

EXPANSIONS OF THE *šb* ROOT

By J. A. THOMPSON

The present discussion will attempt to do three things. First of all it is presented as a tribute to the valiant endeavours of E. C. B. MacLaurin over many years to build up a worthy Department of Semitic Studies in the University of Sydney. The status and achievements of this department up to 1972 owe a great deal to MacLaurin's vision and persistence. A field in which he has shown keen interest over many years is the comparatively new field of Ugarit studies. The article which follows, while not devoted to Ugaritic in particular, draws on Ugaritic vocabulary in a number of places.

Secondly, the article will pursue a line of investigation which has interested the writer for some years, namely the nature of the original verb morpheme in Semitic languages.¹ The triconsonantal root morpheme in Semitic languages and the triconsonantal verb stem seem at first sight to be normal. But it is evident that the Semitic languages developed various devices for the expansion of a biliteral root morpheme to a trilateral morpheme and there are notable families of Semitic roots where this has happened.² The words of Gesenius-Kautzsch in their *Hebrew Grammar* are worth recalling. "The reduction of a stem to the underlying root may generally be accomplished with certainty when the stem exhibits one weak consonant with two strong ones, or when the second and third consonants are identical."³ In the discussion which follows an attempt will be made to show that the biliteral stem *šb* underwent a variety of expansions to produce a family of trilateral roots.

The third aim of the article is to investigate a little further some of the warnings of James Barr over recent years. He has urged upon biblical exegetes that the important factor for them is not etymology but meaning and has warned them not to draw theological or exegetical conclusions from the fact that a particular word derives from a certain root which has a certain basic sense.⁴ He has gone further and has warned scholars of the dangers of seeking for the meaning of obscure words or of *hapax legomena*

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1. J. A. Thompson, 'Expansions of the *ʿd* root', *J.S.S.*, Vol. 10, No. 2, autumn, 1965, pp. 222-240.
 2. W. Gesenius and E. Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar* (1910), pp. 100ff.; G. R. Driver, *Problems of the Hebrew Verbal System* (1936), pp. 3-8.
 3. Gesenius-Kautzsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 100c.
 4. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961).

in cognate languages since the same basic root may give rise to words which are quite unrelated in meaning.⁵ It will be shown that derivatives of the biliteral stem *šb* exhibit both a wide consistency of meaning in the cognate languages and a considerable degree of inconsistency so that James Barr's warnings are shown to be necessary. Nevertheless it is also clear that there *is* a close relationship in meaning between a considerable number of the members of the *šb* family in the various cognate languages so that it is a reasonable first step in the elucidation of difficult words to commence with parallels in the cognate languages.

It will be argued in the course of this paper that the root *šb* in Semitic languages gives rise to a wide range of words which either directly or indirectly carry the sense of 'standing erect', although it will become evident that there are several other meanings which attach to the same stem.

I. *Geminate Expansion*

The doubling of the *b* and the *šb* root should give rise to the stems *šbb* (Hebrew, biblical and post biblical); *šbb* Aramaic (or perhaps 'bb when we allow for a consonantal shift from *š* > ^c over the centuries; Syriac *šbb*, or ^c*bb*; Arabic *šbb* (or perhaps *dbb* allowing for a consonantal shift); Ugaritic *šbb*; Akkadian *šbb*; Ethiopic *šbb* or *dbb* (allowing for a consonantal shift).

The root *šbb* does not appear to yield a verb in Hebrew although it probably lies behind the noun *šb* meaning a roofed or covered wagon as in the phrase ^c*glt šb* (Num. 7:3 cf. Isa. 66:20). It may be argued that there is some slight link here with the idea of something standing up.

In post-biblical Hebrew the same word is used in the same sense,⁷ but the root ^c*bb* meaning 'to be thick, dark' does not appear to be related.

In Arabic there is a well-developed root *šbb*. The form means 'pour out', 'pay down' a price or 'let down' or 'lower' a rope, 'bend down' the head, 'descend'. The passive denotes 'done away', 'annihilated'. Alternately *ša ba I* denotes 'love ardently'. The form *āšaba IV* means 'go down' (a declivity), *tašaba V* means 'dash

5. James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1968).

6. Sabatino Moscati (Ed.), *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*, 1964, p. 128. Note the change *šrr* (Hebrew) to ^c*rr* (Aramaic) or ^c*rr* (Syriac).

7. There is an alternate meaning for *sāb* in Hebrew, namely 'thorn tailed lizard'. So also in post-biblical Hebrew. In the Midrash Rabbah to Numbers the expression '*eyn sāb 'elah mešuyyarot šab*' refers to wagons painted in the colour of a lizard. But the root is probably *šbh* from which a range of derivatives can be deduced.

forth' (torrent), *taṣā ba VI* 'drink' (the remains of water, etc.), *'inṣaba VII* 'be bent on', *'iṣtaba* 'take for oneself water'. The nouns denote 'strong desire' (*ṣabābatu*); 'pouring out' (liquid), or 'loving ardently' (*ṣab*); drainage (*ṣababu*), 'blood', 'sweat' *ṣabību*; a place where water pours out (*ṣaṣabu*), etc. The basic idea of 'pouring out' or 'giving forth' seems to be central in Arabic. Those words which refer to 'ardent love', 'desire', 'passion', etc., have strong links with roots in other Semitic languages⁸ where the basic root seems rather to be *ṣbw* or *ṣby*. In that case it seems possible that Arabic *ṣbb* has developed from *ṣb* by way of *ṣbw* or *ṣby* while retaining some general connotation of 'pouring out'—liquid, love, desire, etc. But the root and its derivatives are not easily connected with the meaning 'stand upright'.

Ugaritic does not seem to have developed a trilateral root *ṣbb* although the word *ṣb* deriving from the root *ṣbw*(Ii) means 'coveted'.⁹ The root *ṣbb* does not seem to have existed in Ethiopic.¹⁰

The Akkadian *ṣumbu* (*ṣubbu*) is equivalent to Hebrew *ṣāb* and denotes 'wagon' or 'dray'. The verb *ṣabābu* (*ṣapāpu*) has reference to birds flying and thus develops a different meaning again.

It is evident from this brief review that there is no one meaning for the root *ṣbb* which is common to all, or even to the majority of the Semitic languages. Hebrew, Aramaic and Akkadian have a common idea in 'wagon'. Arabic *ṣbb* carries the sense of 'pouring out love', that is 'desire' in some of its usages which has parallels in Aramaic *ṣby*, Syriac *ṣby*, Ugaritic *ṣbw*, and Arabic *ṣabā*. The relationship between the meaning 'desire' and 'stand erect' is not immediately clear, although in at least some cases the sense of 'desire' is so sexually orientated that it may be that there was a physical link with the erection of the male organ. But even so, there is a polarization of meanings, one group of roots having a clear association with the meaning 'stand erect', and another group having the meaning 'desire'. To some extent Barr's point is made. One cannot argue from the meaning 'stand erect' in certain expansions of the root *ṣb* to the meaning of other expansions.

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8. Eg. *ṣebiy* (Aramaic), *ṣb'* (Syriac), *ṣb* (root *ṣbw*) (Ugaritic). See discussion in the appropriate section below. Compare Arabic *ṣabā* 'inclined towards'.
 9. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 1956, p. 150. The term is not however recognized in C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 1965.
 10. It is not listed in A. Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* (reprint 1955) under *ṣbb* but the root *ṣby* carries the meaning 'flow'. See below in Section V.

II. *Expansion by prefixing -n*

This device should give rise to Hebrew *našāb*, post biblical Hebrew *našāb* Aramaic *nešāb*, Syriac *nšb*, Arabic *našaba*, Ugaritic *nsb*, Ethiopic *nšb* and Akkadian *našābu*.

The Hebrew Niphal *nišāb* has a range of uses all of which bear some sense of 'standing erect'. Thus the verb can mean 'take one's stand', 'be stationed', 'stand' (before or with), 'stand upright', 'stand firm', 'stand over' (as an official or prefect of some kind). The expression *hanišābim sarēy* refers to the supervisors of the prefects. In the Hiphil form we have the meanings 'set up' or 'erect' (a monument, a heap of stones, a target, etc.). The Hophal as the passive means 'be set up'. The noun *nešib* denotes a 'pillar' (of salt Gen. 19:26), or a governor (or perhaps garrison), that is someone or something set up as guardian over a city. The noun *nišāb* in Judges 3:22 denotes 'handle' of a dagger.

The noun *mašāb* denotes a 'standing place', 'post', 'outpost' and metaphorically an 'office'. The feminine form *mašābāh* means 'guard', 'watch' and the noun *mašēbāh* has a wide usage in the pages of the Old Testament for the pillar in wood or stone associated with Canaanite worship in Palestine. The noun *mašebet* meaning 'stump' (of a tree) still retains something of the idea of 'standing upright'.

The whole range of derivatives of the root *nšb* in Hebrew can thus be fitted into a family of words carrying some nuance of 'standing erect'.

In post-biblical Hebrew *nāšab* means 'put up', 'place', and the Niphal denotes 'stand (defiantly)'.

Aramaic *nešab* or *nešēyb* means 'put up', 'plant' (plant trees) while, the Aphel *'anšēb* denotes 'to point', 'sharpen'. The noun *nišbā* means 'a plant', 'shoots'. All of these words can be brought into the family of words meaning 'stand upright'.

Syriac *nšb* means 'plant', 'implant', 'fix', 'found'. The Ethpeel and the Pael are related in meaning. The noun *nšb* refers to 'planting', 'a plant'; *nšwb* means 'gardener', 'founder'. These meanings can be brought into the family of terms meaning 'stand erect' without much difficulty.

Arabic *nšb* and the other verb forms fit very easily into the same family. Thus *našaba* I denotes 'set up', 'put up', 'erect'; *naššaba* II denotes 'erect' with some idea of intensity or repetition; *nāšaba* III 'to make an open show', that is to hold up to view; *ānšaba* IV carries the idea of 'ascribing', 'attributing' but has a second meaning 'be tired, weary'; *tanaššaba* V means 'stand'

11. See Köehler and Baumgartner—*Lexicon*, pp. 628f.

(around); *intašaba VIII* denotes 'become upright', 'stand upright' etc. The nouns have related meanings *našbu* sign, standard set up, pole, etc.; something set up to worship; *tašbatu* setting a snare (plot, artifice); *našābu* place of sunset; *našbatu* stones set up round a cistern. There are other derivatives from the root which refer to 'fatigue', 'weariness' but the great majority of the derivatives carry some sense of 'standing erect'.

In Ugaritic *nšb II* means 'set up, erect'. The noun *msb* from the same root denotes 'pole', 'standard' (used of balances), *mšbt* 'tong' or 'handle' of bellows.¹²

The Ethiopic *nšb* is not listed in Dillmann's Ethiopic lexicon.

Akkadian *našābu* in one of its senses means 'be fixed', 'put in place', 'put down'.¹³

It seems to be arguable that in biblical and post-biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Ugaritic and Akkadian the root *nšb* carries a strong sense of 'standing erect', and hence of 'being fixed or settled' although there are other senses in some of the languages.

III. Expansion by a prefixed *w* or *y*

It would seem that there is a virtual equivalence of *w* and *y* in these expansions. In Hebrew, for example, the expansions with a prefixed *w* do not show the *w* in some of the stems but a prefixed *y* serves the purpose. Similarly, across the whole Semitic field the basic root *šb* is expanded in some cases by a prefixed *y* and in others by a prefixed *w*, although the meanings are closely related.

The expansion in question is known in biblical and post-biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic and Arabic.

In biblical Hebrew the root appears exclusively as the Hithpael *hityašēb*, which carries a range of meanings such as 'take one's stand', 'present oneself', 'take up a position'; 'hold one's ground', 'stand still', 'stand firm', along with some metaphorical uses such as 'confront' and 'set oneself against'. Clearly there is a close link between these meanings and the basic sense of 'stand upright'.

In post-biblical Hebrew the Hithpael of the same root has a similar meaning.

12. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, pp. 157, 160; C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, p. 446.

13. There is another meaning for *našābu* in Akkadian—'to absorb', 'soak up' which is related to Arabic *našaba* 'to recede into the earth', 'dry up', and to Ethiopic *ndf*, 'to dry up', 'be exhausted'.

Aramaic *yešab* and the Pael *yasēb* denote 'establish'. The Pael infinitive *yašābā* means 'to make certain', 'be certain'. The adjective *yašib* means 'reliable', 'firm', 'firmly planted'.

Ugaritic *yšb* I means 'stand up'.¹⁴

Arabic *wašaba* I means 'be fixed, constant, settled, firm', 'continue', and *awšaba* IV similarly, although form IV carries another meaning 'be sick, fatigued, be made sick'; *waššaba* II means 'take care of', 'tend,' 'nurse' in a sickness; *wāšaba* III denotes 'keep', 'attend', 'apply oneself constantly to something'; *tawššaba* V 'become ill', 'to suffer fatigue'. The nouns *wašibu wašabu* refer to 'sickness' or pain sometimes, with an idea of constant or continual pain. This note of continuity links the nouns with the idea of something fixed and so has a vague connection with something that stands.

There is an Ethiopic root *wašb*, but it does not carry the meaning of 'standing firm'. The Syriac roots *yšb* or *wšb* do not seem to exist.

Thus a family of roots formed by the expansion of the biliteral *šb* by a prefixed *y* or *w* and carrying some sense of 'standing' or 'being firm or fixed' is well known in both biblical and post-biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic and possibly in Ugaritic. It does not seem to occur in Syriac and Ethiopic.

IV. *Expansion by an affixed aleph*

The root *šb'* occurs in biblical Hebrew and post-biblical Hebrew as *šb'*, in Ugaritic as *šbu'*, in Akkadian *šabā'u* (*šabu*), and in Ethiopic *db' šb'*.

In each of these the verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc., all have reference to 'waging war', 'service in war', 'army' and the like. There is clearly a common idea coming to expression in these roots each of which may be explained as an expansion of the biliteral *šb* by the affixation of an '. There is a sense in which the meaning of these roots may be regarded as being related to the idea of 'standing upright' or 'being firm or secure'. A man needed to be standing upright to wage war in those bygone centuries.

In biblical Hebrew the root *šb'* occurs in the Qal of the verb to denote 'wage war', and in the Hiphil meaning 'muster'. The idea of 'serving' in worship is related in that the person who thus serves is standing upright in the service of his leader Yahweh.

The noun *šābā'* likewise covers the two areas of 'service in war' and 'service in worship'. More generally the noun refers to

14. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, p. 165. It is not listed as a verb in C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (1965), p. 413 Glossary.

an 'army' or 'a company of fighting men'. Metaphorically the term is used of the 'hosts of heaven' and in the phrases *'ēlohē šebāot* and *yahweh šebāot* God is defined in terms of His 'hosts' or 'armies'. The nouns *šābā* (m) and *šebā'āh* (f) denoting 'gazelle' may have some reference to a beast that stands erect.¹⁵

In post-biblical Hebrew *šāba'* means either 'army' or 'service' and Ugaritic *šbu'* means 'army', 'host'.¹⁶

In Akkadian the verb *šabā'u* means 'go to war' (*sb'*) and the noun *šābu* refers to 'a group of people', 'contingent of workers', 'army', 'people', etc. Both the Ethiopic roots *šb'* and *db'* have reference to 'making war', 'waging war'. The theme of "war runs through those forms of the verb which are in use II, III,1 and III,3."¹⁷

The root does not appear to have been used in Syriac.

Within itself this root *šb'* is a fairly compact, consistent unit which has a broadly consistent meaning in most of the Semitic languages. It is here argued that there are some grounds for regarding the family as part of the total *šb* family which carries the general sense of 'standing upright or firm'.

V. Expansion by an affixed yodh

The root *šby* appears in biblical Hebrew as *šābāh*, in post-biblical Hebrew as *šebiy* or *šbh*, in Aramaic as *šebēy* or *šebā'* in Syriac as *šb'*, in Arabic as *šby*, in Akkadian as *šābu*, and in Ethiopic as *šby*.

In meaning there is both a degree of conformity and a degree of variation. In biblical Hebrew both the Qal and the Hiphil of the root *šbh* mean 'swell up' (Num. 5:22, 27).¹⁸ Alternately *šbh* gives rise to a noun *šby* meaning 'gazelle' which is comparable to post-biblical *šabyā'* 'gazelle' where the *š* corresponds to *ṣ*; to Arabic *šabyu* where *š* corresponds to *ṣ*, and to Akkadian *šabītu*, also meaning 'gazelle'. The consonantal correspondences of biblical Hebrew *š*, post-biblical Hebrew *ṣ*, Arabic *ṣ* and Akkadian *š* provide an excellent illustration of this phenomenon.

A third meaning arising from Hebrew *šb'* is found in the noun *šebi* 'beauty', 'decoration'. One can imagine some link between the meaning seen in 'gazelle' as a delicate upstanding

15. To be distinguished from the root *šby* sometimes written *šb'*.

16. C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, Glossary, p. 472, item 2138.

17. A second use of the verb carries the general sense of 'cease'. See A. Dillman, *Lexicon Linguae aethiopiae*, 1864, reprint 1955, p. 1283.

18. The usage is related to the Syriac root *cb'* or *cb'y* meaning 'swell', 'thicken', 'harden', 'be fat, heavy, etc.' Hebrew *š* corresponds to Syriac *c* through a consonantal change.

creature and both the meaning 'beauty' and the meaning 'stand erect' which is the most widespread sense of the root *šb*.

We have referred to the post-biblical word *šabyā'* meaning 'gazelle' where Hebrew *š* corresponds to the post-biblical *š*. However, the root *šby* is known in post-biblical Hebrew where it is used in the Qal, Niphal and Piel with some sense of 'to swell' and thus corresponds to the Biblical Hebrew usage.

The Aramaic root *šeby* (or *šebā'*) carries some such meaning as 'find pleasure in', 'choose', 'desire'. The related noun is *šebiy* 'desirable thing', 'beauty', 'desire'. It is not difficult to see a certain relationship between these meanings and the sense 'gazelle' which is a beautiful, upstanding, desirable creature, although, to be sure, the link is tenuous.

The Syriac verb *šb'* means 'to be willing', 'to wish', 'to desire', 'to have pleasure in'. The related noun *šby* meaning 'possession', 'property', can be related to the verb since one's possessions are what one desires. The sense 'matter', 'affair', 'thing' ranges very widely from these meanings. However, the noun *šbn* 'will', 'desire', 'delight', the adverb *šbin't*, and the adjective *šbiny'* both with some sense of 'voluntary', 'willing' are both closely related.

The Arabic root *šby* carries a wide range of meanings connected with 'incline' or 'desire' which are related. Thus *šabby* II, *sābay* III, *āšby* IV, *tašbbay* V, *tašābay* VI all have a meaning closely associated with 'desire' or 'incline'. An alternative range of meanings has reference to 'being a child'. Thus *šibān* means 'youth', 'boyhood'. Some of the verb forms also carry this sense. Thus *šabā* can mean 'be a youth, boy, child'. But this verb also carries the sense 'to incline to foolish or youthful conduct', 'to become youthfully ignorant'. Then the sense shifts slightly to that found in *tašābay* VI and the noun *našābu* 'manifesting passionate love' and 'desire'. A study of E. W. Lane's *Lexicon*¹⁹ will make clear that the Arabic root *šby* has a strong sense of 'inclination' or 'desire'.²⁰

The Akkadian verb *šabu* means 'wish', 'desire' and the related noun *šibutu* denotes 'will', 'wish', 'desire'.

The Ethiopic *šby* means 'flow' and hence cannot be grouped in the present family. It does, however, have some link with the

19. E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1872, reprint 1968), part 4, pp. 1649-1651.

20. The verb *šabā* does not belong here since it is a denominative verb derived from the gentilic 'Sabian'. It denotes 'to become a Sabian', that is, an apostate.

Arabic root *šbb* which carries the meaning of 'pour forth', 'flow', 'descent' (into a valley).²¹

Ugaritic *šb* from the root *šbw* means 'covet' and is thus related to Syriac, Arabic and Akkadian.²²

It is safe to draw the general conclusion that the expansion *šby* carries the sense of 'wish' or 'desire' in several of the Semitic languages although there is a considerable variety of meaning over the whole spectrum of Semitic languages. It is not easy to associate this range of meaning with the sense of 'stand erect' which is found in some of the other expansions.^{22a} Only in the case of words meaning 'gazelle' can one propose a link. But if this is granted one may move from the beautiful gazelle which stands erect to the fact of its desirability as something to be possessed. The link is, however, rather tenuous.

VI. *Other possible expansions*

The expansions we have discussed by no means exhaust the range of possibilities for the expansion of the biliteral root. Several of those proposed by Gesenius-Kautzsch²³ were investigated but most of them do not apply in the case of the root *šb*. However, the expansion *šbr* occurs in several of the Semitic languages with the meaning 'heap up' or 'pile up', which has some relation to the idea 'stand up'.

Thus biblical Hebrew *šābar* occurs in a few Old Testament passages in the sense of 'heap up'.²⁴ In post-biblical Hebrew the root *šābar* similarly means 'pile up' and hence 'collect', 'join together'. Aramaic *šebar* denotes 'pile up', 'bring together', while the related noun *šeber* means 'help', 'pile' with the extended meaning of a heap of people, that is a 'congregation' or 'community'.

Arabic *šabbara* II occasionally denotes 'heap up' although the derivatives of this root are generally related to the idea of 'confining' or 'restraining' something, and hence have reference to 'patience'. The related root *šabara* I is used of 'piling up' (stones), while the noun *šabāztu* means 'bundle', 'package', and *sabratu* denotes 'hump', 'heap'.

21. See E. W. Lane, *op. cit.*, pp. 1638ff.

22. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, p. 150. The root is not, however, listed by Cyrus H. Gordon's *Ugaritic Textbook*.

23. Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, pp. 100f.

22a. It is tempting to see in a number of these meanings a distinct link with what may have been originally sexual desire which is associated with the erection of the male organ. See above in Section I. Other meanings like 'swell', 'flow', etc., may be related to the same family as the expansions of *šb* which clearly carry some nuance of 'stand erect'.

24. See L. Köehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 1953, p. 792.

Ugaritic *šbrt* means 'band', 'group' and *šbr* a 'team' (of workers).

The root *šbt* in biblical Hebrew appears only in the noun *šebet* where it denotes 'bundle of ears'. The post-biblical sometimes carries the sense of 'attend upon' in reference to God. The meaning is readily linked with that shown in *hityašeb* where presumably the one who 'attends upon' God stands upright.

It may be that yet other expansions may be included in the discussion.²⁵ the present investigation does not claim to be exhaustive.

Some general conclusions may be drawn from the present discussion.

The biliteral root *šb* does not show the same consistency of meaning in its many derivatives in the cognate languages as do some of the other biliteral roots such as *qaš* and *ʿēd*. The general sense of 'stand erect' is strongly represented in the expansions *nšb*, *yšb* or *wšb*, *šb'*. There is some evidence of this meaning in the expansions *šbb*, *šbr* and *šbt* but in the *šby* the sense is very strongly 'wish' or 'desire' which is not easy to associate with the sense 'stand erect', unless the sexual associations of 'desire' already suggested be considered.

It can thus be affirmed that James Barr is both right and wrong. There is some truth in the assertion that cognate languages provide parallel meanings for derivatives of a given root, but it is not the whole truth since the root often undergoes significant semantic changes. The root under discussion in this paper provides an excellent illustration of what James Barr has argued. Presumably he would not wish to assert that there are no semantic links between derivatives of a common root in cognate languages. But when he urges caution in the use of this procedure he is clearly on very sound ground. The present discussion makes this clear for the biliteral root *šb*.

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25. Compare the wide range of expansions for the root *qaš* in Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 100.