



BRILL

---

The Etymology of Eden

Author(s): A. R. Millard

Source: *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 34, Fasc. 1 (Jan., 1984), pp. 103-106

Published by: BRILL

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1518211>

Accessed: 30/09/2008 08:07

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=bap>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



BRILL is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Vetus Testamentum*.

<http://www.jstor.org>





commentators H. Gunkel, J. Skinner, S. R. Driver, R. de Vaux have all noted the equation, some with slight hesitancy. In more recent years E. A. Speiser wrote “*Eden*. Heb. *‘ēden*, Akk. *edinu*, based on Sum. *eden* ‘plain, steppe’ ... this word is rare in Akk. but exceedingly common in Sum. thus certifying the ultimate source as very ancient indeed” (*Genesis* [Garden City, 1964], pp. 16, 19).

Attractive as this derivation seems, it faces major objections. One, restated recently by Claus Westermann, deserves attention.<sup>5</sup> The Sumerian word begins with a simple /e/. That language has no /ʿ/, and there is no ground for supposing one stood as the initial of the word in Akkadian, as it does in Hebrew. One may compare Hebrew *ʿēd* and its generally supposed ancestor, the Sumerian *e<sub>4</sub>-de*, “flood-storm”, Akkadian *edû* where the initial vowel is carried by /ʿ/ in Hebrew.

The second objection arises from the history of the word in Babylonia. Speiser rightly observes that it is “exceedingly common” in Sumerian. In Akkadian, on the other hand, its occurrence is limited to the single entry in Syllabary b cited above.<sup>6</sup> Wherever “steppe” is to be expressed in Akkadian, and wherever there are Akkadian renderings of Sumerian compositions using *edin* the word normally found is *šēru*, *edinu* never appears.<sup>7</sup> This could be an accident, Akkadian texts containing *edinu* having escaped recovery. Yet given that *šēru* so often translates *edin*, and that there are several known synonyms of *šēru* in Akkadian, it seems safe to conclude that *edinu* was not a word current in Akkadian, but simply a learned scribal transcription of the Sumerian word-sign in the Syllabary. Again, a learned Hebrew scribe might have borrowed an extremely rare word from Babylonian because it could allow a popular etymology, but it can hardly be considered very likely, and is not the case with other Akkadian loan-words in Biblical Hebrew. The number of ancient readers who could have understood such ingenuity would not have been large.

Both the problem of the initial phoneme and the absence of *edinu* from any Akkadian text except one lexical list militate against the derivation of Hebrew *‘ēden* from an East Semitic and ultimately Sumerian word.



Biblical Hebrew knows several words with <sup>ʿ</sup>*dn* as their base and the common idea of “pleasure, luxury”. Traditionally, Eden is

linked with them, the Septuagint already representing *gan-<sup>ʿ</sup>eden* by *paradeisos tēs truphēs* at Gen. ii 15 and elsewhere. Many scholars have continued to uphold this link. Those who prefer the Babylonian explanation assume with Speiser that the foreign word “came to be associated, naturally enough, with the homonymous but unrelated Hebrew noun for ‘enjoyment’ ”, while Skinner affirmed “There is no probability that the proper name was actually coined in this sense”.<sup>8</sup> Hitherto only Biblical Hebrew among the ancient West Semitic languages preserved indubitable examples of the base <sup>ʿ</sup>*dn* in use, Syriac showing it at a later time. The base is known in Arabic and could be an integral part of that language. Neither of the occurrences claimed in Ugaritic by C. H. Gordon is sustained by recent studies,<sup>9</sup> although another passage is now widely held to exhibit a form from <sup>ʿ</sup>*dn*.<sup>10</sup>

With the recovery of the life-size statue of Had-yis<sup>ʿ</sup>ī, king of Guzan, from Tell Fekheriyeh in northern Syria, a new example of a word apparently cognate with <sup>ʿ</sup>*eden* has become available.<sup>11</sup> In the first part of the parallel Assyrian and Aramaic texts stands a series of epithets of Hadad as god of life-giving water. He is styled “water-controller of heaven and earth, who rains down plenty, who gives pasture and watering-places to all lands, who gives prosperity (?) and offerings to all the gods his brothers, water-controller of all rivers, who makes all lands abound.” The last phrase in the Aramaic is *m<sup>ʿ</sup>dn mt kln* for which the Assyrian has *muṭahḥidu kibrāti*. There is no doubt the Assyrian verb means “to enrich, make abundant”, nor that the Aramaic parallel should have a similar sense (although the two texts are not absolutely identical in every phrase). Here, then, is <sup>ʿ</sup>*dn* in a verbal form, “who enriches, gives abundance”, in an Aramaic inscription which we assign to the mid-ninth century B.C. Clearly Old Aramaic gave a sense to <sup>ʿ</sup>*dn* which was very similar to its value in Biblical Hebrew.

Neither explanation of Eden can be finally established as the



right one; this new example of the cognate verb in Old Aramaic, with its context, reinforces the earlier interpretation. While that might still be claimed as secondary, or as a popular etymology, the objections to the Babylonian etymology make it much weaker than its champions have allowed. We may prefer to treat Eden, therefore, as conveying from the first all that was contained in the "blissful Paradise of God", in the tradition of the Septuagint and the poet John Milton.

Liverpool

A. R. Millard

<sup>1</sup> T. G. Pinches in Sir Henry Rawlinson, *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia V* (London, 1884), pl. 38, no. 2, with a duplicate, pl. 38, no. 4; re-published by F. Delitzsch, *Assyrische Lesestücke*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 65, 66, 4th edn. (1900), pp. 103-5, 5th edn. (1912), p. 107; and by R. Campbell Thomson, *Cuneiform Texts ... in the British Museum* 11 (London, 1900), pls. 24, 26.

<sup>2</sup> The whole text is available in B. Landsberger (ed.), *Materialen zum Sumerischen Lexicon* 3 (Rome, 1955), pp. 89 ff. For characteristics of the lexical material in cuneiform see M. Civil in S. J. Lieberman (ed.), *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 123-57.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hastings (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible* 1 (London, 1898), s.v.

<sup>4</sup> (2nd edn, Leipzig, 1917), p. 43; cf. F. Buhl (ed.), *Wilhelm Gesenius' ... Handwörterbuch* (17th edn, Leipzig, 1915), p. 567.

<sup>5</sup> *Genesis* I (Neukirchen, 1974), p. 286, citing U. Cassuto and T. C. Vriezen.

<sup>6</sup> Two cases in Old Assyrian texts entered by W. von Soden under *edinu* in *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* I (Wiesbaden, 1965), p. 187b, are obscure and probably not the same word, see K. Hecker, *Grammatik der Kültepe Texte* (Rome, 1968), p. 182, n. 1, and *The Assyrian Dictionary* I/J (Chicago, 1960), p. 297b, *itinnu* B.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Assyrian Dictionary* § (Chicago, 1962), pp. 138 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Speiser, p. 16, in line with Zimmern and Delitzsch; J. Skinner, *Genesis* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1930), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1965), Glossary, no. 1824, 51 (*CTA* 4) II: 17; 'nt (*CTA* 3): III: 30, following C. Virolleaud, *Syria* 13 (1932), p. 124; 16 (1935), p. 264; *La déesse Anat* (Paris, 1938), p. 46; now rendered "Behind" by A. Caquot, M. Szyner, A. Herdner, *Textes Ougaritiques* I (Paris, 1974), pp. 167, 198, following H. L. Ginsberg, U. Cassuto, G. R. Driver.

<sup>10</sup> For the text BH ii 53,54 *b<sup>c</sup>dn dnm* (Gordon, *UT* 75; *CTA* 12), Caquot, Szyner, and Herdner adduce the Hebrew, p. 349, n. u, with Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 73, 141, cf. C. Virolleaud, *Syria* 13 (1932), pp. 133, 140. E. Lipiński, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 5 (1973), pp. 193 f., sees the meaning "time, moment" here which others accept elsewhere (e.g. Baal II v 6, 7, Gordon, *UT* 51, *CTA* 4) although Virolleaud translated "bienfait" in *Syria* 13.

<sup>11</sup> A. Abou Assaf, P. Bordreuil, A. R. Millard, *La Statue de Tell Fekherye* (Paris, 1982).