 below.
has been largely neglected, though technical terms and expressions—unlike literary idioms—may often yield very helpful information for purposes of dating.\(^3\)

It is precisely to this question that the following presentation is addressed. I will examine the diachronic status of three idioms current in the distinctive vocabulary of the biblical genealogical registers and similar material:

1. Derivations of the root שִׂיחי “register; be genealogically registered; genealogical record”;
2. The age formula הִלְמַעְלָה . . . מ “from . . . and upwards/and beyond”;
3. The forms of the 3mp possessive suffix of the word אֲבָהָה in the idiom בֵּית־אֲבָהָה/אֲבֹתֵיהֶם “their fathers’ house” (=“their family, clan”).

Once the linguistic nature of each of these idioms has been established, I will proceed to utilize their collective evidence as a possible chronological marker which may indicate the historical age of the texts in which they are embedded.\(^4\)

II. THE LINGUISTIC DATA

A. The Root שִׂיחי\(^5\)

1) Late Biblical Hebrew

1 Chr 7:30–40 versus Num 26:44–47


\(^4\) All three examples to be examined here have already been discussed elsewhere in previous studies that deal with the language of \(P\) as a whole (cf. n. 3 above). Note, however, that in the present investigation our analysis is focused specifically and exclusively on the genealogical records embedded in \(P\) and related material from Joshua. From a typological standpoint, these records constitute a well-defined body of texts worthy of individual analysis, regardless of the literary framework into which these genealogical and genealogically oriented materials have been incorporated.

\(^5\) An earlier version of the following discussion may be found in Hurvitz, “Evidence of Language,” 26–29. Note that, unless otherwise specified, the English translations of the Bible presented here are from the Revised Standard Version.