Research article

Jan Joosten*

Construct-Phrase Gentilics: A Distinctive Feature of Classical Biblical Hebrew

Abstract: Gentilics derived from composite proper nouns like *Bin Yamīn* "Benjamin" display complex morphosyntax in classical Biblical Hebrew. In postexilic Hebrew, this type of morphosyntax is not attested and the gentilics are formed differently. Construct-state gentilics thus confirm the regnant periodization of Ancient Hebrew.

Keywords: Ancient Hebrew morphosyntax, diachronic linguistics

Introduction

Knowledgeable Hebraists of the last two hundred years or so have adopted a framework for the history of Hebrew in the biblical period which distinguishes two main chronolects, "classical" Biblical Hebrew (CBH) of the monarchic period, and "late" Biblical Hebrew (LBH) of the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[1] In recent writing, this framework is usually associated with Avi Hurvitz, who has argued for it extensively, providing abundant data and reflecting on methodological issues.[2] However, the outlines of the approach go back to Wilhelm Gesenius in the early nineteenth century.[3] The framework allows for biblical texts written before the heyday of CBH, notably a handful of poems inserted here and there into the prose of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets whose language is defined as "archaic" Biblical Hebrew.[4] In addition, between CBH and LBH, a less well-defined chronolect, "transitional" Biblical Hebrew, must also be recognized.[5]

   While the diachronic framework just sketched out is a helpful model, it comes with many caveats. CBH is usually defined as the Hebrew of the Pentateuch and Former prophets, but several passages in that corpus may in fact reflect earlier or later varieties of the language.[6] The LBH corpus consists of Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Esther, Daniel and Ecclesiastes, but these books do not all present the same linguistic profile; some are more conservative, drawing heavily on CBH, while others are more innovative, displaying features that will become common in Mishnaic Hebrew. Poetry is more difficult to categorize in a historical perspective than prose. Textual deterioration can wreak havoc on the

---

1   See, e.g., Angel Sáenz Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (ET John Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 68–75, 112–129; *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé, Ziony Zevit; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012); Aaron Hornkohl, "Biblical Hebrew: Periodization", *EHLL* 1 (2013), 315–325.

2   See Avi Hurvitz, *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovations in the Writings of the Second Temple Period* (VTSup 160; Brill: Leiden, 2014), and other titles quoted there.

3   See Wilhelm Gesenius, *Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache und Schrift* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1815).

4   Sáenz Badillos, *History*, 56–62.

5   See Ronald Hendel, Jan Joosten, *How Old Is the Hebrew Bible? A Linguistic, Textual, and Historical Study* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New Haven, CT: YUP, 2018), 73–84.

6   For Archaic BH, see above. For possible examples of secondary additions reflecting later language, see, e.g., Alexander Rofé, "An Enquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah", in *Die hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 27–39.

---

* Independent scholar, France, E-mail: janj76772@gmail.com

diachronic profile of a passage, for example when a classical feature is accidentally transformed into a late feature. But scribes and redactors can also respect linguistic forms of an earlier text when they supplement or alter it.

Hebraists have devised methodological tools for dealing with the complexities outlined above.[7] But there has also been a backlash. The diachronic approach, once a part of the toolkit of biblical scholars, has become the preserve of a small number of specialists. It is not rare nowadays to see a biblical scholar dating Pentateuchal texts to the late Persian or early Hellenistic period, completely disregarding their linguistic profile. A few Hebraists have tried to argue, unsuccessfully so far, that the whole diachronic approach is misguided.[8] As a result, a field of study that was relatively calm twenty years ago has become a hotbed of new approaches. Several recent studies make strong pleas for the use of insights developed in general linguistics in Hebrew studies.[9] A body of research seeks to apply concepts from sociolinguistics to the Hebrew material.[10] Other studies focus on individual writings in the Hebrew Bible.[11] Another exciting development is the increased inclusion of grammatical features in the debate. Traditionally, the distinctive features of CBH and LBH have been found in the area of vocabulary, but morpho-syntax and syntax also provide a number of interesting contrasts.[12]

Distinctive features of CBH

Diachronic research on Hebrew grammar is promising for many reasons. To begin with, grammatical developments often prove to be more comprehensive and systematic than lexical developments. For example, changes in one area of the verbal system will go hand in hand with changes in other areas. This makes syntactic developments easier to track and harder to dispute. Another advantage of grammatical studies is that such changes, particularly in the realm of syntax, are often less obvious than lexical changes, making it more difficult for late authors to reproduce CBH diction through imitation. While it would have been easy for a writer of the Persian period to avoid Aramaic loanwords and use native Hebrew words instead, it would have been much more difficult to do the same for grammatical features. This second quality has led to a methodological breakthrough that few Hebraists have noticed.

From Gesenius to Hurvitz, specialists in Hebrew diachrony have always underscored that only late linguistic features can be diagnostic. LBH elements are expected to be attested only in late texts, but CBH elements, because they can be adopted from CBH texts, are likely to occur in late as well as in early texts. CBH texts invariably use the word סֵפֶר for the meaning "letter, written missive", while LBH texts use the word אִגֶּרֶת, borrowed from Aramaic. However, LBH texts also use the word סֵפֶר, presumably as an archaism. The upshot of this dynamic is that only the relative lateness of LBH texts can be positively proven, whereas the earliness of CBH texts must remain a postulate. Grammatical research allows one to break this methodological impasse; many syntactic and morpho-syntactic features of CBH have indeed disappeared completely, or nearly completely, in LBH. The explanation for this disappearance seems to be that writers of the late Persian period did not have as clear a grasp of CBH grammar as they did of CBH vocabulary.

---

7 See notably the introductory remarks in Hurvitz, *Concise Lexicon.*

8 See, e.g., Robert Rezetko and Ian Young, *Historical Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew: Steps Toward an Integrated Approach* (ANEM 9; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), and literature by Young and Rezetko quoted there.

9 See notably several studies in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew* (above note 1).

10 See, e.g., William Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New Haven CT: YUP, 2013), and the literature cited there.

11 See, e.g., Nili Samet, "The Lexical Enigma of מָנוֹן and the Problem of Dating the Hezekian Collection", *ZAW* 128 (2016): 419–32.

12 One of the first scholars to set out this new avenue of research is Mats Eskhult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 103–120.

An excellent illustration of this principle is the use of the infinitive absolute in peremptory commands.[13] This usage is attested around 25 times in CBH, with an additional 15 occurrences in the Latter prophets and Proverbs.[14] But there are no certain instances of it in the LBH corpus or post-biblical Hebrew. The distribution of this feature suggests that the imperatival use of the infinitive absolute fell out of use after the sixth century. Passages attesting this feature would therefore appear to date to the very early Persian period at the latest.

Of course, no one would venture to date a biblical text on the strength of a single feature. But the imperatival use of the infinitive absolute does not stand alone. A whole slew of grammatical features show a similar distribution; they are well represented in CBH but are virtually unattested in the LBH corpus. Note, for instance, the following list of particles typical of CBH:

		BH total[15]	CBH	LBH
לָכֵן	"therefore"	200	21	(1)[16]
פֶּן	"lest"	125	85	(1)
לִקְרַאת	"toward"	121	103	(5)
טֶרֶם	"before"	56	27	0
אוּלַי	"perhaps"	45	29	0
מֵאָז	"from when"	19	6	0
בִּלְעֲדֵי	"without"	17	8	0
זוּלָת	"except"	16	8	(1)
בִּגְלַל	"because of"	10	7	0

Where the Chronicler is copying his source text, he sometimes preserves the particles used there. But none of them are used in the original writing in the entire LBH corpus. This suggests that these particles fell out of active use after the end of the Babylonian period.

Texts using such distinctive CBH features should not be dated to the late Persian or Hellenistic periods. The chances that, say, the Joseph story could have been composed at the end of the fourth century BCE, as some have argued,[17] are practically nil in light of the following occurrences:

	Joseph story (Genesis)
פֶּן	42:4; 44:34
לִקְרַאת	46:29
טֶרֶם	37:18; 41:50; 45:28
מֵאָז	39:5
בִּלְעֲדֵי	41:16; 44
בִּגְלַל	39:5

---

13 See Mats Eskhult, "Verbal Syntax in Late Biblical Hebrew", in *Diggers at the Well. Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls & Ben Sira* (edited by Takamitsu Muraoka, John F. Elwolde; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 84–93, 90.

14 Gen 17:10; Exod 13:3; 20:8, 12; Lev 2:6; Num 4:2, 22; 6:23; 25:17; Deut 1:16; 5:12, 16; 16:1; 24:9; 25:17; 27:1; 31:26; Jos 1:13; 2 Sam 24:12; 2 Kgs 3:16; 5:10; 11:15; 19:29; Isa 38:5; Jer 2:2; 3:12; 13:1; 17:19; 19:1; 28:13; 32:14;34:2; 35:2, 13; 39:16; Zech 6:10; Prov 25:4, 5. As Eskhult has pointed out, it is also attested in Judean inscriptions of the monarchic period: e.g., נתן "give" (said by a superior), Arad 2:1.

15 Note that many biblical books are not reckoned as CBH or LBH, especially books consisting mostly of poetry: the Latter Prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Song of Songs, as well as books that attest "transitional" BH, such as Lamentations and Ruth.

16 The figures in parentheses indicate passages in Chronicles that were copied from the parallel in Samuel-Kings.

17 See, e.g., Alessandro Catastini, "Le testimonianze di Manetone e la 'Storia di Giuseppe' (Genesi 37-50)", *Henoch* 17 (1995): 279–300; Thomas Römer, "The Joseph Story in the Book of Genesis: Pre-P or Post-P?" in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on Its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (ed. F. Giuntoli and K. Schmid; FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 185–201.

The study of grammar allows Hebraists to determine that a passage is representative of CBH in the same way that the presence of late vocabulary allows the identification of LBH. This is an important gain.

Gentilic adjectives derived from construct phrases in CBH

The methodological importance of distinctive CBH features makes it desirable to collect as many instances of them as possible. The day has not yet arrived when a full collection, analogous to Hurvitz's *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew*, can be attempted. What is important at the present stage is to find examples that have not previously been identified.

In Biblical Hebrew, gentilic adjectives can be derived from proper nouns designating a putative ancestor, a clan, a city, an area, or a country. A descendant of Ishmael יִשְׁמָעֵאל is a יִשְׁמְעֵאלִי "Ismaelite" and an inhabitant of Sidon צִידֹן is a צִדֹנִי "Sidonian". Where proper names consist of two nouns in a construct relation, the gentilic ending is attached to the second element. A member of the tribe of Benjamin בִּנְיָמִין (literally "Son of the right hand" or "Son of the South") is called a בֶּן־יְמִינִי "Benjaminite". Note is also to be taken of the plural בְּנֵי יְמִינִי "Benjaminites". Such a gentilic adjective is rendered definite, as is usual in construct phrases, by means of a definite article attached to the second noun: "the Benjaminite" is בֶּן־הַיְמִינִי:

1 Sam 9:21

וַיַּעַן שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא **בֶן־יְמִינִי** אָנֹכִי מִקַּטַנֵּי שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Saul answered, "I am only a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel" (NRSV)[18]

Judg 3:15

וַיִּזְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיָּקֶם יְהוָה לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־אֵהוּד בֶּן־גֵּרָא **בֶּן־הַיְמִינִי**

But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite (NRSV).[19]

On the same morphosyntactic model, the father of Gideon, Joash, who belongs to the Abiezer clan, אֲבִיעֶזֶר, is called אֲבִי הָעֶזְרִי "the Abiezrite" in Judg 6:11.[20]

Essentially similar are the gentilic adjectives derived from place names formed with the noun בית "house": Bethlehem, Bethel and Beth Shemesh:

יִשַׁי בֵּית־הַלַּחְמִי "Jesse the Bethlehemite" (1 Sam 16:1, 18; 17:58; cf. 2 Sam 21:19)

חִיאֵל בֵּית הָאֱלִי "Hiel of Bethel" (1 Kgs 16:34)

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֵּית־הַשִּׁמְשִׁי "Joshua of Bethshemesh" (1 Sam 6:14, 18)

Construct-phrase gentilics and their relation to the proper nouns from which they were derived are mentioned in the grammatical literature.[21] As linguistic phenomena they are remarkable because their morphological structure does not reflect their meaning; e.g., יִשַׁי בֵּית־הַלַּחְמִי is not "Jesse, the house of the Lahmite", as the syntax seems to suggest. Syntactically, they are nominal phrases, but semantically they express a single adjectival meaning.

Two possible examples of this type of construction are not mentioned in the grammar books. In Jer 35, the prophet is told to interview the Rechabites:

---

18 See also Judg 19:16; 1 Sam 22:7; Psalm 7:1. In Psalm 7:1, where the gentilic stands in apposition to a proper noun, one expects the article.

19 See also 2 Sam 16:11; 19:17; 1 Kgs 2:8.

20 See also Judg 6:24; 8:32, where the singular is to be taken as a collective.

21 See, e.g., F. E. König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der Hebräischen Sprache*, Vol. 2/2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 298, §302d.

Jer 35:2

הָלוֹךְ אֶל־בֵּית הָרֵכָבִים

Go to the house of the Rechabites (NRSV)[22]

The phrase בֵּית הָרֵכָבִים is usually interpreted as "the house of the Rechabites", with the "house" referring to the family or clan. This is possible, although the word בית may seem somewhat tautological, since the gentilic ending by itself suggests that the people referred to belong to a collective. Note that in verse 3, the Rechabites are again called כָּל־בֵּית הָרֵכָבִים, and in verse 18, once more בֵּית הָרֵכָבִים. Therefore, it is better to view the noun בית as forming part of the group's name. If we do so, the expression would seem to be constructed on the model of the construct-phrase gentilics examined above. The starting point would be the name of the group called בֵּית־רֵכָב "the House of Rechab" mentioned in 1 Chron 2:55. Someone belonging to this group would be a *בֵּית־רֵכָבִי "Rechabite". To make the expression definite, the article would be attached to the second element, *בֵּית הָרֵכָבִי "the Rechabite"; the plural would be expressed in the second element: בֵּית הָרֵכָבִים "the Rechabites" – which is what we find in Jeremiah.

An expression in Jer 35:5 ostensibly contradicts to this analysis:

וָאֶתֵּן לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי בֵית־הָרֵכָבִים גְּבִעִים מְלֵאִים יַיִן וְכֹסוֹת

Then I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups (NRSV, adjusted)

The somewhat unwieldy phrase "the sons of the house of the Rechabites" suggests that "house" was interpreted as a separate element, rather than as part of a gentilic construct phrase. However, this objection falls by the wayside when we observe that the phrase בְּנֵי בֵית־הָרֵכָבִים is not attested in the Old Greek of this verse:

Jer 42:5 LXX
καὶ ἔδωκα κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῶν κεράμιον οἴνου καὶ ποτήρια
And I gave before them a jug of wine and cups

To all appearances, the overloaded expression of the Masoretic text in verse 5 was added by a later scribe who intended to follow the wording of the earlier text but did not entirely understand its language. As many scholars have pointed out, Masoretic pluses in Jeremiah often appear to be secondary additions, as their language indeed suggests.[23] The present case fits a pattern in the textual history of this book.

The second case is more tenuous. In an enumeration of cities belonging to the heritage of Benjamin, the book of Joshua lists the following:

Jos 18:24

וְהָעַוִּים וְהַפָּרָה וְעָפְרָה:
וּכְפַר הָעַמֹּנִי [כְּפַר הָעַמֹּנָה] וְהָעָפְנִי וָגָבַע...

The Avvites, Happarah and Ophrah, and Kephar-Haammoni, the Ophnite, and Geba.

The list combines names of cities with gentilics referring to the inhabitants of other cities (note in verse 28 הַיְבוּסִי "the Jebusite", inhabitants of יְבוּס). The phrase כפר העמוני may be, as the *Ketiv* has it, the name of a city, "Village of the Ammonite". But it is also possible that it is a gentilic, built in the

---

22   See also Jer 35:3, 18.

23   See Jan Joosten, "L'excédent massorétique du livre de Jérémie et l'hébreu post-classique" in *Conservatism and Innovation in the Hebrew Language of the Hellenistic Period. Proceedings of a Fourth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls & Ben Sira* (edited by Jan Joosten, Jean-Sébastien Rey; Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 73; Leiden, Brill, 2008), 93–108; Aaron Hornkohl, *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-Century Date of Composition*, SSLL 74 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

same way as בֵּית־הַלַּחְמִי and the other examples discussed above. The settlement in this case would be called כפר עמון "Kephar Ammon", and its inhabitants, collectively, כפר העמוני "the Kephar-Ammonite".

Diachronic implications

There are only thirteen certain examples of our construction in the Hebrew Bible.[24] Nevertheless, the fact that all of them occur in the CBH corpus appears to be significant. If the uncertain examples are included, there are fourteen in the CBH corpus and three in Jeremiah. The verse 1 Sam 17:58 is not attested in the Old Greek, which suggests that it was added later, perhaps in the Persian period.[25] However, even if it is late, the occurrence hardly attests the living use of the construction in this period. It seems more likely that the expression יִשַׁי בֵּית הַלַּחְמִי "Jesse the Bethleemite" was copied from 1 Sam 16:1 or 18.

No attestations of construct-phrase gentilics are found in the LBH corpus or in Qumran Hebrew.[26] Instead a different construction is used. Moreover, there are several indications that authors of the LBH period did not have a clear grasp of the syntax of construct-phrase gentilics.

- Instead of בֶּן־הַיְמִינִי "the Benjaminite" Chronicles has the following:

    1 Chron 27:12

    אֲבִיעֶזֶר הָעַנְּתֹתִי לבנימיני [לַבֶּן יְמִינִי]

    Abiezer of Anathoth, the Benjaminite (NRSV, adjusted)

    Here the composite proper noun is treated as a single unit, and the article is attached to its first element.

- The same syntax as in the preceding example is found in a Qumran fragment that contains parts of the text of Judg 6:11 (4QJudg[a] = 4Q49 f1:5). Joash, Gideon's father, is here called יואש האביעזרי (MT יוֹאָשׁ אֲבִי הָעֶזְרִי). The text of 4QJudg[a] is non-aligned, and the fragment, palaeographically dated to the first century BCE, is very short. This makes it quite difficult to say anything definite about its language.[27] In this case, however, it seems likely that the morphosyntax of the fragment reflects the late linguistic revision of a late Second Temple scribe.

- A third instance of the syntax, in which the article is prefixed to the composite gentilic as a whole, can be found in Num 26:30, although in this case the evidence is more patchy:

    MT

    אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי גִלְעָד אִיעֶזֶר מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאִיעֶזְרִי

    These are the descendants of Gilead: of Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites (NRSV)

    4QNum[b]

    לֹאחיעזר משפחת]

    LXX

    καὶ οὗτοι υἱοὶ Γαλααδ· τῷ Αχιεζερ δῆμος ὁ Αχιεζερι

    The evidence of 4QNum[b] and the Septuagint makes it likely that the original name of the clan mentioned in this verse was אחיעזר. This would lead one to expect a gentilic of the form

---

24 Judg 3:15; 6:11, 24; 8:32; 19:16; 1 Sam 6:14, 18; 16:1, 18; 17:58; 2 Sam 21:19; 1 Kgs 2:8; 16:34.

25 See, e.g., Ronald Hendel, "Plural Texts and Literary Criticism: For Instance, 1 Samuel 17", *Textus* 23 (2007): 97–114 and earlier literature cited there.

26 In Esth 2:5 we find the expression אִישׁ יְמִינִי, which is a bit different and may in any case have been borrowed directly from 1 Sam 9:1.

27 See Robert Rezetko, "The Qumran Scrolls of the Book of Judges: Literary Formation, Textual Criticism, and Historical Linguistics", *JHS* 13 (2013): https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2013.a2. Rezetko does not discuss the variation in regard to the gentilic.

אחי העזרי. Instead, the gentilic seems to have been formed as in 1 Chron 27:12, with the article preceding the entire compound, האחיעזרי, although this late form is not actually attested. While Num 26 is part of the CBH corpus, it would not come as a total surprise to find an LBH form in this chapter. Several scholars have observed that parts of the priestly stratum in Numbers are relatively late, and exhibit late language.[28] Note that Numbers is the only book of the Pentateuch that contains Persian proper names: וָפְסִי in Num 13:14, and פַּרְנָךְ in Num 34:25.

- 1 Chron 20:5 is parallel to 2 Sam 21:19, but it does not use the same gentilic:

2 Sam 21:19

וַיַּךְ אֶלְחָנָן בֶּן־יַעְרֵי אֹרְגִים בֵּית הַלַּחְמִי אֵת גָּלְיָת הַגִּתִּי

And Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite (NRSV)

1 Chron 20:5

וַיַּךְ אֶלְחָנָן בֶּן־יָעוּר [יָעִיר] אֶת־לַחְמִי אֲחִי גָּלְיָת הַגִּתִּי

And Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite (NRSV)

The differences between the two versions are at least partly due to apologetic considerations. The Chronicler may have wished to do away with the apparent contradiction between 2 Sam 21:19 and 1 Sam 17, where the slaying of Goliath is attributed to David. But language history may also have played a role. It seems that the Chronicler took הַלַּחְמִי as a proper noun.

- The Septuagint also provides evidence of the difficulty that scholars during the Second Temple period experienced with the archaic syntax of construct-phrase gentilics. In several passages the translators confuse the place name with the gentilic (1 Sam 6:14; 16:1). In other passages the expressions are translated literally, and the meaning gets lost (Judg 3:15 υἱοῦ τοῦ Ιεμενι "son of Iemeni"; cf. 6:24; 1 Kgs 2:8). When the Greek translators correctly translate the construct-phrase gentilics, as they do in several other passages (1 Sam 6:18 τοῦ Βαιθσαμυσίτου; 16:18; 2S 21:19; 1K 16:34), they may have been paying more attention to the context than to the grammar.

On the whole, the distribution of construct-phrase gentilics clearly favours the view that this is a feature of CBH that fell out of active use shortly after the fall of Jerusalem and the forcible exile of the literate elites. A passage using this syntax should therefore be regarded as having been written during the monarchic period or shortly after.[29]

Concluding remarks

It should be pointed out that the difference between CBH and LBH syntax highlighted in this article attests the emergence of compounds in Hebrew. The expression בֶּן־הַיְמִינִי shows that the name בִּנְיָמִין was still conceived of as consisting of two elements, although it was almost always written continuously.[30] The Chronicler's לַבֶּן יְמִינִי shows that the name is now considered an indivisible whole, despite the space between בן and ימיני, according to the *Qere*. Compounds never went mainstream in Hebrew, but the very first step towards their development did happen in the biblical period.[31]

---

28 See, e.g., Jan Joosten, "Diachronic Linguistics and the Date of the Pentateuch", in *The Formation of the Pentateuch. Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America* (ed. by Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid; FAT 111; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 327–344.

29 The attestation in 1 Sam 17:58 may be an exception, but as was indicated above, the gentilic would here have been borrowed from the close context.

30 But see the *Ketiv* in 1 Sam 9:1.

31 Another word illustrating the same general tendency is שֶׁנְהַבִּים "ivories", originally composed of שֵׁן "tooth" and הב "elephant", but no longer regarded as a construct chain, as shown by the plural morpheme attached at the end.

The main burden of this paper was to show that the syntax of construct-phrase gentilics confirms the dominant approach to Hebrew diachrony in the biblical period. The CBH corpus and the LBH corpus exhibit different syntax, and the evolution follows a typologically plausible path. The example shows once again that syntactic evidence is potentially more persuasive than lexical evidence. Unlike the distribution of most instances of contrasting vocabulary, the construction of gentilic construct phrases typical of CBH is never encountered in LBH.

Our case study also shows some of the complexities inherent in diachronic research on Biblical Hebrew. Some Hebrew expressions can be interpreted in different ways. The biblical corpus is relatively small, making it difficult to identify variations that are statistically relevant. Textual corruptions interfere with grammatical analysis. Nevertheless, a global approach to the linguistic evidence that takes various angles into account does in the end lead to usable results.

The word is attested in 1 Kgs 10:22 and its parallel in 2 Chron 9:21. Since the writer of the Old Greek in 1 Kgs 10:22 does not seem to have read the word in its Hebrew source text, one wonders whether the word may reflect the Hebrew of the Chronicler, which was secondarily imported into the text of Kings.