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# ANCIENT SEMITIC LINGUISTICS

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## ANCIENT SEMITIC LINGUISTICS

-Relations. Origins. Structures-



*Pyrgi Tablets, 500 BCE*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrgi\\_Tablets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrgi_Tablets)

### Abstract

The evolution of natural language, with historical and empirical respect to the human family of Semitic tongues, is a creative process of cognitive adaptation and learning. Natural language processing reflects the many levels and layers of the linguistic coding of experienced reality and the specific quality of evolutionary codifications by book-keeping techniques and written laws. Concerning the selection pressure and procedures of language evolution, it is scientifically decisive to focus on the symbolic duration of grammatical structures and implied meanings. This interplay of free creation and construction principles shows a time-resistant tendency, which governs the linguistic coding process and the human interpretation of reality. Further advancement of computational linguistics will help us to better understand the evolution of the human mind, in medical and psychological terms of improving education and cultural learning.

### Key terms

Natural language processing, computational linguistics, Hebrew, Canaan, human evolution, creativity.

JEL Code: Z12, Z13

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**Introduction:**

### **Evolutionary Linguistics**

Researching into the real linguistic origins of the Hebrew speaking people is a challenging and rewarding scientific activity as per the **evolution of a language**, concerning cultural origin and natural surroundings.

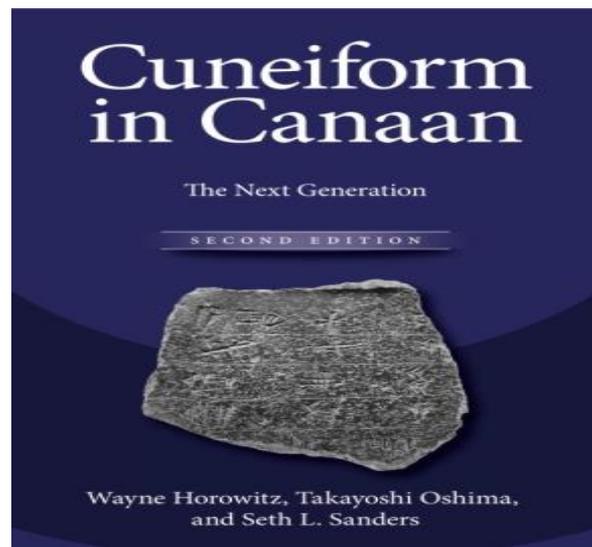
The Canaanites were factually a Semitic people with a Semitic language, which is practically almost indistinguishable from early Hebrew language documents. The cultural emergence of a **new society model** in the country of Canaan around 1200 BCE and a Davidic monarchy around 1000 BCE will be analyzed, concerning related ancestors, tribal unities and Canaanite artifacts.

This methodical study will not build on any narratives nor claim validity or invalidity of traditional accounts, with reference to polemics, archeology or ancient Semitic language. The sole scientific research purpose is clarification, overview and compilation, for **educational goals** and enlightenment.

Archeology, geology, comparative linguistics and literary documents do not 'speak' the same language and an honest scholarly approach states this **scientific problem** at the very outset, to avoid misunderstandings and false perceptions of the authors' intention.

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The aim is to provide the reader and learner with a **basic understanding** of major developments in ancient Semitic linguistics, which starts with the bilingual Sprachbund (federation of languages) of Sumerian and Akkadian (2500 BCE), using cuneiform for records; the eldest records of a mixed language of Canaanite-Akkadian (1360 BCE) is the Armana correspondence (clay tablets, found in Upper Egypt, El Armana), the language family that later on evolved into Phoenician and Hebrew.

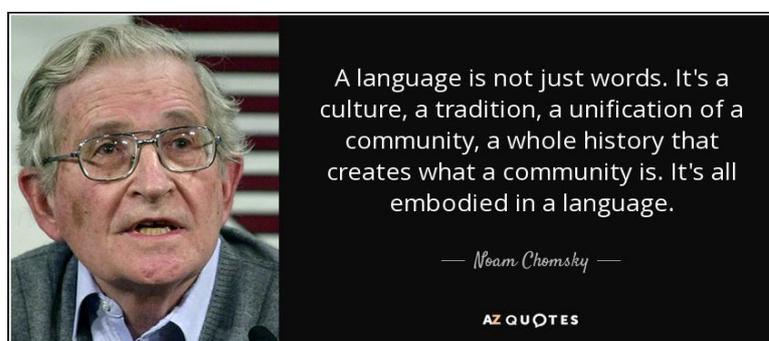


The bookkeepers of ancient Mesopotamia (Sumer) have developed script for economic purposes of accounting, trade and human exchange of property (e.g. first commercial land transfers, monetary tools); language slowly and gradually evolved into written codifications, reflecting the cultural progress (literacy, techniques) of technical civilization and human learning. A lot of translational work has to be done, in order to understand these **cultural learning processes** in the history of humanity.

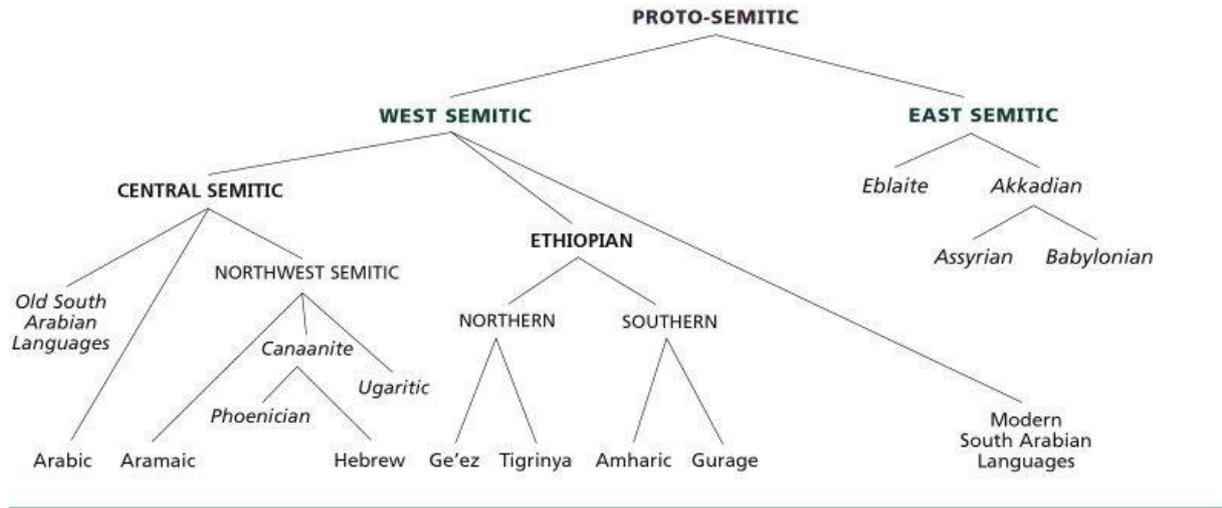
### **Language and Culture**

Every symbolic codification or cultural code rises the unavoidable research question of origin, evolutionary procedure and selective duration, i.e. cultural

symbols (math included) are human communication means, which were and are created for getting 'control' over 'reality'. The content information (from pictograms to letters) changes over time its meaning, even within one defined language culture, due to learning processes and knowledge transfer; such transformations occur over generations, in terms of cultural memory, i.e. the knowledge (wisdom included) of a culture (its DNA) is programmed by the linguistic grammar, the grammar being the most distinguished feature of any human natural language. Concerning the evolution of languages, this fact does imply that all cultural symbols are running continuously through a durability time test, with reference to their 'explanatory fitness', in terms of 'selection protocols'. These symbolic shifts of meaning do not affect the grammar of a language, they simply cause a cultural change of content information, concerning used and shared symbols (e.g. ancient hexagram into star of David); many cultural symbols (letters included) have their origin in depicting nature. Human cultural progress seems to depend on advancing symbolic abstraction and linguistic codification, in terms of communicative power, because living is mainly about communication. Creativity is the human capacity to change the role of elements in a linguistic and cultural system, with reference to the selective evolution of symbols; such information processes can be best explained by the natural autopoeisis of living systems and their potential systemic capacity to repair, reproduce and maintain itself, i.e. adaptation and cognition (learning) are the driving natural forces of language and culture. Various extinction processes in the evolution of languages do not mean that all cultural symbols and values get lost, but a selective cultural transfer and absorption into other languages takes place, like the metaphor of a river that flows into another river.

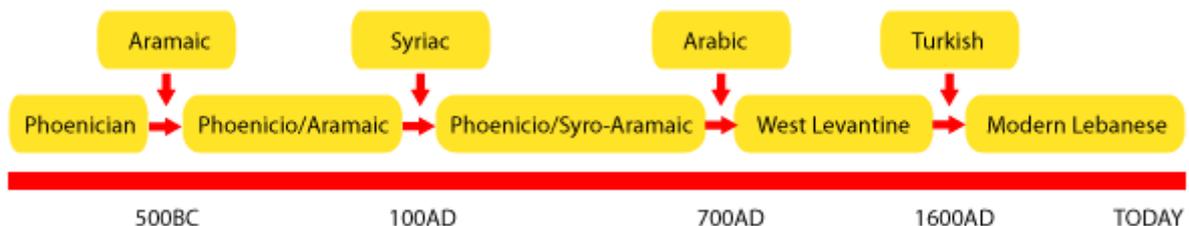


**Synopsis:**



**Phoenician**

Despite over 10000 surviving inscriptions (e.g. Pyrgi Tablets) in the whole Mediterranean, Phoenician (and later Punic) is the worst transmitted, studied and least known of all ancient Semitic languages. Aramaic and Hebrew can be understood as higher developed dialects of the ancient Canaanite language, called Phoenician (dabarim kanaaim); the Lebanese language, although highly infiltrated by Arabic and Turkish vocabulary, is the modern ‘survivor’ of this ancient Semitic language.



**Aramaic**

The linguistic center of historical Aramaic, which is factually an independent group of related languages, is located North from Samaria, and it became the second official language of the Assyrian empire. The Arameans were a Semitic-speaking people, who lived and migrated as tribal confederation in ancient Mesopotamia. The Aramaic language is most closely related to Hebrew and a linguistic metamorphosis (Aramaization) made it to become Israel's vernacular, after the Babylonian conquest (586 BCE), with Aramaic entering Jewish literature (300 BCE) and scholarship. At the time of Jesus of Nazareth, Aramaic was definitely the daily language of the people of the land (am ha'aretz), while Hebrew was retained as liturgical language; for the communication with authorities, the Greek Koine (commercial) language was dominantly used. The majority of Judeo-Aramaic speakers lives in modern Israel and their language is being practically replaced by Ivrit.

### **Samaritan**

In Palestinian Aramaic, the dialect of Galilee was different from that of Judea, and as a result of the religious separation between Jews and Samaritans, the special dialect of Samaritan emerged and evolved. It ceased to be a spoken language for daily functions between the 10-12 centuries CE; the religious use as liturgical language remained intact, due to distinctive scriptural practices (Samaritan Torah) and historical interpretations, e.g. regarding Mount Gerizim as the true location of God's holy place on earth (as opposed to the Foundation Stone on the Temple Mount). Scholarship cannot agree on dating the schism between Judaeans and Samaritans, but the destruction of the Samaritan temple (built 400BCE) in 128/9 BCE definitely marks an ethnical climax of this religious rivalry. The city of Samaria was founded by King Omri 880 BCE; it was the capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel. The territory of Samaria is historically known and reported for deep-rooted ethnic conflicts, which seem to have geo-physical reasons, with respect to certain holy traditions and locations. Deuteronomy 27:1-7 clearly states that an altar may be erected at Mt. Ebal; Deuteronomy 11: 29-30 prescribes ceremonies to be conducted at the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal, when Israelites enter the land. Samaritans argue that the place where G-d commanded the Israelites to build an altar are these mountains at Shechem (Sichem).



## Hebrew

The most ancient Hebrew language document is an inscription in Paleo-Hebrew, which is dated into the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, i.e. the period of King David's reign; Hebrew was a widely spoken language in the Kingdom of Israel and Judah (1200 to 586 BCE). The ancient Israelites were Semitic-speaking tribes, inhabiting parts of Canaan, and belonging to the language group of the Canaanites. Hebrew emerged as the original language (lashon ha kodesh) of ethical monotheist culture, leading back natural creation (creation of nature) to one single and eternal source of all things, being derived from nothing as ideation principle by a spiritual power; such a notion is not reflected in the myths of any other ancient culture, but only in the Sinaitic codex (1312 BCE) as the very foundation stone (Torah she-be- 'al peh) of Hebraic language and culture.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

פּוּר עִלְמַד פּוּר עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד עִלְמַד Canaanite

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ Ketav Ivri

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ Ketav Ashurit

The empirical and historical joining of human physical and spiritual forces makes the study of linguistics exciting, but it is scientifically essential to think in the category of language evolution as socio-cognitive learning process (e.g. extinction vs. development). After the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE), Hebrew disappeared as a spoken language; internal and external pressure factors do always

play a decisive role in the evolution of a language, i.e. power structure and language use are deeply intertwined.

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## **Excursus:**

### **Ivrit**

The revival of Hebrew as modern Hebrew is a linguistic process, which took over 100 years to bear full fruit. Despite its many linguistic layers and varied influences, it is classified as a typical Semitic language and developed since 1880 by natural linguistic evolution, mirroring the modern Israeli phases of resettlement. According to Israel's Academy of the Hebrew language in Jerusalem, Ivrit has approximately 33000 words, while Biblical Hebrew had approximately 7000 words. The academy does not Hebraize international words, like television (televizia), and it does not want to be a language police, but a service institution. There are many scientific discussions, concerning the future of Ivrit, with respect to language reform and innovation, e.g. to extend the structure of the 3 letter shorash (root) to the development of new classes of shorashim, based on 4-5 letters. The evolution of any language, however, is much more a matter of cognitive adaptation or learning and can never be dictated by artificial policies or rulings.

**Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.**

## Lachoudish

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachoudisch>

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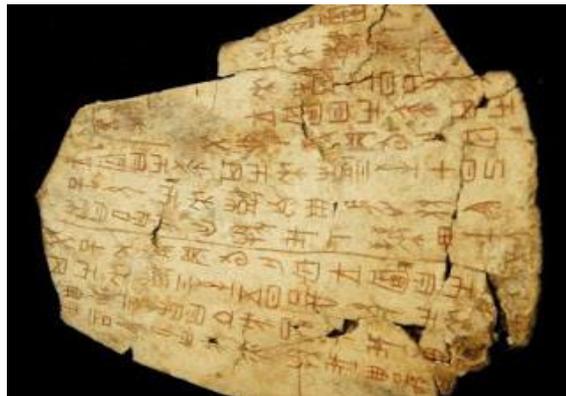
Lachoudish, a curious mixture of Hebrew and German (not Yiddish), was the local dialect of Jews and Gentiles in the little village of Schopfloch (Bavaria). The name is most probably a contraction of lashon ha kodesh. Jewish residents played a vital role in the social history of the town, since about 1400, engaging in cattle trade in several surrounding communities; the acquisition of land and most other trades, except moneylending, was restricted for Jews and the adoption of a German surname was mandatory. Historical research into the strong Jewish presence in that region of Bavaria is still continuing as well as into its almost extinct dialect.



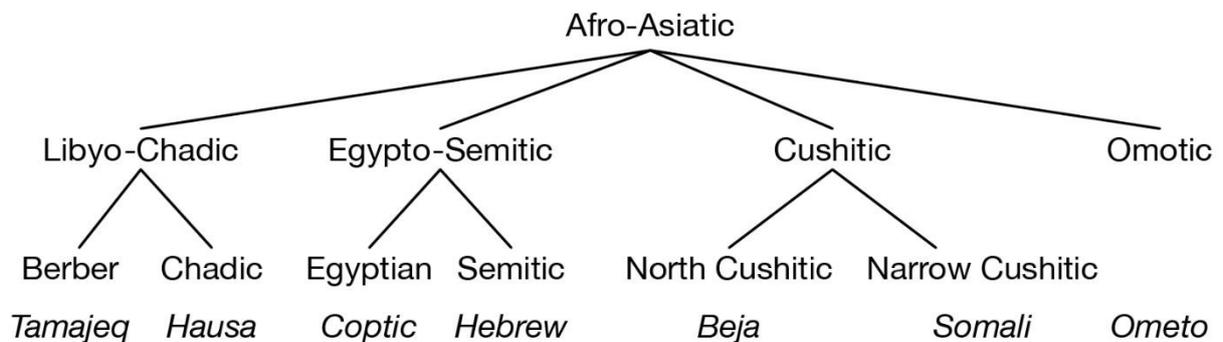
Synagogue, Schopfloch, 1910.

## Pattern Analysis

It is very reasonable and sound to assume an autochthonous and polygenetic evolution of language patterns, due to human creative cognition; one good ancient example of autochthonous appearance are the old Chinese oracle bones (1250 BCE), which contain detailed historical information of ancient dynasties and genealogies, but were also used for divination and supernatural agency, mainly by pyromancy.



Over 7000 spoken languages and over 140 language families are a tall order for any linguistic research, which wants to cover universal patterns of human natural language, with Africa being the linguistically most diverse continent.

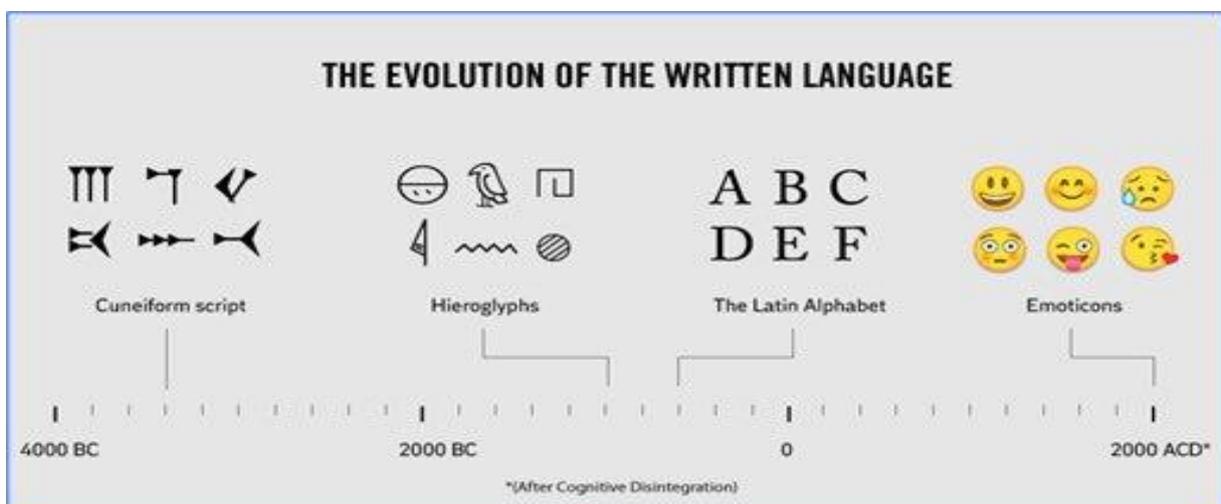


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The evolution of the Afro-Asiatic language family is of special methodical research interest to our scientific investigation, because of its natural and central importance for the developmental evolution of world cultural history, in terms of physical incubation and civilizational impact.

## Dating Methods

The age of the earth is a very different question from the age of the universe; in each of these cases, different dating methods are used. The age of the earth is dated by extrapolation from the radioactive decay of lead isotopes; a number of assumptions as to the conditions surrounding the formation of the solar system are implied in these calculations, using primarily the potassium-argon method. The whole dating method is based upon the requirement of a closed system (no external impact), which is very difficult to fulfill; the dominant rock-dating method is not universally applicable and only certain types of rocks (igneous rocks) are formed by a solidification from a molten state. This simple example from physical geology shows the depth of the scientific problem involved in any dating method. In short, every dating method and terminology arrives with hidden or implied assumptions, which should be made transparent, in relation to the used reference system ('horizon of time') and applied 'philosophy of time' (e.g. back-dated solar years). In addition, it is difficult to translate any methodical dating, for example 'cave painting appeared at 40000 BCE', into a perspective of lived human generations, i.e. a careful extrapolation of the generational aspect, in quantitative terms, would be required to understand the 'real time horizon' as a mortal human being. In any case, written languages evolved in the 'time corridor' around 1500 BCE spontaneously in certain geographic areas of Afro-Asia, the Indian sub-continent and China, which marks the advent of human civilization, mainly advancing literacy and technical skills. Concerning dating methods, we should be aware of necessities and conventions, i.e. scientific agreements and assumptions.



## **Computational Linguistics**

Natural language processing of Hebrew and other Semitic languages seems to imply special cognitive challenges for professional developers of computer programs. Unique word formation processes of roots and knowledge patterns, a deficit in practical linguistic bodies, a very varied morphology, and the writing system itself create great intellectual (learning) barriers for computational linguists, which have not only to do with the (mass) market economics of the involved software industries. Future technical tools and cultural techniques, which are in cognitive emergence of programming Hebrew, can definitely be applied for linguistic R & D processing Arabic and other living Semitic languages, because of closely related structures and origins of the body of language, i.e. the morphological applicability is almost self-explanatory. The computational performance of advanced and artificial linguistics will propel such comparative research forward; the creative dynamics of natural languages requires linguistic skills that can make full use of the lexicon of a language. Computational lexicons must become more sensitive to the dynamic creation of new language roots and patterns, which is a matter of tech-know-logical morphology and software learning tools (artificial cognition).

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## **Conclusions**

Dabarim kanaaim, the ancient Canaanite language, is factually the proto-language of all Semitic tongues. The Afro-Asian corridor of the ancient Near East served as a vital bridge between Mesopotamian and Mediterranean spaces of cultural learning and economic exchange. It is scientifically decisive to understand the autochthonous evolution of natural language and the human mind, in terms of selection pressures and procedures. More methodical research has to be done into the temporal duration and selection of cultural symbols, which seem to be the essential coding vehicle of human meaning, experience and suffering. Studying the cultural and cognitive evolution of advanced literacy and technical skills is the natural key to unlock the hidden mystery of human evolution.

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Flint Tools, Motza, Israel (7000 BCE).

