

‘āmāl IN KOHELETH: « TOIL » OR « PROFIT »

The purpose of the present research is to analyse the morphologic and semantic variations of the root *‘ml* in the book of Koheleth. We shall begin by checking the uses of the root both in the Semitic languages in general and in Hebrew in particular. That will permit us to reconstruct, tentatively, the history of the semantic evolution of the different morphemes of *‘ml*. Moreover, it will be possible to make a comparison, within a diachronic perspective, between the semantic specifications of the root in Koheleth and its semantic history in the context of the Hebrew language.

1. *The root ‘ml in the Semitic languages, excepting Hebrew.*

In Akkadian the root *‘ml* occurs only in the noun *nēmeltu(m)* (Assyrian variant form: *nēmalu*; ground-form: *m/napras*<sup>1</sup> = \**na‘ma-lu* > *nēma/elu*<sup>2</sup>), which signifies « gain, earnings, profit »<sup>3</sup>. The word is found beginning with the ancient Babylonian (1950-1530 B.C.) and Assyrian (1950-1750 B.C.) periods. In most cases, it is a question of pecuniary gain: cf., e. g., the expression *kasap nēmeli*, « the earned money, earnings ». In personal names, *nēmeltu* can be used as a compound element followed by a divine name, or alone.

The same root is found in ancient South-Arabic and in classical Arabic, with the basic meaning of « to work, to do »<sup>4</sup>. In Ethiopic, the noun-form *mā‘bal*, « iron tool »<sup>5</sup>, occurs, with the ground-form,

<sup>1</sup> W. von Soden, *Grundriss der akkadischen Grammatik samt Ergänzungsheft*. (« *Analecta orientalia* », 37/47) Roma 1969, (hereafter quoted as *GAG*) § 56b.

<sup>2</sup> *GAG*, § 24e.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. Vol. II, Wiesbaden 1972, (hereafter quoted as *AHw*) p. 776b: « Gewinn, Profit ». The following examples are quoted from this article.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford 1907, (hereafter quoted as *BDB*) p. 765b, s.v.

<sup>5</sup> « Instrumentum ferreum (a fabro ferraio confectum) », in Ch. F. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopicæ*. Lipsiae 1865, col. 983.

as in the Akkadian noun *nēmēlu*, \**m/na<sup>c</sup>malu*, where the consonant *m* was dissimilated to *b*<sup>6</sup>.

In the Northwest-Semitic area, the root is largely attested in Hebrew and Aramaic<sup>7</sup>. In Aramaic, the root occurs first in the two almost contemporary inscriptions of Sefire (750 B.C., c.) and Zenzirli (Barrakkab I, 733-727 B.C.).

In the Sefire inscription the noun *cāmāl* occurs (I A, 1. 26):

[*wjšk h*] (26) *dd kl mh lhjh b'rq wbšmjn*

*wkl mh cml*

*wjšk 'l 'rpd* ['*bnj b*] (27) *rd*

« [Let] Hadad [pour out] (26) all manner of evil in earth and  
and all manner of trouble; [heaven

let him pour out upon Arpad (27) hail [stones] »<sup>8</sup>.

The noun *cml*, translated as « trouble » by Gibson and Fitzmyer<sup>9</sup>, « *Uebel* » by Donner-Röllig<sup>10</sup> and as « *affliction, malheur* » by Jean-Hoftijzer<sup>11</sup>, gets a clear meaning from its context, where it is paralleled by *lhjh*, « evil »<sup>12</sup>.

In the Zenzirli inscription, Barrakkab I, 11. 7-8, the verb *cml* presents a difficult interpretation:

(7) *wbjt 'bj c/(8)ml mn kl*

*wršt bglgl* (9) *mr'j mlk 'šwr bmšc*(10) *t mlkn rbrbn bclj k*(11) *sp*

*wbc'lj zhb*

*w'hz*t (12) *bjt 'bj whjtbth* (13) *mn bjt ḥd mlkn rbrb*(14) *n*

The text is translated thus by Gibson:

« (7) My father's house (8) laboured more than all others;  
and I have run at the wheel (9) of my lord, the king of Assyria,  
[in the midst

<sup>6</sup> For the change of *m* to *b*, which is frequent in the Punic language (cf. *šm<sup>c</sup>>šb<sup>c</sup>*), cf. S. Moscati, *Il sistema consonantico delle lingue semitiche*. Roma 1954, p. 46, § 47.

<sup>7</sup> To my knowledge, *cml* has not yet been found either in Ugaritic or in Phoenician.

<sup>8</sup> J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*. Vol. II: *Aramaic Inscriptions, Including Inscriptions in the Dialect of Zenzirli*. Oxford 1975, p. 30, text; p. 31, translation.

<sup>9</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, S. J., *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*. (« *Biblica et orientalia* », 19) Rome 1967, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> H. Donner, W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Vol. II, Wiesbaden 1973, (hereafter quoted as KAI) p. 239.

<sup>11</sup> Ch.-F. Jean, J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*. Leiden 1965, (hereafter quoted as DISO) p. 217, s.v. II.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. DISO, p. 137, s.v. II.

(10) of powerful kings, possessors of (11) silver and possessors  
[of gold.]

I have taken over (12) my father's house and have made it bet-  
[ter (13) than the house of any powerful king »<sup>13</sup>.

A similar interpretation of *ˢml* has been advanced by Donner-Röllig: « Und das Haus meines Vaters war [ei]friger als alle »; the same author further on explains the text as follows: « es handelt sich um den Eifer der Könige von Sam'al ... im Dinste des assyrischen Grossherrn »<sup>14</sup>. In contrast to this interpretation, Ginsberg<sup>15</sup> and Rosenthal<sup>16</sup> understand *ˢml* to mean « has profited ». Dahood, on the basis of the semantic parallelism between *ˢml* and *ˢḥ*<sup>17</sup>, suggests that *ˢml* means « to amass (riches) » and proposes the translation: « the house of my father amassed (riches) »<sup>18</sup>.

As against the last two suggestions, we need only point out that they do not fit well in the context of the inscription. Here, the verb *ˢml* is followed by the expression *wršt bglgl mr'j*, which, as is shown by the Panammu inscription<sup>19</sup>, 11. 12-13, describes the participation of a vassal king in the military campaigns of his suzerain and which, in any case, indicates, on the basis of parallel biblical expressions as 1 Sm 8, 11; 2 Sm 15, 1; 1 Ki 1, 5, an act of subjection in front of a superior. So we think that the first interpretation, particularly the one of Donner-Röllig, is more appropriate to the context.

In imperial Aramaic, two other examples of *ˢml* occur. The first is from the Elephantine documents: *šm'jtj k'ˢml' zj ˢmlt kzj [...]*, « I have heard of the trouble which you took when [...] »<sup>20</sup>. This text is important for us, because, for the first time, the expression *ˢml ˢml* is found, in which the verb *ˢml* occurs together with its internal object. The second text of the same period is the inscription of Daskyleion: (2) *whwmjtk* (3) *bl wnbw zj 'rh' znh* (4) *jhwh ˢdh*

<sup>13</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> *KAI II*, p. 233; cf. *DISO*, p. 217, s.v.: « la maison de mon père faisait des efforts plus que tous ».

<sup>15</sup> H. L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*. New York 1950, p. 3, footnote 2a; *id.* in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*, 21 (1952), pp. 35-37.

<sup>16</sup> F. Rosenthal, « Canaanite and Aramaic Inscriptions », in J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton 1969<sup>3</sup>, p. 655.

<sup>17</sup> M. Dahood says: « From the analogy of *ˢāšā*, 'to work', but also 'to gather', and of *pāˢal*, 'to toil', but also 'to collect' ..., one might fairly maintain that *ˢmal*, 'to labour', could also signify 'to amass', in *id.*, « The Phoenician Background of Qoheleth », *Biblica*, 47 (1966), p. 269.

<sup>18</sup> *ib.*

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 and 84.

<sup>20</sup> A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* Oxford 1923, p. 139, inscription N. 40, 1. 2.

'jš 'l jcml, « (2) I adjure you (3) (by) Bel and Nebo that whoever passes (4) this way, let no man disturb (me) »<sup>21</sup>. For Gibson the form of the verb *jcml* is an Aph'el, with the same meaning as in Syriac, « to weary or to trouble (someone) »<sup>22</sup>. Semantically, the verb corresponds to *rgz*, Yiph'il, of a similar Phoenician inscription, which signifies « to disturb, upset (the bones of a dead person in a tomb) »<sup>23</sup>.

In the Aramaic texts of Qumran, the root *cml* is found, as far as I can ascertain, only twice. In the fragments of the *Books of Enoch* (4Q En<sup>a</sup> 1 III, 11. 17-18), we read: [wdj hww 'kljn] (18) *cml kl bnj 'nš'*, which Milik translates: « [and they (the giants) were devouring] the labour of all the sons of men »<sup>24</sup>. In the sentence, as it has been reconstructed, *cml* is an object of the verb 'kl, « to eat », and denotes « the fruit of toil », « the produce of work », as in Ps 105, 44<sup>25</sup>. Such a connection is frequently found in Akkadian, in the phrase *nēme-la(m) akālu(m)*, « to spend, consume the earnings »<sup>26</sup>, and, as we will see, in Koheleth. The second text is 1Q Test Levi (frgm. 3, 11. 1-2): [wzmnjn] (2) *tcml wzmnjn tn[wḥ]*, « [sometimes] you will toil, sometimes you will re[st] »<sup>27</sup>. Here, *cml*, « to toil », is opposed to *nwḥ*, « to rest »<sup>28</sup>.

In the Aramaic rabbinic literature, the verb *cml* is found very seldom; generally, in the Targumim, the same Hebrew verb is rendered by *trḥ* or *lcj*, both « to toil ». The noun *ġāmāl* is more frequently found, which, in addition to its normal significations of « toil, trouble » and of « fruit of labour, produce », develops a new meaning of « acquisition, rent », according to Jastrow<sup>29</sup>, « *Nutzniessung, Miethzins* (sic) », according to Levi<sup>30</sup>. An instance of the last mentioned meaning occurs in *B. Bathr. 67a*: *mgbjnn 'pjlw m'cml' dbtj*, « we used to collect even from house rents »<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Gibson, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> id., p. 158.

<sup>23</sup> DISO, p. 274, s.v. I; cf. the inscription in KAI I, N. 13.

<sup>24</sup> J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch. Aramaic Fragments of Qumrān Cave 4*. Oxford 1976, the quoted Aramaic text is on p. 150, the translation on p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. BDB, p. 765b.

<sup>26</sup> AHw II, p. 776b.

<sup>27</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, D.J. Harrington, *A Manual of Palestinian Aramaic Texts*. (« *Biblica et orientalia* », 34) Rome 1978, pp. 80-81; note, on p. 80 (fig. 3, l. 2), the misprint *wzmzjn* for *wzmnjn*.

<sup>28</sup> In a fragmentary inscription of Palmyra, the expression occurs: *w'cml bswmh*, « il s'est efforcé de sa personne » (translation suggested by DISO, p. 217, s.v. I); cf. *Syria*, 17 (1936), p. 280, l. 5.

<sup>29</sup> M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. New York 1903, reprint 1975, p. 1089, s.v.

<sup>30</sup> J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch*. Vol. III, Leipzig 1883, p. 662, s.v.

<sup>31</sup> Jastrow, op. cit., ib.

Corresponding to the Hebrew substantive *ʿāmēl*, « worker », in rabbinic Aramaic *ʿamēlā'* / *ʿamēlā'*, « hard worker », is found<sup>32</sup>. The precise significance of the term is explicitly explained in *Genesis Rabbah* (Sect. 39, 15): *tmn qrijn lpw' l' tḡ' ʿmj'l'*, « there [in Syria<sup>33</sup> or in Babylon<sup>34</sup>] they call a *good working man ʿmj'l'* »<sup>35</sup>.

Finally, there is a group of four inscriptions belonging to Byzantine synagogues, where the noun *ʿml* signifies « offering, contribution », given for the foundation of the building. In three inscriptions of the synagogue of Hammath-Gadara the following blessing occurs: *mlk ʿlmh jtn brkth bʿmlh*, « may the king of the universe give his blessing for his (or her) contribution »<sup>36</sup>. In the synagogue of Kokhav-Ha-Yarden<sup>37</sup>, *ʿml*, « contribution », is paralleled by *rḥmn*, « generosity »<sup>38</sup>.

## 2. The root *ʿml* in Hebrew.

In the following part we analyse the different semantic uses of the root *ʿml* in the large context of Hebrew literature. To begin with, I present a general table with all the biblical occurrences of *ʿml*, followed by some considerations on the distribution of the root in the Hebrew Bible; afterwards, we will make a brief survey of the different significations of the root in the Hebrew Bible, excluding Koheleth, and in Hebrew non-biblical literature.

<sup>32</sup> id., op. cit., p. 1088, s.v.

<sup>33</sup> Levy, op. cit., ib., s.v.

<sup>34</sup> M.A. Mirkin, *Midrash Rabbah: Bereshit Rabbah*. Part 2, Tel Aviv 1971<sup>2</sup>, p. 102, footnote.

<sup>35</sup> Text and translation by Jastrow, op. cit., ib. The *textus receptus* offers a different reading of the sentence. The critical edition of *Bereshit Rabbah* by Y. Theodor, quoted in Mirkin, has a text which substantially agrees with ours.

<sup>36</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, D.J. Harrington, op. cit., inscription N. A26, 11. 9-10; A27, 11.2-3.4; A28, 11. 2.3; pp. 262-265. The authors render *ʿml* as « undertakings ».

<sup>37</sup> Among the Greek inscriptions in Syria, the following phrase frequently occurs: *ex idiōn ponōn* (or *kopōn*, or *kamatōn*), with the meaning of « at his expences ». The corresponding common Greek expression is: *ek tōn idiōn*. Most likely, the phrase is a semitism, where *ponōn*, *kopōn*, *kamatōn* are different translations of *ʿml*. Cf. H.L. Ginsberg, *Koheleth*. Tel Aviv — Jerusalem 1961, (Hebrew) pp. 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, D.J. Harrington, op. cit., inscription N. A39, pp. 268-269. In the *editio princeps* of the inscription by M. Ben-Dov, cited ib., p. 297, the phrase *drḥmn wmn ʿmlj* has been translated: « of their own and public funds ». Another epigraphic instance of *ʿml* has been found in Dura Europos, in a rather fragmentary inscription, cf. *Berytus*, 7 (1942), p. 97.

## a) Occurrences of cml in the Hebrew Bible.

	the verb cāmal	c ā m ē l		the substantive cāmāl	total
		as a substantive	as an adjective (participle)		
Gn				41,51	1
Nm				23,21	1
Dt				26,7	1
Jud		5,26		10,16	2
Is				10,1; 53, 11; 59,4	3
Jer				20,18	1
Hab				1,3.13	2
Jonah	4,10				1
Ps	127,1			7,15.17 10,7.14; 25,18; 55,11; 73, 5,16; 90,10; 94, 20; 105,44; 107, 12; 140,10	14
Prov	16,26	16,26		24,2; 31,7	4
Job		3,20; 20,22		3,10; 4,8; 5,6.7; 7,3; 11,16; 15,35; 16,2	10
Koh	1,3; 2,11.19.20. 21; 5,15.17; 8,17		2,18.22; 3,9; 4,8; 9,9	1,3; 2,10 (bis). 11.18.19.20.21. 22.24; 3,13; 4,4. 6.8.9; 5,11.17.18; 6,7; 8,15; 9,9; 10,15	35
1 Chr				7,35 (as a per- sonal name)	1
					= 76 times

From the above table it can be seen that *cml* occurs 76 times: once as a personal name; 11 times as a verb, of which 6 times with *cāmāl* as internal object<sup>39</sup>; 4 times *cāmēl* as an adjective with the function of a participle; 55 times the substantive *cāmāl*.

Not considering the personal name in 1 Chr, out of the 75 occurrences of *cml*, 35 belong to Koheleth, that is to say almost a half. Moreover, if we consider the books of Koheleth, Proverbs, Job and Psalms together, we see that it occurs 63 times. It follows that *cml* is characteristic of wisdom literature and of liturgical poetry. Considering the remaining 12 examples, it becomes clear that our root belongs almost exclusively to late Hebrew literature<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless,

<sup>39</sup> Koh 1,3; 2,11.19.2.(21); 5,17; in Prov 16,26, the verb has as its subject *nefeš cāmēl*.

<sup>40</sup> See also S. Schwertner, « *cāmāl*, Mühsal », in E. Jenni, C. Westermann, ed., *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Vol. II, München-Zürich 1976, (hereafter quoted as *THAT*) col. 332: « Durch diese Streuung wird deutlich, dass *cāmāl* im ganzen der späten Sprache angehört ».

the two occurrences in Jud 5,26 and Nm 23,21<sup>41</sup> are surely of an earlier date.

Distinguishing between poetical and prose texts, we see that only three occurrences belong to prose: Dt 27,7 and Jud 10,16, both written in the elevated deuteronomistic style, and Jonah 4,10.

b) *Semantic uses of ʿaml in the Hebrew Bible, excluding Koheleth.*

The substantive ʿāmāl<sup>42</sup> is the most frequent morpheme of our root in the Hebrew Bible: outside Koheleth, it is found 33 times. Apart from Ps 105,44, it is used with two different significations. (1.) Its more common meaning, particularly when the term stands by itself, is that of « trouble, misery », very akin to « affliction, sorrow ». In a pessimistic tone, it can designate the condition of human life: « man is born to *trouble* » (Job 5,7); or the condition of a suffering person: « nights of *misery* are appointed to me » (Job 7,3; see too Job 3,10; 11,16; 16,2: « comforters who cause *affliction* »; Jer 20,18; probably also Ps 73,16). In a more specific sense, ʿāmāl can denote the condition of a poor and miserable man: « they (the wicked) are not in *trouble* as other men are » (Ps 73,5; see also Prov. 31,7); the unjustly persecuted man prays: « consider my affliction (*ʿonjî*) and my *trouble* » (Ps 25,18; see too Ps 10,14 and Is 53,11). Similarly, the misadventures of Joseph (Gn 41,51), the oppression of the people of Israel by Pharaoh (Dt 26,7) and by the Canaanite rulers (Jud 10,16; Ps 107,12) are described as ʿāmāl. When the term occurs with this first meaning, it is often in parallelism with ʿōnî, « affliction, poverty », as in Gn 41,51; Dt 26,7; Ps 25,18; 107,10.12. A verb that frequently has ʿāmāl as an object is rāʾâ, « to see »: Dt 26,7; Is 53,11; Jer 20,18; Ps 10,14; 25,18; cf. Job 3,10.

(2.) The second meaning of the biblical ʿāmāl is « oppression, vexation », that is, that kind of « affliction » (meaning 1.) which is done to others. This oppression can be done by a court (Is 10,1; Ps 94,20), 'conceived' in secret (Is 59,4; Ps 7,15; Job 15,35), sown like grain (Job 4,8<sup>43</sup>), proclaimed in public (Ps 10,7; 140,10; Prov 24,2) and can even strike a town (Ps 55,11). The psalmist desires that the

<sup>41</sup> When Gn 41,51, referring to the history of Joseph, was written, is disputed. According to the traditional view, the v. belongs to E and is pre-exilic.

<sup>42</sup> Verbal noun; ground-form \*qatal, cf. H. Bauer, P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments*. Halle 1922, (hereafter quoted as *BL*) § 61s" p. 463. The noun-form \*qatal can express an abstract idea; cf. J. Barth, *Die Nominalbindung in den semitischen Sprachen*. Leipzig 18942, p. 105, quoted in *BDB*, p. 765, s.v.

<sup>43</sup> The text of Job 5,6 belongs to this semantic context, but its precise meaning is disputed.

*oppression* should fall back on the head of its doer (Ps 7,17) and Habbakkuk wonders why God permits the *oppression* of man (1,3.13). In this second meaning, cāmāl is characterized by a particular *Wortfeld*: most commonly it is paralleled by 'āwen, «trouble»: Is 10,1; 59,4; Hab 1,3; Ps 7,15; 10,7; 55,11; 90,10<sup>44</sup>; 107,10; Job 4,8; 5,6; 15,35; Nm 23,21<sup>45</sup>; by šōd, «devastation»: Hab 1,3; Prov 24,2; by hāmāš, «violence»: Hab 1,3; Ps 7,17; 55,11; by rāc, «evil»: Hab 1,13; Prov 24,1-2; by hawwōt, «destruction»: Ps 94,20; 55,11-12; by rāšāc, «wicked»: Hab 1,3-4. 13; Ps 140,9-10; by tōk ūmirmā, «treachery and deceit»: Ps 10,7; 55,11.

(3.) Finally, there is a single occurrence, in Ps 105,44, where cāmāl denotes the fruit of work and toil, the «produce», «income»: «they took possession of the *fruit* of peoples' *toil*».

Another morpheme of the root cml is cāmēl, which can be an adjective-participle or a substantive<sup>46</sup>. Outside Koheleth, the morpheme occurs four times, always as a substantive. In Job 3,20, the meaning of cāmēl is clear from its parallel expression mārē nāfeš, «the bitter in soul» (compare, for the contents, with Job 5,7; Jer 20,18) and it indicates a man who has the cāmāl as his lot. The occurrence of cāmēl in Job 20, 22b must be taken in the same sense. In the two quoted texts of Job, cāmēl gets its significance as from the above classified cāmāl (1.), «affliction, sorrow», and means «afflicted person». In the two other texts, Jud 5,26 and Prov 16,26, cāmēl denotes simply a «worker», as in the corresponding Arabic term cāmīlu.

Jud 5,26 deserves special attention due to its antiquity:

jādāh l'jātēd tišlahnā / wimīnāh l'halmūt cāmēlīm

«She put her hand to the tent peg / and her right hand to the  
[workmen's mallet].»

The word *halmūt*, which corresponds to *maqqebet*, «ham-

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<sup>44</sup> In Ps 90,10, cāmāl wā'āwen, according to several versions, should be translated «affliction and trouble». On the contrary, since when cāmāl is coupled by 'āwen it always means «violence», one should conclude that also here it retains the same meaning. M. Dahood consequentially translated our text: «mischief and iniquity», cf. id., *Psalms* II. («Anchor Bible», 17) Garden City - New York 1973<sup>2</sup>, p. 320.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*. Edinburgh 1903, p. 353: the two terms of ours indicate an «absence of disasters from Israel». The v. presents several difficulties: one of them is the fact that only here in the Hebrew Bible cāmāl occurs as a subject of the verb rā'ā, «to see», whereas it is always its object elsewhere. One might suggest that the two verbs r'h and hbjt in Nm 23,21 were originally intended to be understood in the passive form.

<sup>46</sup> *BL*, p. 464, § 61z''-a'': the ground-form \*qatil designates originally an adjective; it can also be used as a participle and as a noun: some examples are: zāqēn, šākēn, kābēd.



mer », in the parallel account, Jud 4,21, means « mallet, hammer » (cf. LXX<sup>B</sup>: *sphyra*; Vg: *malleus*). The word *ʿāmēlīm* created difficulties for the ancient versions: LXX<sup>A</sup> translated it: *katakopos*, « exhausted »; LXX<sup>B</sup>: *kopiōn*, « toiler »; LXX<sup>P</sup> read, probably, in its Hebrew text *lʿōlāmīm* and translated: *eis telos*, viz. « to the end », as in the Psalms. But the Targum rendered the term with the specific *nafhīn*, « smiths », workers who forge iron; similarly the Vulgata, which reads: « *ad fabrorum malleos* », and also the Peshitta. The last interpretation has a good philological basis<sup>47</sup> and has been accepted by modern dictionaries<sup>48</sup>. It is clearly superior to the alternative translation, which sees in *ʿāmēlīm* a qualitative designation of the workers, as « the men who toil »<sup>49</sup>, a word used here only to express « a singular metonymy for a heavy hammer »<sup>50</sup>. As a matter of fact, the idea of toil, exhaustion, that can be implied by *ʿāmēl*, is not requested here by the context; on the contrary, it is out of place.

The same word *ʿāmēl* means simply « worker » also in Prov 16, 26a: *nefeš ʿāmēl ʿāmēlā llō*, a text that is translated by Toy: « The labourer's appetite labours for him »<sup>51</sup>.

The verb *ʿāmal*, apart from Koheleth, is found only three times: once in the above cited text of Prov 16,26, where it signifies « to work »; in Ps 127,1, *ʿāmal b-* denotes the work of the builders; in Jonah 4,10, where *ʿāmal b-* is parallel to *giddēl*, « to grow (something), to farm », it denotes the work of the farmers. It is not clear to what degree the idea of toil is implied in the two last quoted occurrences; in any case, it seems to be absent in Prov. 16,26a.

Finally, the root is found in the personal name *ʿāmāl*, 1 Chr 7,35, which has a hypocoristic form, with the theophoric element being absent. Other personal names such as *ʿēlʿāšā*, *ʿēlpāʿal* can be compared with this name. As stated above, in the Akkadian language personal names formed by the element *nēmel* + divine name, or simply consisting in the element *nēmel* occur. Moreover, at Palmyra the name *ʿmlʿ* is found<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the meaning of the root in Arabic.

<sup>48</sup> BDB, p. 766a: « workman »; F. Zorell, *Lexicon Hebraicum et Aramaicum Veteris Testamenti*. Roma 1954, reprint 1968, p. 609b: « *faber* »; E. Ben Iehuda, *Thesaurus totius hebraicitatis*. Vol. IX, Jerusalem, p. 4563b: « *Arbeiter, ouvrier, labourer* ».

<sup>49</sup> According to Rashi and Radak, cf. *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, commentary on the v.

<sup>50</sup> G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges*. Edinburgh 1895, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> C.H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*. Edinburgh 1899, p. 331; cf. likewise BDB, p. 766a and F. Zorell, op. cit., p. 609b; Ben Iehuda, op. cit., Vol. IX, p. 4563b.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *THAT* II, p. 332.

c) *Semantic uses of ʿml in non-biblical Hebrew.*

The root ʿml is never found in the Hebrew epigraphic texts and appears for the first time in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira, where the adjective ʿāmēl occurs three times (11,11; 34,3<sup>3</sup>.4) and the noun ʿāmāl once, in 13,26. In this book, ʿāmēl denotes twice, 34,3.4, the toil and the labour employed to increase wealth; the contrary verb is nūaḥ, « to rest ». Twice ʿāmēl is paralleled by jāgēaʿ, « weary », 11,11 and 34,4. In 13,26 maḥšebet ʿāmāl, « painful thought »<sup>54</sup>, contrasts with lēb ṭōb, « happy heart ».

In the Hebrew literature of Qumran, only the noun ʿāmāl is found, for the present. It is used generally in the sense of « affliction, sorrow », as in the Bible: cf. 1Q pHab VIII, 2; X, 12; 1Q Hod X, 32; XI, 1.19; 4Q Dib Ham 6,12<sup>55</sup>. In 1Q Serek IX, 22, ʿāmāl occurs within a particular context: lʿzwb lmw hwn wʿml kpjm, where ʿāmāl kappajim is parallel to hōn, « wealth », and signifies « the produce of the hands (fruit of toil) »; the original form of the phrase ʿāmāl kappajim is jēgiaʿ kappajim (cf. Ps 128,2; Hagg 1,11; Job 10,3), which has the same meaning. If in the phrase jēgiaʿ has been substituted by ʿāmāl, it means that the two were understood to be semantically equivalent<sup>56</sup>.

As far as rabbinic Hebrew literature is concerned, I limit myself to the evidence quoted in available dictionaries. The noun ʿāmāl can signify « affliction, toil, fruit of work, property »<sup>57</sup>; for the last meaning cf. *Ex. Rabbah* (Sec. 22,3): šellō' hājā baʿāmālō gāzēl, « in whose acquired property there was no robbery »<sup>58</sup>. The Qal form of the verb is found only on a few occasions, just as in the Bible. On the contrary, the adjective ʿāmēl is common and is used to qualify a man who toils, works hard or a suffering person<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> I adopt here the marginal reading; the text has ʿmlj, an otherwise unattested plural construct form. Cf. *The Book of Ben Sira. Text, Concordance and an Analysis of the Vocabulary.* (The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language) Jerusalem 1973, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> It isn't improbable that mḥšbt ʿml should be read in correspondence with hʿwšr, « riches », in v. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the texts, including 1Q Serek IX, 22, in E. Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran.* Hebräisch und deutsch. München 1971<sup>2</sup>. For 4Q Dib Ham 6, 12, cf. M. Baillet. « Un recueil liturgique de Qumran, grotte 4: 'Les paroles des luminaires' », *RB*, 68 (1961), p. 210: the sentence, in which ʿml occurs, is literary dependent on Dt 26,7.

<sup>56</sup> As for jēgiaʿ, the meaning of « product » tends to supplant the original meaning of « toil »; cf. *BDB*. p. 388b. What happened at an earlier stage with jēgiaʿ, began to happen later also with the synonymous ʿml.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Jastrow, op. cit., p. 1089.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Cf. especially Ben Iehuda, op. cit., Vol. IX, pp. 4563-4564.

### 3. *Semantic evolution of the root ʿml.*

Grouping the different meanings of the root ʿml, according to its different morphemes, one observes that at their basis there is a common semantic denominator, which is the idea of « work ». The meanings can be grouped in two categories, according to the two different aspects that characterize the work: toil, or efficiency-production. Tentatively, we make the following proposal for the semantic evolution of the root:

(Toil)                    ⇨ *hard work* → *trouble, affliction* → *oppression (of others)*

#### WORK

(Efficiency            ⇨ *produce* → *property, wealth* → *gain* → *contribution*  
production)

This wide ramification takes place within the two Northwest-Semitic languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. The evidence of the other Semitic languages confirms our suggested view: ancient South Arabic, classical Arabic and Ethiopic assure us that the neutral idea of work belongs to the basic meaning of ʿml. This connotation must be very ancient, because in the old Akkadian language the noun *nēmelu(m)*, « gain, profit », occurs, which is already a development of the idea of work. We can even attempt to set the suggested semantic evolution of the root in the wider frame of the Semitic linguistic area. In the Southern Semitic area, the root was used to mean *efficiency-production*; in the Eastern Semitic area, a secondary development of the same meaning is found; in the Northwestern Semitic area, the root is prevalently used with the meaning of *toil*, and only sporadically or in later texts with the sense of *efficiency-production*.

### 4. *The root ʿml in Koheleth.*

a) *A survey of the occurrences of ʿml in the book.*

ʿml is one of the favourite roots of Koheleth<sup>60</sup>. Morphologically, it occurs in three forms: verb, adjective-participle and substantive,

<sup>60</sup> Cf. O. Loretz, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient. Untersuchung zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet*. Freiburg 1964, pp. 166 ff. The most frequent « Lieblingwörter » in Koheleth are: ʿsh (62 times), hkm (51 times), twb (51 times), ʿt (40 times), jdʿ (38 times), šmš (33 times), ʿml (33 times, excluding 1,3), rch (30 times), hbl (29 times), ksjl (19 times), šmh (17 times), 'kl (15 times), jtr (15 times), skl (13 times), rwh (13 times), etc. The reckoning is that of Loretz.

which have, within the book, the distribution outlined in the following table.

Verb:	cāmāl	1,3	2,11	2,19.20.21	3,13	
Adject.:	cāmēl		2,18.	22		4,8
Subst.:	cāmāl	1,3	2,10(bis).11	2,18.19.20.21.22.24	3,9	4,4.6.8.9
(Verb:	cāmāl)	5,14.17		8,17		= 8 times
(Adject.:	cāmēl)				9,9	= 5 times
(Subst.:	cāmāl)	5,15.17.18	6,7	8,15	9,9	10,15 = 22 times

The distribution itself of the root in the book suggests some conclusions. As in all other biblical books, the substantive occurs much more frequently than the verb or the adjective-participle. Moreover, taking into account that out of 13 occurrences of the verb and of the adjective-participle, 8 or 9 times they are further qualified by the internal object *cāmāl*, one must acknowledge that the basic semantic unit is the substantive. Further one observes that in Koheleth the root *cml* not only is not present in all the parts of the book (it is absent in the chapters 7, 11, 12; it occurs only once or twice in the chapters 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10), but that it shows the tendency to appear in groups of verses: 2, 18-24 (11 times); 4,4-9 (5 times); 5,14-18 (5 times); 2,10-11 (4 times).

#### b) *Discussion of the texts.*

To begin with, our discussion of the meaning of *cml* in Koheleth will concentrate on the literary units, where the presence of *cml* is more frequent.

Koh 1,12-2,26 forms a single literary unit<sup>61</sup>, in which it is possible to distinguish minor units, ordered according to a clear sequence<sup>62</sup>: after having introduced himself (1,12-15), the author shows how wisdom can't solve man's problems (1,16-18), neither can joy (2,1-2),

<sup>61</sup> So R. Gordis, *Koheleth - The Man and his World*. A study of Ecclesiastes. New York 1963, pp. 148-149 and A. Lauha, *Kohelet* («Biblischer Kommentar A.T.», 19) Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, pp. 42-43.

<sup>62</sup> So Lauha, op. cit., *ibid.*

pleasure and wealth (2,3-11), adopted as a way of life; there is no essential difference between wisdom and foolishness (2,12-24a). In the context of this large unit, the root *ʿml* plays an important role in two sections: at the end of the first minor unit, 2,3-11, and at the end of the subsequent one, vv. 12-24a.

2,10-11 functions as a conclusion to the list of efforts made by Koheleth to increase his wealth, vv. 4-9. In v. 10, the substantive *ʿāmāl*, refers, synthetically, to all those efforts; it is clear, particularly in v. 11, where *ʿāmāl* is semantically specified on three occasions by *ʿšh*, « to undertake an enterprise », which, on his part, is to be related to « enterprises » in v. 4, to « to do = to build » in vv. 5 and 6, and to *ʿšh*, « to buy, to purchase »<sup>63</sup> in v. 8 (cf. also v. 3). So in vv. 10-11, *ʿāmāl* denotes precisely « zealous initiative », « hard work » done to increase wealth. That *ʿāmāl* doesn't mean here « wealth, possession », is pointed out by the presence, in v. 10, of *ḥeleq*, which means « possession, gain »: it is the *ʿāmāl*, « hard work », which is at the origin of the *ḥeleq*, « possession ». Note however, that here, in *ʿāmāl*, the idea of sorrow, pain is absent.

In vv. 18-24a, *ʿml* has a remarkable frequency, occurring 11 times in all. The group of vv. forms a self-complete thematic unity, which treats of the inutility of amassing riches, that, after death, may be inherited by inept hands. In reference to v. 24a, Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, XII cent.) had already observed that *ʿāmālô* is equivalent to *māmônô*, « his money »<sup>64</sup>. Ginsberg, on the basis of the observation of Rashbam, suggested that everywhere in Koheleth *ʿāmāl* means « riches, wealth »<sup>65</sup>. Such a generalization was opposed by Gordis<sup>66</sup>. In our unit, the noun *ʿāmāl* has clearly the meaning of « fruit of work, property » in four vv., as it is shown by the context: <sup>67</sup> in v. 18b *ʿāmāl* is an object of the verb *hinniaḥ*, « to leave back (after death) »; in v. 19, *ʿāmāl* is an object of *šālaṭ*, « to be master of », « to exert control over »; in v. 21, *ʿāmāl* is paralleled by *ḥeleq*, « possession », and, in v. 22, by *raʿjôn*, « wish », « desired object »<sup>68</sup>. On the basis of these texts, we may conclude that in the whole unit, vv. 18-24a, the noun *ʿāmāl* has a univocal sense. The verb *ʿamal*, here

<sup>63</sup> *ʿšh* in v. 8 is parallel to *kustj*, « I amassed », and *qnitj*, « I bought », in v. 7. For *ʿšh*, « to buy », cf. *BDB*, p. 759a: 7.

<sup>64</sup> Cited in H. L. Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ib.*, p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> R. Gordis, « On the Meaning of *ʿml* in Koheleth », (Supplementary Notes, D) in *id.*, op. cit., pp. 418-420.

<sup>67</sup> For the semantic development: « work » → « fruit of work », cf. R. Gordis, « On the Meaning of *ʿml* in Koheleth », p. 418. A similar phenomenon happens with the words *hjl*, *jgc*, *'wn*, *hwn*, *kh*.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, p. 211.

almost always having the noun *cāmāl* as an internal object, gets the akin meaning of « amassing (riches) »<sup>69</sup>.

Therefore, the global meaning of the unit is: Koheleth feels aversion to his riches, for they might be left to another (v. 18), who, perhaps, is unable to use them properly (v. 19). So it is far better to divert one's heart from riches (v. 20), than to be attached to them and, in the end, to leave them to someone that hasn't toiled (*cml*) for them. What can all riches give to man (v. 22) if his life is filled with sorrow (v. 23)? It is better to take advantage of riches as one lives (v. 24a).

In the unit 3,1-15, the root *cml* occurs twice: in vv. 9 and 13. In v. 9, *cāmāl* is paralleled by *hācōšeh*, « the worker »<sup>70</sup>, « *der Tätige* »<sup>71</sup>, and so denotes the activity of the latter. V. 13 is very similar to 2,24: the *cāmāl* that man eats, are his goods, his wealth, that is, the fruit of his work. The connection between *cml* and *'kl*, « to eat », found also in 2,24 and 5,17, occurs, as we have already noted, in the Akkadian language in the phrase *nēmela(m) akālu(m)*.

In the unit 4,4-6, there are other occurrences of *cāmāl*: in v. 4, the term is paralleled by *kišrōn hammacāšeh*, « skill »<sup>72</sup>, « ability (of an artisan) », cf. 2,21, and denotes, therefore, the effort and the zeal employed in accomplishing a work. In v. 6, *cāmāl* undergoes a semantic modification: here it is, like its parallel term *nāḥat*, « rest, quietness », an accusative of material<sup>73</sup> and indicates what is reached through work and effort. So, the sense of the three vv. is: every effort and ability finds its *raison d'être* in emulation (v. 4); it is better a little, achieved through peace, than a lot through much effort and anxiety.

In the following unit, 4,7-12, *cml* occurs three times: in v. 8, both as a substantive and as an adjective-participle: the two are semantically interdependent, in the sense that in the question of v. 8b (« for whose sake am I toiling? »; cf. the parallel expression, « to deprive oneself of joy »), the *cāmāl* of v. 8a is resumed and specified; thus the *cāmāl* of v. 8a also signifies « hard, assiduous work »<sup>74</sup>. In v. 9, *cāmāl* is semantically qualified by *šākār*, « reward », and, as a consequence, signifies « work ».

<sup>69</sup> See above, footnote 17.

<sup>70</sup> R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> A. Lauha, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>72</sup> R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, p. 160.

<sup>73</sup> A. Lauha, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>74</sup> The word *qēs*, which in 4,8 qualifies *cāmāl*, denotes always « the end » of something continuous like a series, a chronological or numerical sequence. Virtually it never implies the idea of space; also in 4,16, where the phrase *qēs lekōl hācām* l<sup>e</sup> must be understood as a play of words in reference to the similar phrase in v. 8.

Another group of occurrences of *ʿml* is found in 5,14-18, a text which forms an almost homogeneous unit. In v. 14, *ʿāmāl* is synonymous with *ʿōšer*, « riches », and denotes the « fruit of work, income ». In the following v., the verbal form of our root receives the meaning of « hard, assiduous work », for it is semantically qualified by the succeeding expressions. In v. 17, as in 2,24 and 3,13, *ʿāmāl* occurs together with *'ākal*, « to eat », and means, consequently, « fruit of work, income »; this meaning is here stressed by the loose parallelism of our root with *ḥeleq*, « property » (cf. 2,10.21; 5,18; 9,9). The same is valid for v. 18, where *ʿāmāl* is parallel not only to *ḥeleq*, but also to *ʿōšer - n'kāsīm*, « riches - treasures ».

In 6,7, *ʿāmāl*, according to the context, is what satisfies hunger; its meaning is the same as in the above cited parallel texts: even though man destines all his *income* to his mouth (i.e., to his hunger), his longing is never satisfied.

In 8,15, there is almost a contraposition between the advice to take delight in life and the « hard work » that characterizes it.

In the following v. 17, the verb *ʿāmal* is constructed as an auxiliary verb in the phrase *j'ʿml lbqš*, which signifies, « he will labour hard to find, will search hard »<sup>75</sup>.

In 9,9, *ʿāmāl* is parallel to *ḥajjīm*, « life », cf. 8,15; the two terms qualify each other: life is not only *hebel*, « vanity », but also *ʿāmāl*, « hard work ». In the v. also *ʿāmēl* occurs, which is constructed as a participle and has the noun *ʿāmāl* as an internal object: its function is to stress the idea expressed by the noun.

10,15 is a *crux interpretum*: the first line, due to grammatical difficulties; the second, because of its strange meaning. However, we can observe that v. 10a is syntactically parallel to v. 12b, and its meaning should be: the effort (*ʿāmāl*) that the fool employs in multiplying his speeches, will exhaust his companion (cf. *'ādām* in v. 14). *ʿāmāl* is here semantically qualified by the synonymous root *jg'*, « to be tired ».

1,3 is the beginning of the unit consisting of 1,3-11, where the vicissitudes of man and of the world are conceived as increasing self-repetitive events. As a solemn warning, the opening v. announces that every effort (*ʿāmāl*) and undertaking of man, as sublime as it may be, is destined to take its part in the shapeless destiny of mankind and of the world<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> R. Gordis, *Koheleth*, p. 299.

<sup>76</sup> So also R. Gordis, « On the Meaning of *ʿml* in Koheleth », p. 420.

c) *Conclusion.*

Synthesizing the results of our analysis, we observe that the root *ʿml* assumes in Koheleth two semantic qualifications: (1.) « hard, assiduous work, toil »: 1,3; 2,10-11; 3,9; 4,4.8.9; 5,15; 8,15.17 (as an auxiliary verb); 9,9; 10,15; (2.) « fruit of work, income, profit »: 2,18-24a; 3,13; 4,6; 5,14.17.18; 6,7. The two meanings are strictly related to each other: the first has given origin to the second, according to a process largely attested in Semitic linguistics.

Comparing the two meanings that *ʿml* has in Koheleth, with the various semantic uses of the root in ancient Hebrew, one observes that the first meaning, « hard work, etc. », is found, with certainty, only in Ben Sira 34,3-4 and, later, in rabbinic literature. In Aramaic, the root occurs with the same meaning during the Persian period (if not already in the Zanjirli inscription) and in the documents of Qumran. The second meaning is found in the Bible, outside Koheleth, only in Ps 105,44, a clear post-exilic composition<sup>77</sup>; outside the Bible, it is found in Qumranic literature and both in Hebrew and Aramaic rabbinic writings.

From the comparison, we can deduce that the book of Koheleth was written very late in the history of Hebrew biblical literature. Another conclusion is, that the theory, according to which the language of Koheleth, on one hand, and the language of the remaining biblical books, on the other, are mutually heterogeneous, is strengthened; in fact, the two meanings that *ʿml* has in Koheleth are ignored in the rest of biblical literature (with the exclusion of Ps 105,44); and *vice versa*, the two meanings that *ʿml* has in the bulk of biblical literature are ignored in Koheleth.

FABRIZIO FORESTI O.C.D.

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen*. Vol. II (« Biblischer Kommentar A.T. », 15/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1972<sup>4</sup>, p. 719.