Controversy is not something new to the study of the Classical Hebrew language or the translation and exegesis of the Old Testament. It would be difficult to find any subject in those areas of study that has not been a matter of dispute. In this article, however, I shall focus attention on just one subject that is a matter of controversy at the present time: the use of Semitic languages other than Hebrew in Classical Hebrew lexicography.

It has long been customary in lexicons of Biblical Hebrew to compare cognates in other Semitic languages. The practice is continued in such important works as the *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, begun by Walter Baumgartner and completed under the editorship of J.J. Stamm. It is also found in the current edition by Herbert Donner of the lexicon begun long ago by Wilhelm Gesenius. Yet this familiar aspect of Classical Hebrew dictionaries has recently been challenged—challenged by omission and also by explicit argument.

The Spanish dictionary of Biblical Hebrew, edited by Luis Alonso Schökel, which started to appear in 1990, does not record cognates. Nor does the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, edited by David Clines in Sheffield, of which the first two volumes have been published. In his introduction to volume 1, Clines has given reasons why comparative material has not been included. This is plainly a live issue in current Classical Hebrew lexicography.

Readers will, I hope, bear with me when I mention that there is a personal aspect to this controversy as far as I am concerned—personal and, indeed, autobiographical. I was a pupil of G.R. Driver—later Sir Godfrey Driver—the Professor of Semitic Philology at Oxford University. In my first term at Oxford, I heard him read a fascinating paper about new ideas for the translation of the Hebrew Bible, new ideas that were later to appear in the *New English Bible*. Three years later, I started to read for the Final Honour School of Oriental Studies, and I was delighted to sit at Driver’s feet, excited by every lecture of his that I heard.

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1 This expanded version of the Presidential address at the Congress (*Ed. Note:* IOSOT Congress, Cambridge, 1995) also served as the basis of a lecture to the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities on 3 June 1996.
Driver often pointed out that the number of words attested in the Hebrew Bible is not large enough to include all the words that must have been in use in ancient Israel. That is obviously true. He also pointed out that there are a number of rare words, even *hapax legomena*, which may have been in common use at the time. He maintained that a valuable clue to their meaning was to be found in other Semitic languages. Further, some passages in the Hebrew Bible that had been thought to be textually corrupt might be explained with the help of the same method.

This approach to Hebrew lexicography was, of course, not new. It had its origin partly in the work of medieval Jewish scholars, who spoke Arabic in everyday life and used it to explain the meanings of some Hebrew words. In later centuries, scholars made comparable suggestions along comparable lines. In the 18th century, for example, J.D. Michaelis in Göttingen made many suggestions about Hebrew lexicography in the light of the Semitic languages known to him. Some of the results appear in his translation of the Bible into German. In the following century, Wilhelm Gesenius made use of cognate languages in his substantial contributions to Hebrew lexicography.

At this point it is necessary to make a distinction between two uses of cognate languages which, however, overlap at times. We must think, not only of the use of cognate languages to discover supposed lost meanings of words, but also of their use in giving an account of the etymology of words of known meaning. It is, of course, common for scholarly dictionaries to say something about the etymology of the words that they record.2

To return to the subject of my student days at Oxford, Driver was not the only person to make use of other Semitic languages in his study of Hebrew. Another of my teachers was Chaim Rabin, whose illness and recent death are a source of sadness to all who knew him. While his main teaching duty in Oxford was to lecture on Mishnaic and Medieval Hebrew, he frequently spoke and wrote about Classical Hebrew in the light of possible cognates.

But there was another side to the picture. The Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford was Herbert Danby, and to him I also owe much. His approach was strikingly different. His way of dealing with the Hebrew Bible was to seek to make sense of the text on the basis of well-attested and generally-accepted meanings. On one occasion, he asked me to translate a verse of Hebrew, and he seemed impatient when I rashly ventured to say that I understood that a meaning for a particular word had been suggested other than the usual meaning. His exegesis was based on a careful grammatical study of the text; and it

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2 Barr ("Hebrew Lexicography", p. 112) has pointed out that the word "etymology" is used in several different senses, but it seems unnecessary to go into details for the present purpose.