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A COMPOUND ETYMOLOGY FOR BIBLICAL HEBREW ‘EXCEPT’

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This paper suggests an alternative derivation for the Biblical Hebrew preposition זulṭי ‘except’. It does not derive from an alleged verbal root ZWL, but is rather to be compared with Akkadian ša lā and Aramaic dī lā with the same meaning and thus originates from the fusing of three elements: the West Semitic relative particle *dū, the Semitic negative particle *lā, and the pronominal morpheme *-tī. This derivation has better comparative Semitic support than the traditional derivation; it also accounts for a large number of instances of the problematic hireq compaginis.

The Biblical Hebrew preposition זולת ‘except’ is usually derived from an alleged root cognate with the Arabic verb zāla, plus a hireq compaginis. While this etymology is possible, it does not explain the exotic morphology of the form, and it lacks solid comparative evidence. Instead, we argue that זולת is a compound of three elements: the inherited West Semitic relative particle *dū, the common Semitic negative particle *lā, and the oblique pronominal morpheme *-tī. Thus, זולת is cognate with Akkadian ša lā and Aramaic dī lā and is a relic of the Semitic *dū lā su’ātī construction found in Akkadian. Our derivation has the added benefit of eliminating many examples of the hireq compaginis from the biblical corpus.

1. PREVIOUS SUGGESTIONS

Many verbal etymologies have been proposed for זולת. Gesenius and Buhl, for example, link it with the Arabic verb zāla ‘to cease, to remove’ and cite Isa 46:6 as evidence that this verb existed in Biblical Hebrew: הזלים זהוב מכסים וישכוב בכסים י avaliação ‘The ones who lavish (?) gold from the purse and weigh silver in the scale’.1 Klein, on the other hand, reconstructs a Proto-
Central Semitic root ZWL ‘to waste, lavish’ on the basis of Arabic zāla and Jewish Aramaic ZWL ‘to be worthless, cheap’, which he relates to Hebrew צול ‘to despise’. In this regard, he seems to subscribe to the “biliteral theory” of Semitic roots, which has fallen into disfavor. Finally, in The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Arabic zāla is avoided altogether; the entry on צול only refers to the two Aramaic roots and the verse from Isaiah.

These verbal derivations of צול require too many semantic changes and do not adequately explain the unusual morphology of the form. Indeed, it is doubtful that any subset of Arabic zāla, Hebrew צול, Jewish Aramaic ZWL, and Egyptian Aramaic ZWL are related to each other. Any connection between ‘removing’, ‘lavishing’, ‘being worthless’, and ‘selling’ seems forced: only an unscrupulous vendor would sell worthless merchandise, nor can absent goods be lavished. Even a derivation from an alleged Hebrew root cognate with Arabic zāla alone is questionable. While the semantic expansion “cessation, removal” > “except” is not impossible—especially in light of the Akkadian preposition ezib / ezub ‘apart’, which comes from the masculine singular imperative of ezēbum ‘to leave’—a verbal etymology does not explain the final -î of צול. Instead, proponents of this theory simply label it a hireq compaginis, lumping it in with other unexplained phenomena. As will be shown below, a compound derivation has the benefit of more reasonable comparative evidence and can better explain the morphology of this form.

2. A NEW PROPOSAL

With a little squinting, it is not hard to imagine that צול contains the relative pronoun וה and the negative particle לות plus an extra element in -ת, which looks suspiciously like the oblique -ת found elsewhere in Semitic. In this section, we will examine each component in turn and bring the components and development of this form into sharper focus.

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3 Proponents of the biliteral theory argue that Proto-Semitic contained a class of biconsonantal verbal roots, which could be semantically modified by the addition of monoconsonantal infixes and affixes. This theory founders on the near absence of biliteral roots in Proto-Semitic—the I–w a-i class of verbs is the only exception—and the difficulty of assigning meaning to single consonants.
5 For a similar construction in English, compare the use of “never mind” in the sentence: “They’ve got popcorn, peanuts—never mind the cotton candy.”
The relative pronoun וּז appears fifteen times in the Hebrew Bible and is a reflex of the Proto-West Semitic relative pronoun *dū. It is cognate with other West Semitic relatives in z, d, and d, such as:

Ge'ez: ms za-
Modern South Arabian: ms d / d
Sayyaditic: ms d, fs dt
Classical Arabic: ʾaladdī, dū, dī
Ugaritic ms d- (nom. /dū/), fs dt-, pl dt
Aramaic: zy, dī, d(ə)-
early Byblian Phoenician: z

The West Semitic relative originally inflected for gender, number, and case, like the Arabic demonstrative pronoun dū.6 The loss of case distinction in nouns in Pre-Hebrew, however, eliminated the need for case distinction in the relative pronoun. Over time, the nominative masculine singular was generalized in most forms of the language.7 A similar process took place in Aramaic and Ethiopic, but there the genitive and accusative forms were generalized, respectively. In Hebrew, the noun *’atar- ‘place’ was grammaticalized as a locative relative conjunction and then as a relative pronoun, which eventually displaced ו and ז in most environments. In some dialects, grammaticalization was carried one step further: phonological reduction accompanied semantic bleaching, yielding the short form ו.

Hebrew ו is also cognate with the Akkadian relative ša, which is itself a remnant of a fuller paradigm. In Old Akkadian, the relative pronoun inflected for gender, number, and case, for example, ms nom. tū, mp nom. tūt, etc.8 The mismatch between the initial consonants across the branches is the result of an ad hoc sound change in either East or West Semitic. Either de-

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7 The use of the demonstrative ז as a relative pronoun probably reflects the old genitive form in Exod 13:8; Ps 74:2; 78:54; 104:8; 26; Prov 23:22; Job 15:17; 19:9. It is also used to form nominalizations in the expression inequalities ז the one of Sinai’ (Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9).

voicing occurred in East Semitic or voicing took place in West Semitic. For the purposes of our argument, which form is original is a moot question; what matters is that the first syllable of זָלָתִי matches the form of the West Semitic relative that survived in Biblical Hebrew.

阿富 is the standard negative particle in Biblical Hebrew and negates indicative verbs, prepositional phrases, and nouns. It is distinguished from cognate particles by a final aleph. This aleph, however, is probably not etymological, but rather a graphic device used for monosyllabic words that were not cliticized (cf. Hebrew阿富 and Samalian <W> ‘and’ and <P> ‘then’) or an early vowel letter for /ō/.  Other languages lack an aleph altogether or omit the aleph in certain compounds. In Ugaritic, Old Aramaic, and the Deir ‘Allā inscription, the negative is a clitic and takes the form <l>. Although all later dialects of Aramaic use <l> as the standard negative particle, compound forms in these languages, like Common Aramaic lyt < *lā (<l)>it and Nabatean <LW> (< *lā hū ’), lack an aleph because they formed before the introduction of the regular use of aleph for final -ā.  In Classical Arabic, the alif serves as a vowel letter for /ā/ in לֹא but disappears in composite forms such as לֹא < *lā ’ an. Taken together, the comparative evidence suggests that the Pre-Canaanite ancestor of阿富 was *lā.  Thus, זָלָתִי can contain לֹא as long as it crystallized as a compound before the advent of Hebrew as a written language. As we will argue below, the genesis of זָלָתִי occurred before the Canaanite shift, well before the emergence of written Hebrew.

The Hebrew negative particle阿富 reflects the Cannanite shift, while זָלָתִי does not. It must come from *dū-la-īn rather than *dū-la-īn; otherwise the Canaanite shift would have produced **zūlōtī. For this reason, we suspect that the addition of –īn triggered a shortening of *ā to *a in阿富 before the operation of the Canaanite shift. There are other examples from Central Semitic where the inherited negative particle לֹא shortens to la in compounds, all of which involve the addition of morphological material after the negation. Arabic attests lammā ‘not yet’ and lam ‘not’ from *lā + m(ā). Along
similar lines, Pat-El has argued that the Hebrew form לָמָה disguises two different words—the interrogative *la-mā and a negative purpose subordinator *lā-mā—that have fallen together phonologically. In certain contexts, an interrogative meaning for lāmā seems out of place. For example, when Abner is running from Asahel, he states: ‘Turn away from following me lest I strike you to the ground’ (2 Sam 2:22). A hardened warrior like Abner would probably not question the necessity of killing his opponent. The negative existential particle layt / lēt in later Aramaic also attests to a contraction < *lā *i(t (cf. also Arabic laysa) as does the Syriac counterfactual conditional law, which Nöldeke derives from *lā hū.

The combination of the inherited relative and lā appears in Akkadian and Aramaic, both meaning “without, except,” while a similar combination of dū and bal appears in Ugaritic and Soqotri (Modern South Arabian). This construction is used to negate nouns and infinitives. Both Akkadian dictionaries gloss ša lā ‘without’. Note the following example in an early Old Babylonian letter:

\[
\text{ina dabābim ša lā idīm libbum lā uštamraš}
\]

the mind should not be troubled by an unfounded report (lit., a report without knowledge).

Several centuries later, Rib-Addi, the ruler of Byblos, complains to the Pharaoh Akhenaten:

\[
eqlu-ya aššata ša lā muta mašil
\]

my field is like a wife without a husband.

This construction enjoyed an equally long lifespan in Aramaic. An early example appears in the book of Ezra, partly written in Imperial Aramaic:

\[
\]

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whatever is needed...let it be given to them day by day without negligence (Ezra 6:9)

Later examples crop up in Syriac, Jewish Babylonian Armaic, Palmyrene, and Christian Palestinian Aramaic, where the two individual morphemes have fused into a compound, *dlā*.

The Ugaritic reflex of this construction negates infinitives. In the Kirta Epic, the god El instructs the eponymous hero to marshal, for his campaign to *udm*,

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hpt. dbl. spr ‘soldiers without (= beyond) counting’
thn. dbl. hg ‘archers without (= beyond) reckoning’.19
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A cognate of the Ugaritic construction appears in the Modern South Arabian language Soqotri. Here, *di-ból* ‘without’ negates nouns: *di-ból šī wa-di-ból qāymeḥ* ‘without a thing and without value’ (cf. Exod 21:11). Apart from the final -*tī*, Akkadian *ša lā* and Aramaic *dī-lā* can be seen as cognate to יַעֲלֵי, while the Ugaritic and Soqotri forms are cognate with lexical replacement.

Akkadian also suggests a potential origin for the -*tī* of יַעֲלֵי. In this language, the combination of the relative pronoun and *lā* can negate the oblique personal pronouns, which end in -*tī*, as in Akkadian *ša lā kātī* ‘without/except for you’. There is reason to believe that this construction was either Proto-Semitic or easily replicable in individual languages with the operation of identical grammatical rules. As Pat-El argues, the relative pronoun is equivalent to the head noun in a construct chain and thus conditions the genitive. The negative particle, in turn, cannot take a pronominal suffix and so must be followed by an oblique pronoun. The end result is a sequence consisting of a relative, negative particle and pronoun: in West Semitic, *dū lā hu’ātti*. Such a construction would have provided the ideal environment for the creation of the form יַעֲלֵי. The -*tī* of the oblique pronoun was, we suggest, clipped and transferred to the negative particle as well: *dū lā*

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huʾātī > *ðū-la-tī huʾātī. Then the resulting compound was reanalyzed as a new preposition.

Of course, the oblique pronouns must have survived long enough for this clipping to take place in an ancestor of Hebrew. But the oblique pronouns and, more abstractly, the oblique morpheme -tī have a long history in the Semitic family and appear even further afield in Afro-Asiatic.

West Semitic, however, only attests the 3rd person pronouns and a limited number of demonstrative, interrogative, and adverbial elements, which vary by language. The distribution of these forms is as follows:

Akkadian and Eblaite: šuāti, šunūti, etc.
Geʾez: 3ms woʾātu, 3fs yoʾātī, 3mp ʾamuntu; cf. ms zəntu, fs zātī ‘this’, etc.
Tigre: 3ms ħatu, 3fs ħata, 3mp ħatom, 3fp ħatān
Sabaic: 3ms ḥwt, 3fs hyt, 3cd hm(y)t, 3mp hmt, 3fp hnt
Ugaritic: 3ms ħwt, 3fs hyt, 3mp hmt, 3cd hmt
Amarna Canaanite: miyvti ‘who?’
Phoenician: 3ms ḥʾt (Byblian), 3m/fp hmt (standard)

---

23 We prefer clipping over grammaticalization as an explanation for the compounding process because grammaticalization would entail significant phonological reduction: ðū-la-huʾātī > ðū-la-tī.
24 E. Lipiński, Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar (2nd ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), p. 305, mentions Old Egyptian 2ms twt, 2fs tmt, 3ms swt, which A. Loprieno, Ancient Egyptian: A Linguistic Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 67, vocalizes as /čuwati/, /čimati/, and /suwati/; and Agaw ṷat ‘me’, kut ‘you’, and anät ‘us’. The Afro-Asiatic forms are not necessarily cognate with their Semitic counterparts. The Old Egyptian forms mark the nominative case and seem to be derived from the corresponding set of dependent pronouns 2ms tw, 2fs tm, and 3ms sw rather than the possessive suffixes (see note 26).
26 It is unclear whether the 1st and 2nd person forms are an East Semitic innovation or a retention from an earlier, Afro-Asiatic node. Innovation seems more likely. The 1st and 2nd oblique forms could have been derived by analogy to the suffix pronouns in East Semitic (and independently in Egyptian and Agaw?): -ṣu : suʾātī : -ṣya, -ni : X = yāti, niṭtī. And if they were a retention, the loss of the corresponding forms in West Semitic remains unexplained and unmotivated. See J. Huehnergard, “Proto-Semitic and Proto-Akkadian,” in The Akkadian Language in Its Semitic Context: Studies in the Akkadian of the Third and Second Millennium BC (ed. G. Deutscher and N. J. C. Kouwenberg; Leiden: NINO, 2006), pp. 10–11.
27 For Eblaite, see R. Hasselbach, Sargonic Akkadian, p. 149 n. 10.
Unfortunately, most West Semitic examples of these forms appear in unvocalized texts, which makes it difficult to establish sound correspondences across the different branches. Comparative evidence suggests that the pronouns, at least, end in /ī/, but we could be dealing with several different endings. The lack of vocalization is especially problematic, given that early Akkadian exhibits -tī (3ms šuātī, 3fs šiātī), while the Ethio-Semitic languages exhibit a distinction between masculine -tu and feminine -ti, as in 3ms wəʾətu, 3fs yəʾəti. Thus, all unvocalized forms should be treated as only provisionally related to the -tī of זָלָתִי.

We have argued that the -tī of זָלָתִי was clipped from a following oblique pronoun. The exact mechanism for this transfer is unclear, but it seems that adverbs were more likely to incorporate the oblique morpheme than other parts of speech. Apart from pronouns, the morpheme -tī appears most frequently on adverbs. Examples of such forms are:

Geʾez: ḫəfnitu ‘how much?'
Sayhadic: <BLTY> ‘without'
Ugaritic: tmt ‘there', kmt ‘thus', blt ‘without'
Hebrew: בִלְתִי ‘without'
Phoenician: <BLT> ‘without'

28 The 3ms form šuātu is probably secondary, by analogy with 3fs šiātī (see also the next footnote). For these forms, see W. von Soden and W. R. Mayer, Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik (3rd ed.; AnOr 33; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), p. 51.
29 One wonders whether the Ethiopian distinction between masc. -tu and fem. -ti is the result of an ancient (Proto-Ethiopic) analogy like that suggested in the preceding note to account for Akkadian šuātī, namely, an original ms *huātī is replaced by *huātū, with the same vowels in the first and third syllables, on the analogy with the fs counterpart *huātī. The new masc. -tu and fem. -ti would then be extended to other pronominal forms, such as ms zəntu versus fs zətī ‘this'.
32 Occasionally, <Y> serves as a vowel letter for /ī/ in Sayhadic.
33 On enclitic -t in Ugaritic, see J. Tropper, Ugaritische Grammatik, p. 836.
In the case of $\text{dū lā}$ and $\text{bal}$, simple proximity may have been enough since these forms could negate oblique pronouns. But this explanation does not account for adverbs that do not govern pronouns, like Ugaritic $\text{tm}$. Perhaps we may posit a link between the oblique pronouns and the adverbial accusative that facilitated the transfer of $-tī$ to certain adverbs. After all, the oblique pronouns would have marked the accusative at least as often as the genitive, if not more since oblique pronouns could only mark the genitive after prepositions. On nouns, they would be replaced by the suffix pronouns. In this scenario, the final $-tī$ of the oblique pronouns was reanalyzed as an adverbial marker because of its association with the accusative and then transferred to different adverbs individually.

Another possibility is to derive the other adverbs by analogy with $\text{biltī}$ after the breakup of the Central Semitic languages. In this scenario, $*\text{bal hu’ātī}$ was clipped to $\text{baltī} / \text{biltī}$ in Proto-Central Semitic, leaving the following reflexes:

34 Sabaic $<$BLTY>, Ugaritic $\text{blt}$, Hebrew $\text{biltī}$, and perhaps Phoenician $<$BLT$. In all of these languages, the original form $*\text{bal}$ also survived, setting up an analogy that facilitated the transfer of $-tī$ to other adverbs:

$$\text{bal} : \text{biltī} :: \text{dū lā} : X = \text{dū-lā-tī}$$

This analogy may have been especially tempting in the case of $\text{dū lā}$ because the latter construction could negate oblique pronouns. A similar process may account for Ugaritic $\text{kmt}$ ‘thus’, which may derive ultimately from $*\text{kv-mv hu’ātī}$ ‘like it’ = ‘thus’; note that the Akkadian preposition $\text{kīma}$ governs independent oblique pronouns rather than pronominal suffixes, as in $\text{kīma šuāti}$ ‘like him’. If this proposal is correct, then various adverbs could have formed at different times, and $\text{biltī}$ in particular could have formed before the Canaanite shift.

Once the transfer of $-tī$ took place, $\text{biltī}$ was reanalyzed as a new preposition that could be used independently of the oblique pronouns. The forms with suffixes can be accounted for by assuming that 1cs $\text{dū-la-tī-ya} > \text{biltī}$,
that the remaining forms derived by analogy to feminine singular nouns with suffix:

\[
\text{גַלְכָּתִי} : \text{גַלְכָּתְךָ} :: \text{זָולָתִי} = \text{זָולָתְךָ}
\]

This process also facilitated the extraction of a *hapax* “nominal” base גָלָּל, which appears in 2 Kgs 24:14.

### 3. Conclusion

A compound derivation of גָלָּל has several advantages over verbal derivations. It rests on more extensive comparative evidence and can also explain the unusual morphology of the form without invoking the *hireq compaginis*. If correct, our analysis eliminates 117 instances of *hireq compaginis* from the Hebrew Bible (גָלָּל 5 times; בִלְתִּי 112 times).\(^{37}\) In the future, it may turn out that the *hireq compaginis* is actually a composite of several unrelated phenomena that are outwardly identical but historically diffuse.\(^{38}\)

### Appendix: The Occurrences and Meaning of גָלָּל

The meaning of גָלָּל is fixed by context and its rendering in direct translations of the biblical text. Second Samuel 22, which parallels Psalm 18, substitutes מִבַלְעֲדֵי ‘apart from’ for גָלָּל. In the Septuagint, גָלָּל is rendered by παρὰ ‘except for’ nine times, πάρεξ ‘besides’ five times, ἀλλὰ ‘except, but’ once, and ἐκτὸς ‘out of’ once. In the Targums, ἀλὰحن ‘but, except’ is used before nouns and bār-min ‘except’ before suffixed personal pronouns. In the Vulgate, Jerome uses four different Latin words to translate גָלָּל: praeter ‘besides, except’, absque ‘without, apart from’, extra ‘outside of, except, without’, and exceptus ‘excepted’.

The following chart lists all occurrences of גָלָּל in the biblical text, with its translations in the versions.

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\(^{37}\) The examples in Isa 45:5, 21; Hos 13:4; and Ps 18:32 represent גָלָּל plus a following 1cs suffix.

\(^{38}\) There have been several attempts to isolate distinct phenomena subsumed under the *hireq compaginis* label. For example, A. Butts, “A Note on nedārî in Ex 15:6,” *VT* 60 (2010): 167–171, has argued that the *hireq compaginis* on nedārî in Exod 15:6 is actually an old feminine morpheme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>MT</th>
<th>LXX</th>
<th>Targum Jonathan</th>
<th>Vulgate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deut 1:36</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>'əlāhen&lt;sup&gt;39&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>praeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 4:12</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>ἀλλ' ἢ</td>
<td>'əlāhen&lt;sup&gt;40&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh 11:13</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>'əlāhen</td>
<td>absque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Sam 21:10</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πάρεξ</td>
<td>bār-minnah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sam 7:22</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minnāk</td>
<td>extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 3:18</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πάρεξ</td>
<td>'əlāhen</td>
<td>exceptus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kgs 12:20</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πάρεξ</td>
<td>'əlāhen</td>
<td>praeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs 24:14</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>'əlāhen</td>
<td>exceptus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:13</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>ἐκτὸς</td>
<td>bār-minnāk</td>
<td>absque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 45:5</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minni</td>
<td>extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 45:21</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πάρεξ</td>
<td>bār-minni</td>
<td>praeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 64:3</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minnāk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 13:4</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minni</td>
<td>absque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ps 18:32</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minnāk / 'elā'</td>
<td>praeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth 4:4</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πάρεξ</td>
<td>bār-minnāk</td>
<td>exceptus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chr 17:20</td>
<td>זוּלָתִי</td>
<td>πλὴν</td>
<td>bār-minnāk</td>
<td>absque</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>39</sup> Also in Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.
<sup>40</sup> Also in Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.