

The Verb in Qoheleth

The language of the book of Qoheleth has long attracted attention, not only because of its philological significance for dating the book but because of the insights it potentially affords into the linguistic development of ancient Hebrew. As with most languages, the verbal system is a central and ubiquitous feature of the grammar of ancient Hebrew. In many respects the verb in Qoheleth is unremarkable in comparison with other portions of the Hebrew Bible: about 200 verbs occur a total of some 700 times in Qoheleth, which is consistent with the range of density of verbs in the other books of the Hebrew Bible;¹ these verbs consist of 526 Qal, 55 each of Piel and Hifil, 4 Nifal, 8 Pual, 5 Hitpael, and 1 each of Pilpel, Poel, Poal, and Hitpolel, which is also in keeping with the pattern in other biblical writings. By contrast, most of the interest in the verb in Qoheleth has centered on the distribution of verbal conjugations: 222 Imperfects (*yiqtols*), 206 Perfects (*qatals*), 117 Active Participles and 10 Passive Participles, 29 Imperatives, 3 Past Narratives (*wayyiqtols*), and 110 Infinitives Construct and 4 Infinitives Absolute.² Most striking in this list is the 3 Past Narratives, compared with the form's preponderance in most other biblical books, and the relative frequency of the Active Participle, which accounts for about twice the percentage of conjugations in Qoheleth as it does in Genesis–Kings. The question that confronts every analysis of the verb in Qoheleth, given these statistics, is to what extent

1 Approximate numbers are given due to some textual questions that affect a final tally.

2 I am using capitalized traditional terminology for the verbal conjugations (e.g., Perfect, Imperfect, Imperative, Jussive, and Participle). I depart from the traditional nomenclature only with respect to the consecutive forms (i.e., Past Narrative for *Waw*-Consecutive Imperfect, Irrealis Perfect for *Waw*-Consecutive Perfect), since these terms reflect a significant misunderstanding of the TAM of these forms (John A. Cook, "The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics: Clarifying the Roles of *Wayyiqtol* and *Weqatal* in Biblical Hebrew Prose," *JSS* 49/2 [2004] 247–73). These statistics are based on the Westminster tagged text; the statistics are altered somewhat by textual judgments I make in the course of my investigation (below).

these particular data should be attributed to changes in the verbal system (i.e., Qoheleth is late and the Past Narrative is falling into disuse while the Participle is becoming more prominent) versus attributing them to the genre and literary peculiarities of Qoheleth (i.e., non-narrative wisdom/philosophical treatise).

The main focus of this article is to describe the tense-aspect-mood (TAM) system in Qoheleth. My approach is to examine the various conjugations and their interrelationships in Qoheleth in light of the TAM patterns found throughout the Hebrew Bible, noting consistencies and divergences. This descriptive task provides the basis for drawing conclusions regarding the place of the TAM in Qoheleth within the development of the ancient Hebrew verbal system. I proceed by outlining my theory of the TAM in Biblical Hebrew (§1) and then examine the TAM system of Qoheleth in several sections: the Past Narrative and Perfect and the autobiographical foreground (§2); the Participle and Imperfect (§3); the Deontic-volitive (i.e., Imperative, Jussive, and Cohortative) forms (§4); and the infinitive forms (§5). The final section fleshes out the linguistic conclusions arising from the preceding description of the TAM in Qoheleth (§6).

1. A Sketch of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system

The following sketch of the Biblical Hebrew TAM system is the basis of my analysis of the verb in Qoheleth.³ TAM distinctions in Biblical Hebrew are indicated primarily by the verbal conjugations; however, word order is also relevant to mood distinctions, reinforcing the morphological distinction of modality in some cases and disambiguating mood distinctions within a single conjugation in other cases. The two most frequently occurring verbal conjugations, the Perfect and Imperfect, form a

3 For further details see John A. Cook, “The Hebrew Verb: A Grammaticalization Approach,” *ZAH* 14 (2001) 117–43; *The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System: A Grammaticalization Approach* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2002); “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics”; “The Finite Verbal Forms in Biblical Hebrew Do Express Aspect,” *JANES* 30 (2006) 21–35; “The Participle and Stative.” in *Typological Perspective*, *JNSL* 34/1 (2008) 1–19.

perfective-imperfective aspectual distinction. The semantic identification of this pair is based on comparison with the perfective-imperfective opposition throughout the world's languages, in which it constitutes the most common type of verbal system according to the studies by Bybee and Dahl:⁴ the perfective member of the opposition is largely confined to past-time expressions—either (absolute) perfective or (relative) perfect or anterior—whereas the “unmarked” imperfective member may express imperfective events in the past as well as general non-past events.⁵ The next most frequently occurring conjugation in Biblical Hebrew is the literary Past Narrative form (the so-called *waw*-consecutive imperfect), which predominates in the extensive narrative material in the Bible and found much less frequently in the poetic portions. This narrative form occurs with a distinctive *waw*-conjunction, with following gemination, prefixed to it (i.e., -וּ). The conjugation always appears in verb-subject word order through a syntactic triggering likely associated with the peculiar conjunction and analogous to triggered inversion of word order found after most of the clausal function words in Biblical Hebrew (e.g., לִמְעַן, אֲשֶׁר, בִּי, etc.).⁶

The Participle in Biblical Hebrew is an adjective that encodes event predicates.⁷ Thus, it is partially marked for verbal distinctions (i.e., it distinguishes *binyanim*), but it uses nominal agreement markers of gender and number (i.e., it lacks person agreement). As such, when used predicatively the Participle

4 Joan L. Bybee and Östen Dahl, “The Creation of Tense and Aspect Systems in the Languages of the World,” *Studies in Language* 13 (1989): 83; see discussion in Cook, *The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System*, 203–6.

5 Joan Bybee, Revere Perkins, and William Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 126 argue that an imperfective in non-past temporal sphere is identical with present tense.

6 See Robert D. Holmstedt, “Word Order and Information Structure in Ruth and Jonah,” *JSS* 59 (2009): 124–25.

is always “supported” by a copula, though it is rarely overt because Biblical Hebrew allows null copula strategies.⁸ This predicative Participle construction (i.e., a copular predicate complement) expresses progressive aspect in the past, present, or future—the latter mainly in the sense of expected future (e.g., ‘I am giving you this land’ = ‘I am going to give you this land’).

Finally, there is a morphologically distinct deontic-volitive modal system consisting of an Imperative form and a Jussive (including Cohortative) system: the Imperative is restricted to second-person positive directives, whereas the Jussive system appears in all three persons and complements the positive Imperative by encoding negative directives with the distinct “directive” negative word **לֹא**.⁹

In addition to these morphological and morphosyntactic TAM distinctions, Biblical Hebrew has a Realis : Irrealis syntactic mood distinction: Realis (or Indicative) expressions are subject-verb word order, whereas Irrealis expressions are verb-subject word order.¹⁰ This Irrealis word order applies not only to the (Irrealis) deontic-volitive modal system, but to the two most frequently used conjugations, the Perfect and Imperfect: as Realis-mood forms expressing perfective and imperfective aspect,

7 For a detailed argument see Cook, “The Participle and Stative.”

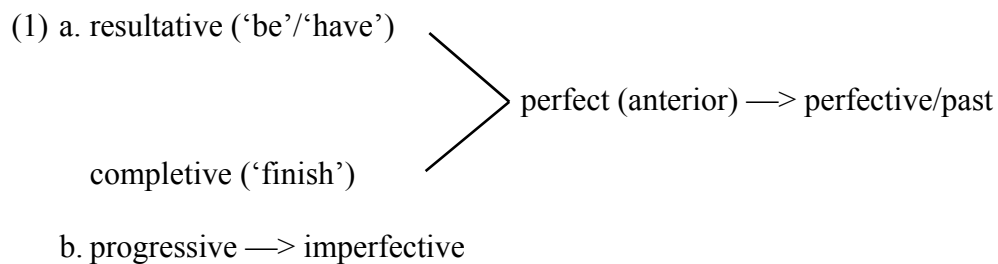
8 See *Ibid.*: 15 n. 23.

9 The category of Cohortative is of questionable value: it complements the second- and third-person Jussive forms as a first-person jussive; the “distinctive” **ה**-suffix is of dubious “volitive” significance and admits to other explanations that better unite its diverse use including on some 99 non-volitive Past Narrative forms and its “conventionalization” on all first-person forms in post-BH (see discussion in Cook, *The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System*, 242–45).

10 Although the Realis : Irrealis distinction is typologically equivalent to Indicative : Subordinate, the former terminology has the advantage of being clearly technical terms and avoids possible confusion with traditional grammatical categories of Indicative and Subjunctive mood (so Frank R. Palmer *Mood and Modality*. 2d ed. Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2001) 4).

respectively, they have subject-verb word order; however, when they express Irrealis mood, they appear in verb-subject word order. The Irrealis Perfect (which encompasses the traditional category of the *waw*-consecutive Perfect plus other uses, such as following ׀א or ׀י in conditional protases) and Irrealis Imperfect forms are predominantly subordinate (subjunctive) mood forms. However, the Irrealis Perfect also frequently expresses past habitual and procedural directives (e.g., do this, then do this, etc.), while the Irrealis Imperfect expresses categorical prohibitions in contrast to the immediacy of the negative-Jussive prohibitions.

The above sketch is an adequate *description* of the TAM system of Biblical Hebrew; however, it is inadequate as an *explanation* of the system, because it does not account for the overlaps of meaning and function among the forms. The only way to achieve such an explanation is to turn to evidence outside the language system itself, such as typological and diachronic data.¹¹ Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca have posited two paths of development exhibited among the world’s TAM systems, one associated with perfective/ past conjugations and another associated with progressive/ imperfective forms.¹²



Given these two paths of development, we may reasonably hypothesize that the Past Narrative and Perfect forms in Biblical Hebrew belong to the first (1a) and the Imperfect and predicatively used Participle belong to the second (1b). The suitability of these two hypotheses is rooted in a number of pieces of evidence. For the Past Narrative and Perfect there are the following considerations. First, the

¹¹ See Martin Haspelmath, “Does Linguistic Explanation Presuppose Linguistic Description?”

Studies in Language 28 (2004): 574.

¹² Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar*, 105, 27.

interaction of these forms with stative verbs seems to confirm the past tense versus perfective aspect identification of the forms on the path of development.¹³ Second, the expression of both perfect (anterior) and perfective aspects by the Perfect conjugation may be explained by the adherence of the older anterior meaning beyond the development of a new perfective meaning.¹⁴ Third, the restriction of the Perfect largely to past-time expressions (exceptions are the instantaneous performative in the sphere of the present and the infrequent future perfect in future time) results from the close association (implication) of perfective aspect and past tense,¹⁵ whereby perfective verbs may be said to “default” for past temporal interpretations.¹⁶ Finally, the disappearance of the Past Narrative form in post-biblical Hebrew is explained by the further development of the Perfect form into a new and competing past tense.¹⁷

13 Namely, the Past Narrative yields only past-time expressions stative verbs, whereas the Perfect can express either past or non-past temporal expressions (e.g., $\text{יָדָעַ$ ‘He knew/came to know’ versus יָדָע ‘He knows/he knew’; see discussion in Cook, “The Hebrew Verb,” 127–30). This difference is a key behavioral distinction between past tense and perfective aspect verbs according to Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar*, 92.

14 On the development of multiple meanings in this way, see discussion of English *wolde/would* in Paul J. Hopper and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, *Grammaticalization*, 2d ed., Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 48.

15 See Östen Dahl, *Tense and Aspect Systems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 79.

16 Carlota S. Smith, “The Pragmatics and Semantics of Temporal Meaning,” in *Proceedings, Texas Linguistic Forum* 2004, ed. P. Denis, et al. (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla, 2006) 92.

17 The etymology usually proposed for the Perfect conjugation in West Semitic—namely, an adjectival copular expression—further supports this explanation by paralleling the lexical source of perfects in other languages. See John Huehnergard, “Languages: Introductory Survey,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 4.156.

The following evidence supports my identification of the Imperfect and Participle with the path in (1b). First, the two forms are semantically similar enough to alternate in the same passage (2), and so belong to the same path of development.

(2) Gen 37:15

וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ אִישׁ וְהָגָה תַּעֲנָה בְּשׂוּדָה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לְאָמֹר מַה־תִּבְקֶשׁ:

And a man found him wandering in the field; and the man asked him, “What are you looking for?”

Second, the Imperfect exhibits a wider range of meanings/ functions, which is the behavioral criteria that constitutes the main distinguishing feature between the two forms.¹⁸ Third, the Participle “gains ground” against the Imperfect in post-Biblical Hebrew, where the latter becomes restricted mainly to its Irrealis subordinate functions and the Participle’s meanings and functions broaden (e.g., more regularly used for generic, future, and present performative expressions in post-biblical Hebrew).

2. The Past Narrative, the Perfect, and the autobiographical foreground

I am following Isaksson’s lead by turning first to the verbs in the “autobiographical thread,”¹⁹ which entails analyses of the three Past Narrative forms and the distribution the Perfect conjugation within and outside this “thread.” My investigation into this autobiographical thread, however, is independent of the intractable questions of literary structure and genre of the book.²⁰ My focus is on the linguistic

18 See Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar*, 40–41, 127.

19 Bo Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth, with Special Emphasis on the Verbal System* (SSU 10; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987) chap. 2.

20 Cf. *Ibid.*, 39–42 who lets himself get caught up in genre considerations. Although his recent treatment, “The Syntax of the Narrative Discourse in Qohelet,” in *The Language of Qoheleth in Its Context: Essays in Honor of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Berlejung and P. Van Hecke (Leuven: Peeters, 2007) 35–46, seems more linguistically aware,

contours of this autobiographical thread as defined by the role of the participating verb forms, which include the Past Narratives, most of the first-person Perfect verbs, and a few other Perfect forms. Linguistically, I am identifying this “thread” as the *foreground* of the book. Although the concept of foreground is customarily encountered in treatments of narrative discourse, the organization of events into foreground and background based on their relative saliency is a universal psycholinguistic trait of all human discourse.²¹ While this foreground structure gives the book a certain literary “cohesiveness . . . in the constant presence of a single brooding consciousness mediating all the book’s observations, counsels, and evaluations,”²² it is not a “narrative” foreground inasmuch as it lacks any consistent temporal succession between events.²³

2.1 The Past Narrative

In light of the non-narrative character of the book, it is not surprising that some scholars have attributed the paucity of Past Narrative verbs in the book to literary or genre considerations rather than the traditional diachronic explanation of the lateness of its language.²⁴ However, Schoors has questioned my approach remains divergent from his insofar as I do not treat the thread as narrative and therefore do not intermingle the foreground-background distinction with issues of temporal succession, on which see Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics.”

21 See Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics,” 254–55.

22 Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 151.

23 See D. C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-Evaluating Its Nature and Date* (ANTS; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988) 30; cf. James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 30, who refers to this thread as the “autobiographical *narrative*” (emphasis added). On temporal succession as the defining feature of narrative, see Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics,” 251–54 and linguistic sources cited there.

24 O. Loretz, *Qohelet Und Die Alte Orient: Untersuchungen Zu Stil Und Theologischer Thematik*

the sufficiency of this literary explanation, because the book does contain passages, most notably 9:14–15 (3), in which Past Narrative forms are more expected than the Perfects that are employed.²⁵ Although a number of scholars have argued for an unrealis interpretation of this passage,²⁶ the most natural interpretation of the passage is as a realis anecdotal narrative.²⁷

Des Buches Qohelet (Freiburg: Herder, 1964) 26 n. 34 claims that Past Narrative verbs are unexpected because the book is not prose narrative; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 50 states that “the literary types in the book do not lend themselves to the frequent use of this verb form” (though he retains “narrative” of the autobiographical foreground; see n. 23 above); Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth*, 60 attributes the lack to the “philosophical approach” of the book; Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 78, agreeing with Loretz, adds that the author consciously avoided the Past Narrative in order to avoid of “temporal and logical ambiguity” among successively reported events.

25 A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (OLA 41; Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 86–87. Other passages do not so clearly demand an anecdotal narrative interpretation as 9:14–15, but may be so understood (e.g., 4:14–16; 5:12–16; 7:27–29; 10:5–7); however, none of these other passages have as extensive a string of Perfects as in 9:14–15.

26 See *ibid.*, 86 n. 285.

27 *Ibid.*, 86 points approvingly to Fox’s (*A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 299) argument that Qoheleth treated the event as historical. On anecdotal narrative in wisdom literature, see John A. Cook, “Genericity, Tense, and Verbal Patterns in the Sentence Literature of Proverbs,” in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebel, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 130–31.

(3) 9:14–15

עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט ובא־אליה מלך גדול וסבב אתה ובנה עליה מצודים גדלים: ומצא בה איש מסכן
 חכם ומלט־הוא את־העיר בחכמתו ואדם לא זכר את־האיש המסכן ההוא:

‘There was a city and the men in it were few, and a great king came against it and surrounded it and built great siege works against it. And a poor wise man was found in it and he delivered the city by his wisdom, yet no one remembered that poor man.’

What makes this passages stand out is that the events make sense only if interpreted in *ordo naturalis*—i.e., as occurring in the order in which they are recounted. By contrast, for example, the extensive series of first-person Perfect verbs in 2:5–8 demand no such an *ordo naturalis* interpretation. Schoors, however, notes that even within the autobiographical foreground there are sequences of verbs that imply a successive interpretation, such as the sequence of Perfects in 2:12, 13, 15 (4).²⁸

(4) 2:12–13, 15

12 ופגיתי אני לראות חכמה והוללות וסכלות . . . 13 וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מזהסכלות . . . 15
 ואמרתי אני בלבי

‘I turned to examine wisdom and madness and folly . . . and I saw that there is advantage to wisdom more than folly . . . then I said in my heart . . .’

Not only are Past Narrative verbs absent in places where they might be expected, but the three occurrences of the form in the book (5a–c) exhibit significant peculiarities.

(5) a. 1:17

ואתנה לבי לדעת חכמה . . .

‘I gave my mind to know wisdom . . .’

b. 4:1

ושבתי אני ואראה את־כל־העשקים אשר נעשים תחת השמש

‘I looked again at all the oppression which occurs under the sun.’

28 See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 87.

c. 4:7

וְשִׁבְתִי אֲנִי וְאָרְאָה הַבֵּל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

‘Again I saw an absurdity under the sun.’

To begin with, the grammatical forms of these examples are peculiar. The first-person Past Narrative of נתן occurs 12 out of 37 times with the “paragogic *he*” suffix,²⁹ and about 100 examples of the Past Narrative with the “paragogic *he*” occur in the Hebrew Bible—all but two of which are first-person forms.³⁰ Significantly, Qumran Hebrew exhibits the conventionalization of the “paragogic/ cohortative *he*” on first-person prefix-pattern (i.e., Past Narrative or Imperfect) forms when preceded by a *waw*-conjunction.³¹

The other two Past Narrative examples are morphologically and lexically identical but unique.³² The

29 Num 8:19; Judg 6:9; 1 Sam 2:28; 2 Sam 12:8; Ezek 16:11; Ps 69:12; Eccl 1:17; Dan 9:3; Neh 2:1, 6, 9.

30 Counts vary: Peter J. Gentry, “The System of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew,” HS 39 (1998) 24 n. 67 lists 99 instances, but he notes that his list varies from Leslie McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982) 211–14. A search of the Westminster electronic text yields 104 examples: 95 first-person singular forms (Gen 32:6; Num 8:19; Josh 24:8; Judg 6:9–10; 10:12; 12:3; 1 Sam 2:28; 28:15; 2 Sam 4:10; 7:9; 12:8; 22:24; Jer 11:18; 32:9; Ezek 3:3; 9:8; 16:11; Zech 11:13; Psa 3:6; 7:5; 69:12, 21; 73:16; 119:55, 59, 106, 131, 147, 158; Job 1:15–17, 19; 19:20; 29:17; Qoh 1:17; Dan 8:13, 15, 17; 9:3–4; 10:16, 19; 12:8; Ezra 7:28; 8:15–17, 24–26, 28; 9:3, 5–6; Neh 1:4; 2:1, 6, 9, 13; 5:7–8, 13; 6:3, 8, 11–12; 7:5; 12:31; 13:7–11, 13, 17, 19, 21–22, 30), 6 first-person plural forms (Gen 41:11; 43:21; Ps 90:10; Ezra 8:23 [2x], 31), and 2 non-first-person forms (Ezek 23:16, 20).

31 Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (HSS 29; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986) 44; Shelomo Morag, “Qumran Hebrew: Some Typological Observations,” VT 38 (1988) 154–55.

32 Jeremiah 18:4 (וְשָׁב וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ כְּלִי אֲחֵר) ‘so he remade it into another vessel’ is the closest parallel.

construction in each case is a verbal hendiadys, ‘I again looked,’ yet it contrasts with the usual collocation, in which both verbs occur in the Past Narrative (6).

(6) a. Gen 14:7

וַיָּשׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־עֵין מִשְׁפָּט . . .

‘They returned to En-Mishpat . . .’

b. Neh 2:15

וָאָשׁוּב וָאָבֹא בַשַּׁעַר הַגִּיָּא

‘I returned through the valley gate.’

In addition, alternate constructions exist in Qoheleth that express this same sense: the Perfect of שׁוּב with Infinitive Absolute of רָאָה in 9:11 (7a); and עוֹד with the Perfect of רָאָה in 3:16 (7b).

(7) a. 9:11

שָׁבַתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ . . .

‘I looked again under the sun . . .’

b. 3:16

וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ . . .

‘I looked again under the sun . . .’

Seow thinks that the עוֹד pattern (7b) indicates continuity with the preceding material whereas the pattern in 4:1, 7 (5b–c) emphasizes discontinuity.³³ Alternatively, the pattern in 2:12 (8), which belongs to this same semantic domain, may indicate that all of these (i.e., 5b–c, 7a–b, and 8) are simply stylistic variants of the author’s transitional formula involving a metaphoric use of ‘turn’ and ‘see/look’ together (cf. the metaphorical use of ‘turn [to another topic]’ and ‘look into [some topic]’ in English).

33 Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18C; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1997) 177.

(8) 2:12

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לְרֵאוֹת חִכְמָה . . .

‘I turned to look at wisdom . . .’

But this hypothesis does not address why the writer chose to use the Past Narrative at all, given the preponderance of Perfect forms in the book. No semantic difference is discernible between the Past Narrative וַאֲתֵנָּה in 1:17 (5a) and the Perfect form נִתְּתִי in 1:13 (9), and the “stylistic” explanation simply begs the question.

(9) 1:13

וְנִתְּתִי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדַרוֹשׁ וְלִתְּוֹר בְּחִכְמָה . . .

‘I gave my mind to seek and to explore by wisdom . . .’

None of the three examples appear to indicate any particular salience (foregrounding) compared with the surrounding foreground Perfects, and there is no clear inference of temporal succession between these and their preceding verbs, except perhaps 1:17 (5a), which Murphy translates ‘So I applied my mind . . .’³⁴ Thus the most that we can conclude is that the writer of the book uses the Past Narrative in peculiar but recognizable constructions insofar as they are close variants of Past Narrative syntagms elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. However, why the author chose to employ the form in these three instances alone does not admit a ready explanation.

2.2 The autobiographical foreground

The Perfect conjugation predominates in the autobiographical foreground material. Isaksson lists 82 Perfect verbs in the foreground material, including 61 without a prefixed *waw* and 21 with.³⁵ Apart

34 Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* (WBC 23A; Dallas: Word, 1992) 11.

35 Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth*, 43. Without *waw* (first-person unless marked otherwise): 1:12, 14, 16[21x 1s, 1x 3ms], 1:17; 2:1, 2, 3, 4[3x], 5, 6, 7[1x 1s, 2x 3ms], 8[2x], 9[3fs], 10[1x 3p, 1x 3ms, 2x 1s], 11[1x 1s, 1x 3cp], 15, 19[2x], 20, 24; 3:10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18;

from these Perfects and the Past Narrative forms, Isaksson identifies only 6 other verbs as part of the foreground material.³⁶ Because I have defined this autobiographical thread as the non-narrative foreground in the book, my catalog of verbs belonging to it differs from Isaksson's.

First, foreground by definition excludes subordinate clause material, which Isaksson has excluded for the most part as well. However, he retains as part of the autobiographical thread the following relative-clause Perfects: אשר שאלו (2:10); שעשו (2:11); שעמלתי ושחכמתי (2:19); שעמלתי (2:20); ראיתי (unmarked, 5:12); אשר ראיתי אני (5:17); אשר ראיתי (6:1); כאשר נתתי (8:16); ראיתי (unmarked, 10:5).³⁷ Except for the example in 2:19, these relative expressions are subordinate directly to foregrounded material,; particularly after chapter two they appear subordinate to transitional statements introducing new topics (i.e., 5:12, 17; 6:1; 8:16; 10:5).

Second, Isaksson does not distinguish between first-person foreground material and first-person reported speech, which must be excluded from the foreground: הגדלתי והוספתי . . . ולבי ראה הרבה חכמה . . . מצאתי . . . בקשה נפשי ולא מצאתי . . . מצאתי . . . לא (7:23); אחכמה (2:15); ולמה חכמתי (1:16);³⁸ ודעת

4:15; 5:12, 17; 6:1, 3; 7:15, 23[2x], 25, 27, 28[1x 3fs, 3x 1s], 29; 8:9, 10, 14, 16; 9:1, 11, 13; 10:5,

7. With *waw*: 1:13, 16; 2:5, 9[2x], 11, 12, 13, 14, 15[2x], 17, 18, 20; 3:22; 4:1, 4, 7; 8:15, 17; 9:16.

36 Ibid., 58. ואני שמח (Infinitive Absolute, 4:2); אחכמה (Cohortative, 7:23); ומוצא אני (Participle, 7:26); ונתון (Infinitive Absolute, 8:9); יודע אני (Participle, 8:12); and וראה (Infinitive Absolute, 9:11).

37 I retain the *כי* clause in 9:1 as part of the foreground, treating *כי* as asseverative rather than as a subordinating conjunction: *כי את-כל-זה נתתי אל-לבי* 'Indeed all this I have taken to heart' (so Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 296).

38 Commentators differ with respect to whether the final clause (*ולבי ראה הרבה חכמה ודעת* 'and my heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge') is part of the reported speech Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 69; Robert Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3d ed.

מצאתי . . . מצאתי (7:27–29). Although the foreground-background distinction still holds within reported speech, it has a separate deictic center from its surrounding discourse context, and therefore the foreground-background distinction within the speech is separate from that of the speech frame.³⁹ Thus, in 7:27–29, the speech frame in the narrator’s voice (אמרה קהלת) is foreground, but the first-person verbs form a separate (subsidiary) foreground within the reported speech itself.⁴⁰

Third, two verbs Isaksson lists as part of the foreground are better interpreted as apostrophes or asides with respect to the foreground material: לי אף חכמתי אמדה (2:9) ‘Also, my wisdom stood by me’ and וזה היה חלקי מכל אמלי (2:10) ‘And this was my apportionment from all my labor’. Similarly, if אמרתי in 6:3 is interpreted as a performative (so most), ‘(in that case) I say . . .’, it diverges from the past deictic center and stands outside of the autobiographical foreground thread.

Finally, although stative and negative expressions are generally excluded from discourse foreground,⁴¹ there are several examples of both types of statements in the foreground material of Qoheleth: הייתי in Qoheleth’s self-introduction (1:12); the לי היה possessive expressions (twice) in 2:7; inchoative statives ידעתי ‘I came to realize’ (1:17; 3:12, 14),⁴² וגדלתי ‘I became great’ (2:9), and ושנאתי ‘I came to hate’ (2:17, 18); and the negatives לא-מנעתי . . . לא-אצלתי in 2:10.

(New York: Schocken, 1968) 148 ; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 11 or not Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 170; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 116.

39 Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (HSM 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003) 74.

40 On subsidiary foreground see Tanya Reinhart, “Principles of Gestalt Perception in the Temporal Organization of Narrative Texts,” *Linguistics* 22 (1984) 785.

41 See *Ibid.* 786.

42 The ידעתי clause in 1:17 might alternatively be treated as an apostrophe: ‘I know that . . .’.

In light of these points, the autobiographical foreground in Qoheleth consists of the verb forms listed in table 1 (below). I have classified the Perfect forms based on whether they have a *waw* conjunction (following Isaksson) and whether they have a following subject pronoun. The latter feature Fredericks suggests is a key to their interpretation: “When Qoh[eleth] wished to describe an act or thought as *simple past* (preterite), he added אני to the conjugated perfect, thus referring to his specific quest.”⁴³ However, his hypothesis is not borne out by the data, which shows Perfects with and without pronouns functioning alike in the foregrounded (cf. ושנאתי in 2:17 and ושנאתי אני in 2:18), and the post-verbal pronoun appears with the Perfect in the non-foregrounded relative clause in 5:17 (אשר-ראיתי אני).

Table 1: Verbal forms in the autobiographical foreground in Qoheleth

Perfects (58x)	– <i>waw</i> , –pro	– <i>waw</i> , +pro	+ <i>waw</i> , –pro	+ <i>waw</i> , +pro
	1:12, 14, 17; 2:2, 3, 4[3x], 5, 6, 7[1x 1s, 2x 3ms], 8[2x], 10[2x]; 3:10, 12, 14, 16; 4:15; 7:15, 23[2x], 27[3fs]; 8:9, 10, 14; 9:1, 11, 13; 10:7.	1:16; 2:1, 24; 3:17, 18; 7:25.	1:13; 2:5, 9[2x], 15, 17; 3:22; 8:17.	2:11–15, 18, 20; 4:1, 4, 7; 8:15; 9:16.
Past Narr. (3x)	1:17; 4:1, 7.			
Other (5x)	ואני שמה (Infinitive Absolute, 4:2); ומוצא אני (Participle, 7:26); ונתון (Infinitive Absolute, 8:9); יודע אני (Participle, 8:12); וראה (Infinitive Absolute, 9:11).			

The central question regarding the foregrounded Perfects is whether they should be interpreted as perfective (e.g., ‘I did great things . . . I built . . . I planted) or perfect (e.g., ‘I have done great things . . . I have built . . . I have planted’). Both interpretations are available to the Perfect conjugation and because the foreground is non-narrative (i.e., no continuous temporal succession), the “bounded” perfective interpretation is not required.⁴⁴ Commentaries and translations show a good deal of variation, not only among each other, but also in their own analyses. Among the variety of treatments, however, there is one consistency: the foregrounded Perfect verbs in chapter two are treated as perfectives (i.e.,

43 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 69.

44 Perfective as opposed to perfect creates “bounded” events, which are thereby eligible to stand in temporal succession with one another (see Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics,” 252–53).

English Simple Pasts) while, beginning with chapter three, increasingly perfect (i.e., English Present Perfect) renderings of the foregrounded Perfects appear.⁴⁵

This trend points to the crux of the issue: chapter two comes across as a “report” of Qoheleth’s “experiment” in which he recounts discreet actions completed some time ago—long ago enough to reflect back on their significance, hence the tradition that the book came from the end of Solomon’s life. However, increasingly this “report” model breaks down, just as the false persona of King Solomon does. This is evident simply from the decline of foregrounded Perfects after chapter two.⁴⁶ Although, as already noted, the foreground is non-narrative, the events are usually discrete rather than overlapping (i.e., ‘I did this, I did that, I did this other thing’ versus ‘I did this while also doing that during the time I was doing this other thing’). Thus, while not temporally successive, these discrete events are nevertheless interpreted as “bounded,” a status attributable to their perfectivity. Thus, with few exceptions the foregrounded dynamic verbs should be analyzed as perfective and the handful of foregrounded stative verbs as inchoative states (see table 1 and list of statives above this section). Although states cannot be “bounded” by perfectivity as dynamic events can, the inchoative stative interpretation represents a partially “bounded” state by indicating a point in time at which the state was entered into (i.e., ‘I became’ versus ‘I was’).⁴⁷

There are few exceptions to the aforementioned pattern which are discussed here. First, the two foregrounded *היה* forms in 2:7 do not exhibit an inchoative sense; however, neither are they clearly

45 For example, note the variation among and within translations and commentaries between a perfective and perfect analysis of *ראיתי* in the foreground passages: 1:14; 2:13; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:4, 15; 8:9–10, 17; 9:13; 10:7.

46 The distribution of foregrounded Perfects in the book is as follows: 6 in chapter 1; 28 in chapter 2; 7 in chapter 3; 6 in chapter 4; none in chapters 5–6; 5 each in chapters 7 and 8; 4 in chapter 9; 1 in chapter 10; and none in chapters 11–12.

47 On boundedness and states, see Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics,” 252–53.

stative. Rather, with the following ל preposition they express possession ('I had/possessed this . . . I had/possessed that'). This idiomatic sense accounts for their non-inchoative meaning as well as their presence in the foregrounded thread. Second, the Perfect verb in 7:15 is widely treated as a perfect (10).

(10) 7:15

אֶת־הַכֹּל רָאִיתִי בְיָמֵי הַבְּלָיָה

Both I have seen in my absurd life: . . .

Here, the temporal expression בְּיָמֵי הַבְּלָיָה constrains the perfect interpretation, because the bounded sense of the perfective interpretation would imply (pragmatic implicature) that the speaker is dead at the time of speaking: ?'Both I saw in my absurd life.'

As mentioned, after chapter two there is increased variation in the interpretation of the Perfect verbs because of the breakdown of the "report" mode. Instead of the perfective expressions in independent clauses that predominate in chapter two (e.g., וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי 'I saw', 2:13, 24), a number of first-person Perfects appear in relative clauses subordinated to foregrounded copular expressions: יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ . . . 'There is an evil that I have seen under the sun . . .' (10:5; see list of relative clause Perfects above, this section). The subordination of these Perfects to present-time (stative) expressions constrains the perfect interpretation (in the same manner as the speaker's deictic anchor in reported speech within past narrative frequently constrains the perfect interpretation of Perfect verbs) and in turn may influence the way scholars have rendered verbs in neighboring verses: וְרָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים 'I saw slaves . . .' in 10:7 is interpreted by some as perfect ('I have seen slaves') but without good reason other than the influence of the perfect rendering 'I have seen' in v. 5.

One of the central cruxes of the book is הֵייתִי in 1:12 (11). The judgment of most scholars is upheld by the above analysis: on the one hand scholars agree that it should not be interpreted as a present state, 'I am king'; on the other hand, the past-stative interpretation ('I was king') adopted by many translations (e.g., ASV, NIV, NJPS) implies that Qoheleth is no longer king, which seems at odds with

the role of his persona as giving him a vantage point from which to give the following reflections. A present-perfect interpretation therefore makes the best sense, and inasmuch as the perfect sense connects Qoheleth's past (the time when he undertook his experiment) and present (the time he reflects on his experiment), it is ideally suited to this lead-in to the "report" that follows.

(11) 1:12

אָנִי קִהַלְתִּי הַיְיָ מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם ׀

'I, Qoheleth have been king over Israel in Jerusalem'

It is difficult to draw any clear conclusions regarding the five other verbal forms in the foreground that are neither Perfects nor Past Narratives. The use of Infinitives Absolute in place of a finite verb is known from other parts of the Hebrew Bible and Phoenician. In Qoheleth they are of three sorts: in 4:2 the Infinitive stands in place of a Perfect verb with a preceding pronoun: 'אני שבח 'I praised the dead'.⁴⁸ In 8:9 the Infinitive Absolute ונתון follows a leading Perfect as a sort of "serial" verb: 'I saw and (then) gave my mind to . . .'. Other examples of the Infinitive Absolute following and continuing the sense of a finite verb are found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Zech 7:5; Esth 2:2–3; 9:1).⁴⁹ Finally, the Infinitive Absolute וראה in 9:11 forms a verbal hendiadys with the lead Perfect שבתני to form an expression synonymous with ושבתי אני וְאֶרְאֶה (with Past Narrative) in 4:1 (see discussion in 2.1 above).

The above portrayal of the autobiographical thread is admittedly an incomplete picture inasmuch as copular expressions are used to transition between topics, especially after chapter two (cf. 3:10 'I have

48 Every other instance the first-person pronoun as verbal subject follows the verb except in this instance and the Perfect expression in the reported speech in 1:16: 'אני הנה הגדלתי 'And I, behold, I have increased . . .'. On the significance for Qoheleth's preference for post-verbal pronouns, see Robert D. Holmstedt, "אָנִי וְלִבִּי the Syntactic Encoding of the Collaborative Nature of Qoheleth's Experiment," *JHS* 9/19.

49 A. Rubinstein, "A Finite Verb Continued by an Infinitive Absolute in Hebrew," *VT* 1 (1952).

seen the task . . .’ and 6:1 ‘There is an evil that I have seen under the sun . . .’). Unfortunately, beyond recognizing the copular clauses with subordinate first-person Perfect verbs (5:12, 17; 6:1; 10:5), identifying foregrounded copular clauses is hampered by the intractable problems of literary structure.⁵⁰

2.3 The Perfects outside the autobiographic foreground

Schoors criticizes Isaksson for his tendency “to multiply the instances of a perfect tense with a present force.”⁵¹ This “tendency” derives in part from Isaksson’s dependence on Rundgren’s model of the Semitic verb, which over-emphasizes the stative origin of the Perfect verb, which Isaksson is at some pains to show retains its stative (present) semantics in Qoheleth.⁵² But this “tendency” is also a result of Isaksson’s conflation of present perfect and present stative meanings. Altogether, he examines 18 Perfects with present-time reference outside the foreground material.⁵³ My redefinition of what constitutes the “autobiographical thread,” results in a larger number of Perfects outside the foreground than Isaksson’s list of 18 present-time Perfects. Nevertheless, Isaksson’s treatment conveniently exemplifies four issues that I use to frame my discussion of the remaining Perfect forms.

50 Isaksson does not address these sorts of copular clauses with respect to the autobiographical thread in his book, but in his recent study (“The Syntax of the Narrative Discourse in Qohelet”) he treats “nominal clauses” as background material on principle. However, his judgment in this regard seems affected by his view that the autobiographical thread is actually a “narrative,” which generally excludes such non-temporally successive expressions like copular clauses.

51 Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 174.

52 For a summary and critique of Rundgren’s model, see Cook, *The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System*, 125–27.

53 Qoheleth 1:9; 2:23, 26; 3:11, 15; 4:3; 5:10, 17; 6:3, 10; 7:10, 14, 19; 24, 27–28; 8:15; and 9:9 (Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth*, 75–92). Two other forms he discusses, הייתי (1:12) and ושנאתי (2:18), are part of the foreground material, discussed above (2.2).

First, as mentioned, Isaksson misleadingly groups together the Perfect forms that express a present perfect sense with those that express a general present sense. The former is the more frequent, less restricted meaning of the Perfect conjugation, and therefore unproblematic. But it remains desirable (and absent in Isaksson’s treatment) to explain the basis by which a present perfect versus a past-perfective meaning is assigned to these Perfects. I submit that the principle which disambiguates a past or a perfect interpretation of the Perfect conjugation lies in the temporal deixis of the surrounding discourse. Unfortunately, the numerous levels of temporal deixis created by the pastiche texture of the book complicates the interpretation of the verb forms. Consider that the motto of the book is a quote by Qoheleth introduced by a narrator: *אמר קהלת* . . . ‘Qoheleth said . . .’ (1:2). Beginning in 1:12 the deictic center shifts to Qoheleth himself, who describes what he has done in the past (chap. 2 especially), what the world is like, which introduces a generic (universal) temporal deixis, and addresses the audience directly with imperatives and other second-person forms. These shifts in temporal deixis throughout the book dictate how the Perfect conjugation should be interpreted. The Perfect forms that express perfective-past in the non-foreground material reside mainly in subsidiary “foreground” threads, such as anecdotal narratives (*נולד* . . . *יצא* 4:14; 9:15–16, see ex. 3 above) or the narrator’s statements about Qoheleth’s activities (1:2, above; and the epilogue in 12:8–11[7x]). The remaining Perfects with a perfective-past meaning appear in subordinate clauses. The Perfects in 2:10 (*אשר שאלו* ‘which they asked’) and 8:16 (*כאשר נתתי* ‘when I applied’) are subordinate to verbs in the autobiographical foreground. The relative clause in 8:9 (*אשר שלט*) modifies a past null copula clause beginning an anecdotal narrative: ‘There was a time when a man had power over another man to harm him’. In 5:15 and 6:4 the Perfect *בא* contrasts as a perfective-past with a future Imperfect *ילך*: ‘just as he came he will go’; ‘for he came in absurdity and in darkness he will go’. Similarly, the contrast between *תשוב* and the subordinate *אשר נתנה* in 12:7 makes the perfective-past interpretation unavoidable: ‘the spirit returns/will return to God who gave it.’ Finally, the relative Perfects *כאשר יצא*

and כשבא in 5:14 create a past-future contrast with Imperfects: ‘Just as he came forth . . . he will return . . . just as he came’.

The relative Perfects in 2:11 (שעשו . . . שעמלתי), allow for either a past or a past-perfect interpretation: ‘that which my hands did/had done . . . which I labored to do/had labored to do’. The contrast between these examples and the relative Perfect in 2:10 (אשר שאלו ‘which they asked’), which is also subordinate to the foreground material, has to do with the situation aspect of the verbs: in 2:10 the activity שאלו is almost coincidental on the action of not withholding (לא אצלתי) of the main clause, thus making a perfective-past interpretation more suitable; by contrast, in 2:11 the accomplishment verbs presume the completion of the event prior to examining it (main clause), thus allowing a more nuanced past-perfect interpretation. A similar ambiguity holds for the stative relatives שהיו and שהיה in 2:7, 9, which admit a past-stative or past-perfect stative understanding: ‘who were/had been in Jerusalem before me’. The latter rendering more strongly underscores that the former kings are now dead by creating a bounded end-point to the stative copular (i.e., they *had been* there but are not now versus they *were* there and may still be). Finally, although the text of 8:10 makes it difficult to decide how to interpret אשר כן-עשו, most scholars treat the preceding Imperfects as past habitual: ‘they would come and go . . .’, which shifts the temporal deixis of the subordinate clause to past or past perfect: ‘where they acted/had acted thus’ (see ex. 32 below).

By contrast, the Perfects that are interpretable as present perfect (apart from the foregrounded ראיתי in 7:15, discussed earlier) appear either in clauses subordinated to present-time (mostly copular) clauses (2:21, 4:3[2x]; 5:2, 12, 17[2x], 18[2x]; 6:1; 7:13; 8:15; 10:5), or in reported speech, where the temporal deictic center shifts to the speaker’s present (1:16[3x]), or in addresses to the implied audience (second-person contexts), in which case the deixis is shifted to the reader’s present (7:10, 14, 22; 9:7, 9). The Perfect אבדה ‘has passed away’ in 9:6 may be treated as a perfect, conjoined with a copular clause (אין v. 5) (12).

(12) 9:5–6

וְאִי־עוֹד לָהֶם שְׂכָר כִּי נִשְׂכַּח זְכָרָם: גַּם אַהֲבָתָם גַּם־שִׂנְאָתָם גַּם־קִנְיָנָתָם כִּבְר אַבְדָּה וְחֶלֶק אִין־לָהֶם עוֹד
לְעוֹלָם בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשָׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

They have no more reward, for even the memory of them has been forgotten. Their love, their hatred, their jealousy has already passed away.

Similarly, the null-copular relative clauses in 2:26 (לחוטא . . . לפניו 'who is pleasing before him . . . who is displeasing') leads to a present-perfect interpretation of the two Perfect forms (נתן) that describe God's actions.

A number of Perfect forms in the book are ambiguous between a perfective-past and a present-perfect interpretation: the forms in 3:10–14 (נתן 2x, עשה 3x) describe God's actions in bringing about the present state of affairs; the string of Perfects in 7:27–29 (מצא 5x, בקש 2x, עשה 1x) are ambiguous because it is unclear whether these verses are to be read as a anecdotal narrative of discrete events (like the autobiographical foreground), or as events related to a current reflection, thus more suitably conveyed with the perfect interpretation (13).

(13) 7:27–29

רָאֵה יָדָה מְצָאתִי אִמְרָה קִהַּלְתִּי אַחַת לְאַחַת לְמִצָּא חֲשִׁבוֹן: אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בְּקִשָּׁה נִפְשִׁי וְלֹא מְצָאתִי אָדָם אַחַד
מֵאֵלֶּף מְצָאתִי וְאִשָּׁה בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מְצָאתִי: לְבַד רָאֵה־יָדָה מְצָאתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יֹשֵׁר וְהִמָּה
בְּקִשׁוֹ חֲשִׁבְנוֹת רַבִּים:

“Look! This I found/have found,” said Qoheleth, “(adding) one thing to another to find a solution—what my soul still sought/has sought, but I did not find/have not found: one man among a thousand I found/have found; but a woman among all those I did not find/have not found. Only this did I find/have I found: that God made/has made humans upright; but they sought/have sought for many solutions.”

Second, Isaksson assumes that the Perfect of היה regularly expresses a present state. However, a

glance at the data from the rest of the Hebrew Bible shows that this interpretation is actually marginal—and with good reason: Hebrew allows a null-copula strategy for present-time copular expressions,⁵⁴ which creates a three-way tense distinction with the Perfect and Imperfect of היה: the Perfect (and Past Narrative) of היה marks past tense, null copula marks present, and Imperfect of היה marks future tense.⁵⁵

The data in Qoheleth support this pattern: the 23 Perfect and 20 Imperfect forms of היה contrast in terms of tense—past versus present—often in close succession (e.g., 1:9–11, see ex. 14; 12:7). Several Perfect forms of היה unambiguously express a past state: אשר היה (1:10), וזה היה (2:10),⁵⁶ אשר היה (4:16), היו (7:10), כשהיה (12:7), and שהיה (12:9). And the two examples in the foreground material in 2:7 (שהיו) and 2:9 (שהיה) are ambiguous between past and past-perfect statives: ‘Who were/had been before me in Jerusalem’ (cf. 1:16 below within reported speech). About an equal number are ambiguous between a past-stative and present-perfect stative interpretation (i.e., ‘were’ and ‘have been’): מה שהיה (1:9; 6:10; 7:24), כבר היה (1:10; 3:15), הייתי (1:12), אשר היה (1:16), לא היה (4:3), היה (7:10). The ambiguity in these forms stems, as in the case of the non-stative Perfects, from their present temporal deixis, whether within reported speech (1:12, 16; 7:10) or in the context of talking about the present state of affairs (1:9, 10).

Fox argues that the phrase מה שהיה (1:9; 3:15; 6:10; and 7:24) is equivalent to מהנעשה and that

54 Cook, “The Participle and Stative,” 9.

55 The difference between the Perfect and Past Narrative of היה is not semantic but discourse-pragmatic: the Past Narrative of היה is used either in a narrative foreground or as a discourse pragmatic tense indicator at the beginning of a new “episode.”

56 The ~~S~~parentetical relationship of this construction to the past autobiographical foreground leads Seow to render it as a past-perfect: ‘This had been . . .’ (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 118).

both phrases are generic in all their occurrences: ‘that which happens’.⁵⁷ However, Fox appears to demand too much consistency in translating the construction identically throughout the book—a consistency that he even fails to carry through when he translates the construction in 6:10 as “Whatever has happened.”⁵⁸ It is preferable to recognize the construction as ambiguous in 6:10 and 7:24 between the present perfect and present stative interpretations, but the context of 1:10–11 disambiguates the interpretation of the phrase in 1:9 by clearly reinforcing a past-future rather than a present-future contrast (14).

(14) 1:9–11

מה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיְהִיָּה וּמֵה־שֶׁנֶּעֱשֶׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה וְאִין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ: יֵשׁ דְּבָר שֶׁיֵּאמַר רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא
כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֵלְמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנָיו: אִין זְכוּרֹן לְרֵאשִׁיטִים וְגַם לְאַחֲרָיִם שֶׁיְהִיוּ לְאִי־הָיָה לָהֶם זְכוּרֹן עִם שֶׁיְהִיוּ
לְאַחֲרָנָה: פ

What was is what will be, and what happened is what will happen; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there any thing of which one might say, “Look, this is new”? It already existed in the ages that were before us. There is no remembrance of those who were long ago, and also of those yet to come who will be there will not be any remembrance with those who will be after them.

If we want to find some consistency in Qoheleth’s use of this phrase, therefore, we should take 1:9 and its restriction to a past or present-perfect stative interpretation as our lead and interpret the other instances accordingly. In other instances, the contrast is more one of past versus generic, as in 3:20, which contains generic Participles (15a). However, the “before” construction with Imperfect forms in the similar passage in 12:7 makes the past-present/future contrast more evident (15b). In both of these

57 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 169, 265. On the Nifal Perfect of עֲשֶׂה, see point 3 below, this section.

58 Ibid., 247.

cases the *היה* should be interpreted as past or perhaps present-perfect, but no generic present.⁵⁹

(15) a. 3:20

הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הָיָה מִזֶּה־עָפָר וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל־הָעָפָר:

All go to the same place; all came from dust and all return to dust.

b. 12:7

וַיָּשָׁב הָעָפָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה:

[Before . . .] and the dust returns to the earth accordingly whence it came and the spirit returns to the God who gave it.

The same construction, *מה־שהיה*, in 3:15 is not so readily explained: the Infinitive and Perfect of *היה* in the second part make the past-future contrast set up by the verse obvious: ‘and what is to be already was’. But the initial part of the verse is startling for its apparent use of the Perfect to designate what *is* and a verbless clause with *כבר* to designate what *was* (16).

(16) 3:15

מִה־שֶׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא וְאֲשֶׁר לֵהֵיוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף:

That which is, already was; that which is to be, already was; and God seeks out what has been pursued.

Given that the contrast of past-future is already apparent from the latter portion of the verse, I would suggest that the need for a “landing site” for the proclitic relative *–שׁ* is what led to the marginal use of the Perfect of *היה* for present stative while the use of the verbless following is to avoid the confusion of two Perfect *היה* forms in a row, which would invite a tautological interpretation: *מה־שהיה כבר* ‘Whatever has happened has already happened’.

The remaining Perfect forms (*לא היתה* in 6:3 and *היו* in 7:19) are cruces. Coming as the final phrase

59 The meaning of *היה* in both passages seems close to its use in designating the event of a prophetic word: ‘the word of Yhwh *came* to’

in a conditional protasis after several Imperfects, the Perfect form in 6:3 seems out of place, though perhaps the irreal conditional context might account for it (on the basis of the past tense-irreal metaphor in language) (17a). In 7:19 the *היו* likewise appears odd if all that is intended is a present-time locative expression, ‘who are in the city’. Perhaps it conveys that the former rulers are gone after the wisdom of the wise has prevailed: ‘that were/had been in the city’ (17b).

(17) a. 6:3

אִם-יֹולִיד אִישׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב | שְׁיֵהֵיוּ יְמֵי-שָׁנָיו וְנִפְשׁוּ לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע מִן-הַטּוֹבָה וְגַם-קָבְרָה לֹא-
הִיְתָה לוֹ אֲמִרְתִּי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּפֶל:

If a man begets a hundred children, and lives many years, however many might be the days of his years, but his appetite is not satisfied by some of the good things, and even a burial were not his, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

b. 7:19

הַחֲכָמָה תָּעִז לְחַכְמֵךְ מִעֲשָׂרָה שְׁלֵיטִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּעִיר:

Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers that had been in the city.

In contrast to these uncertain uses of stative *היה*, the other stative verbs are very consistently interpretable as present states:⁶⁰ *מתו* (4:2);⁶¹ *לא-שכב* (2:23);⁶² *לא-ידע* (4:13); *רבו* (5:10); *ידע* (7:22); *עליכן*

60 The form *עָמַל* (2:18, 22; 3:9; 4:8; 9:9) may be interpreted as stative Perfect (cf. Ludwig Koehler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1994] s.v.), in which case it expresses a present state in all but 2:18, which is a past state subordinate to the autobiographical foreground.

61 Or a present-perfect ‘have died’, if treated as an achievement ‘die’ instead of stative ‘be dead’.

62 I am inclined to treat this verb as a stative, with Schoors (*The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 174): ‘even at night his mind is not at rest’. Note the stative *a*-class prefix pattern: *יִשְׁכַּב*.

מלא (8:11); מלא (9:3); אשר-אהבת (9:9); אשר לא-ידע (10:15); and כי מעטו (12:3).⁶³ The only two exceptions are ולא-ידע in 6:5, which may be interpreted as past or perhaps a present perfect: ‘and did not know/has not known . . .’,⁶⁴ and the reported speech למה חכמתי in 2:15, which makes best sense as a perfect inchoative: ‘Why have I become so wise?’

Third, the Nifal Perfect verbs require particular attention because of the distinct treatment they have been given by Isaksson and others. There are 21 Nifal Perfects in the book, 12 of which are forms of עשה, all in relative clauses. Isaksson and others claim that this has a stative present sense, ‘which happens’, analogous with the treatments of היה (see above this section).⁶⁵ This interpretation seems suspiciously influenced by the similarities between passive voice and stative situation aspect. The other nine Nifal Perfects are less ambiguous than the Nifal עשה forms, and thus it is methodologically more sound to examine these nine first and follow their lead in interpreting the more ambiguous Nifal עשה. Leaving aside the Irrealis Perfect ונרץ (12:6), to be treated below, several Nifal Perfects express perfective-past (נתנו in the narrator’s report in 12:11; נולד in 4:14 and נתן in 10:6, both part of anecdotal narratives). The Nifal Perfect נשכח (2:16) is arguable the only verb in the book with a future perfect meaning: ‘for their memory will have been forgotten’. The remaining four forms express present perfect: נעבד ‘a field that has been tilled’ (5:8);⁶⁶ נקרא ‘has been designated’ (6:10); נשכח ‘for their

63 W. Gesenius and G. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, A. E. Cowley ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1910) §52k note that the (only) Piel of this stative is intransitive here: ‘are few’.

64 The present perfect is somewhat awkward with the “stillborn” subject, about which a continued state of “knowing” seems out of place.

65 Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth*, 69–74; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 169, 265 .

66 The interpretation of the verb is clear despite textual problems with the verse; see Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 234; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 204, for emendations.

memory has been forgotten' (9:5); נשמע 'everything has been heard' (12:13). Given these unexceptional meanings for the Nifal Perfect of perfective past and present perfect, a present stative interpretation of the Nifal Perfects of עשה is questionable. Instead, a present perfect interpretation of the Nifal Perfects of עשה should be followed: 'that which has happened under the sun' (1:9, see ex. 14 above; 1:13–14; 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 11, 14, 16–17; 9:3, 6).

Fourth, Isaksson entertains the idea that the aforementioned verbs might be Nifal Participles instead of Perfect forms, and indeed a case might be made in 8:11 where the form is preceded by אִן.⁶⁷ However, the unambiguous Perfect in 1:14 (נעשו) and Participle in 4:1 (נעשים) makes it evident that both might equally be a part of Qoheleth's grammar. This state of affairs raises the question of whether an adequate explanation of variation such as this among verb forms in the book is possible. Generally the answer to such a question has been negative: there is no distinguishable difference between the Nifal Perfect and Participle of עשה within the context of this favorite phrase of Qoheleth's. I concur with this conclusion, seeing in this alternation an analogy to the stylistic variations in the topic-transition formula with ראיתי, which I noted earlier. However, difficulties arise when such stylistic variants are treated as semantically equivalent, leading many commentators and translators to ignore TAM distinctions in the book. Indicative of such inattention to TAM distinctions is the penchant for general-present renderings of Perfects, Imperfects, and Participles in commentaries and translations, which penchant arises in large part from the unconscious connection between generic expressions and the general present. However, there is no such correlation in language generally, even if many English proverbs use general present tense: 'That's the way the cookie crumbles'; 'Like father, like son'; 'Boys will be boys'; 'Faint heart never won fair lady'. More crucially, and to return to the specific case of the Nifal of עשה, a significant stumbling block in treating this form is that both perfect and progressive in

67 See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 285.

English tend to force a particular rather than generic reading.⁶⁸ Thus, English-speaking commentators and translators especially tend to level the Perfects in generic expressions in Qoheleth (and Proverbs) and read them as general presents. A case in point in 5:2 (18):

(18) 5:2

כִּי בָּא הַחֲלוֹם בְּרַב עֲנִיָּן וְקוֹל דְּבָרִים:

‘For the dream came/has come with much preoccupation, and the voice of fools with many words.’

As awkward as the rendering in (18) appears in English, I think it is out of place to simply treat בָּא as a general present (or read it as a Participle).⁶⁹ Rather, if we take the normal perfect sense seriously, we might see a proverbial deduction from past experience to warning for the present or future. To paraphrase: ‘Because just as the dreams came/have come with much preoccupation, so the voice of fools (will come) with many words.’ The shift from reflection to warning in the comparison makes use of the elliptical play on the verb, and is something that can be seen in the sentence literature of Proverbs as well (e.g., 19:29). We should recognize, however, that this is a target-language issue, not the actual TAM value of these verb forms in Qoheleth, which should be read in ways that are in keeping with their use elsewhere in ancient Hebrew.

As noted in previous studies,⁷⁰ in the past some scholars have failed to recognize the occurrence of the so-called *Waw*-consecutive Perfect in Qoheleth. Based on the above theory of the Hebrew verbal system I am reanalyzing such forms as Irrealis Perfect. The customary *waw* conjunction has to do with the frequent clause-initial position brought about by the verb-subject order of the form. In fact, several

68 Cook, “Genericity, Tense, and Verbal Patterns,” 122.

69 The inverted word order of verb-subject after כִּי is unexpected if it were a Participle; see Robert D. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2002), 156–57.

70 See Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 88.

examples of Irrealis Perfects occur in the book without the conjunction, preceded instead by a condition marker: *לא ראה . . . אלו חיה* (6:6) and *קלקל . . . אם־קחה* (10:10). Most of the Irrealis forms with the conjunction likewise appear in conditional clauses: the temporal protasis that makes up the allegorical passage in 12:1–7, beginning with *והגיעו* (8 verbs altogether); the temporal apodosis *וחם* in 4:11 (following the *אם־ישכבו* protasis); in 5:13 the pair of Irrealis Perfects *והוליד ואבד . . .* mark the temporal protasis and apodosis respectively. In addition to these conditional Irrealis Perfects, the form expresses a final or result idea in 5:5 (*וחבל*) and appears in the repeated judgment of what is good in life, conjoined to relative Imperfect verbs and expressing a subjunctive or optative sort of idea: ‘there is nothing better but that . . . (2:24[2x]; 3:13[2x]). Similarly, a final interpretation fits well for *ואמר* ‘so that he says . . .’ in 10:3. The only truly problematic Irrealis Perfects appear in 1:5 (*וזרח* and *ובא*), where they are out of place among the preponderance of Participles. A possible, though quite uncertain, explanation is that they are subordinate to the preceding statement, contrasting the immoveable earth and the rising and setting sun (19).⁷¹

(19) 1:4–5

דֹּר הַלֵּךְ וְדֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת: וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם:

?A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever, while the sun rises and the sun goes down, panting to its place where it rises.

71 See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 106–7 on the text being certain and the word order indicating Irrealis Perfect versus Participle. However, the anomalous use of the Irrealis Perfects in this passage dominated by Participles makes quite plausible a Participle reading of both forms (the corruption of *וזרח* being explained as a result of metathesis) despite the uniform textual evidence (so Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.

3 The Participle and Imperfect

3.1 The Participle

As I described above and in detail elsewhere,⁷² the Participle is essentially an adjectival encoding of an event predicate. When used predicatively it is supported by a copula, which is more frequently covert than overt.⁷³ Although the overt copula becomes more frequent in Rabbinic Hebrew, Qoheleth shows no increase in that direction. The Participle in Qoheleth appears both as a predicate complement in both main and subordinate clauses, and it frequently fills a nominal slot functioning as a “headless” relative clause.⁷⁴

When the Participle appears in main clauses in Qoheleth, it generally exhibits a generic sense; that is, it characterizes a certain state of affairs (20).⁷⁵

72 Cook, “The Participle and Stative.”

73 That is, even when not phonologically present, the predicatively used Participle is supported by a covert/zero or “implied” copula. Minimal pairs such as those in 2 Sam 7:16 (with הִיָּה copula) and 1 Chron 17:24 (with zero copula) demonstrate that there is no distinction in meaning and the copula is implied in the latter case. The weaknesses of the alternative explanation, that zero-copula expressions consist of juxtaposed subject and predicate, are discussed by Leon Stassen, *Intransitive Predication*. Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 65–76. See also Cook, “Genericity, Tense, and Verbal Patterns,” 126 n. 35, and Cook, “The Hebrew Participle and Stative,” 9 n. 12.

74 Discerning between a *qotel*-pattern agentive noun and a headless relative Participle is not straightforward. See note in *Ibid.*: 3 n.4. Here the issue is mostly moot, my concern being simply whether the “Participle” fills a nominal or verbal slot.

75 See also Qoh 1:4[3x], 5, 6[6x], 1:7[3x]; 2:14; 3:20[2x]; 4:5[2x]; 5:9[2x], 11; 6:6, 10, 11; 8:1, 12[2x]; 9:1, 5[2x], 16, 17; 10:19.

(20) 1:4

דֹּר הַלֵּךְ וְדֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת:

A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

By contrast, the Participle in a main clause expresses a “real” present sense in only a few instances and always in rhetorical questions. One is reported speech (21a), the others are questions posed by Qoheleth to the implied reader (21b).⁷⁶

(21) a. 4:8

וְלִמִּי | אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמַחְסֵר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה

For whom, now, am I toiling⁷⁷ while denying my soul good things?

b. 2:19

וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הֲחָכֵם יִהְיֶה א֥וֹ סָכָל

And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool?

Three notable examples of the Participle in main clause depart from this pattern. In 2:3, נהג appears to demand a past-progressive sense (22). Alternatively, this Participle could be translated as a small clause, similar to how the preceding Infinitive Construct is treated by some.⁷⁸

(22) 2:3

תַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי לְמִשׁוֹךְ בִּינִן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וְלִבִּי נָהַג בְּחָכְמָה

I went about in my heart, leading my body by wine and my heart leading by wisdom . . .

The other two notable exceptions appear within the autobiographical foreground, which suggests an interpretation of non-progressive past, which is anomalous for the Participle (23).

⁷⁶ Qoheleth 2:2[2x], 19, 22; 3:21; 4:8; 6:8, 12.

⁷⁷ The form עֹמֵל here and elsewhere in the book (2:18, 22; 3:9; 9:9) is identified as an adjective (Koehler et al., eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v.), but it may arguably be interpreted as a stative verb.

⁷⁸ E.g., Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 178.

(23) a. 8:12⁷⁹

כִּי גַם יִוֹדַע אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר יְהִי־טוֹב לְיִרְאַי הָאֱלֹהִים

. . . yet I know/I came to know? that it will go well for those who fear God.

b. 7:26

וּמוֹצָא אֲנִי מֵרַמְמוֹת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוּדִים וְחַרְמִים לִבָּהּ אֲסוּרִים יָדֶיהָ

I find/found? more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, and whose heart is snares,
whose hands are fetters.

Both of these examples are significant. In 8:12 the Participle appears where we would expect a Perfect ידעתי (cf. Eccl 1:17; 2:14; 3:12, 14), and may indicate the increased use of the Participle for stative roots that is evident in Rabbinic Hebrew.⁸⁰ In this case, the Participle would demand an interpretation as present stative ‘I know’ in contrast to the inchoative ‘I came to know’ of the Perfect. Given that the Participle does not admit a perfective-past rendering, if the text of 7:26 is correct it may be best to treat the Participle as a general present with almost a performative sense: ‘I find . . .’. This too is significant since the Participle comes to displace the Perfect in performative expressions in Rabbinic Hebrew.⁸¹

The two primary meanings for the Participle, the generic present and real present, appear likewise in subordinate and relative clauses, only in these cases the temporality of the Participle clause is determined by the main clause to which it is subordinate or in which it serves as a nominal element (i.e., headless relative clause). The majority of the nominal examples occur in generic contexts,⁸² while only a few are found in reported speech (3:9; 5:7; 12:1) or in past foregrounded material (4:2). In the

79 See also 6:8, 12, both within a question ‘Who knows . . .?’.

80 Miguel Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, trans. John Elwolde (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 137.

81 F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “(More) on Performatives in Semitic,” *ZAH* 17–20 (2004–07) 65–66.

82 Qoheleth 1:15; 2:8[2x], 26; 3:15; 4:1[6x], 14; 5:10, 11; 7:11, 26; 8:5, 12; 9:2[3x], 3, 5[2x], 11[2x], 17, 18; 10:1, 4, 8[2x], 9[2x]; 11:4[2x]; 12:3[2x], 5, 11.

later case, the stative meaning of the verb is “unbounded” by the past temporal deixis of the foreground, so that it is present rather than past stative (24).⁸³

(24) 4:2

וְשִׁבַּח אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שְׁכָבְרֵם מֵתוֹ

I praised those who are dead.

The Participles in 4:1 illustrate the difficulty at time in distinguishing generic and real present (25): Is Qoheleth describing something that he observed happening (i.e., a specific episode) or something that generally happens (generic)? It is also possible that 4:1 belongs to the category of anecdotal narratives, which are by definition “specific” episodes illustrating generic truths, in which case Qoheleth may be describing some specific act of oppression. However, the character of the passage is far from being made specific through the portrayal with Participles.⁸⁴

(25) 4:1

וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הַעֲשָׂקִים אֲשֶׁר נֹעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה | דְּמַעַת הָעֲשָׂקִים וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם וּמְיָד
עֲשָׂקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם:

When I turned I observed all the oppressions which happen under the sun. Look at the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter! Their oppressors have the power—and they have no comforter.

Relative participles, also by-and-large express a generic meaning.⁸⁵ However, there are exceptions to this pattern. In 2:6 the relative *צומח* is bound in the past time of the autobiographical foreground (26).

83 On “boundedness” and statives, see Cook, “The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics,” 250–54.

84 Other Participles about which it is difficult to decide between generic and real present include:

עֲשִׂים (4:1); הַמְהַלְכִים (4:15); שְׁמוֹר (5:12); חָלָה (5:12, 15); מַעֲנָה (5:19); אָבַד and מֵאֲרִיךְ (7:15); שִׁיבָא (10:5); הַלְכִים (10:7).

85 Qoheleth 1:5; 3:2; 4:1, 12, 15; 5:12, 15; 6:8; 7:5, 15[2x]; 8:14[2x]; 9:4, 12; 10:3, 5, 7, 12; 12:11.

(26) 2:6

עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרִכּוֹת מַיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יַעַר צוֹמַח עֵצִים:

I made pools of water to irrigate a forest (that was) sprouting trees.

Though set within a present temporal deixis, the Participles in 2:16 and 9:10 have an expected future meaning: an implied future event based on the present state (N.B. the analogy with the present-perfect, an implied present state based in a past event) (27).

(27) a. 2:16

כִּי אֵין זְכוֹן לְחַכְמָם עַם־הַכְּסִיל לְעוֹלָם בְּשֶׁכַּבֵּר הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכַּח

For no remembrance of the wise or of fools remains forever, since in the days which are coming/going to come all will have been forgotten.

b. 9:10

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחִשְׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה בְּשֶׁאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הַלֵּךְ שָׁמָּה:

Whatever your hand finds to do, perform with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, whence you are going.

A good number of the Participles in other (non-relative) subordinate clauses have a reader-based temporal deixis, indicated by second-person statements or Qoheleth's rhetorical questions.⁸⁶ Three of the four remaining examples in non-relative subordinate clauses are in generic contexts (4:17; 8:7; 12:5), and 8:16, if the reading is correct, appears to have a past progressive-habitual sense (28).

(28) 8:16

כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה שְׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינָנו רֹאֶה:

For also by day and by night his eyes were not seeing any sleep.

A final category that overlaps with the above ones but is of particular interest for the dating of the book is the participial encoding of stative roots.⁸⁷ It appears significant that Qoheleth uses the active

86 Qoh 2:19, 22; 3:9, 21[2x]; 4:8; 5:7[2x]; 7:21; 11:5, 6; 12:1.

87 Qoheleth 2:19, 22; 3:21; 4:2, 14, 17; 5:7, 9[2x]; 6:10, 12; 8:1, 7, 12; 9:1, 5[2x]; 11:5, 6. These

Participle with stative roots 19 times, given that this is the strategy used for many stative roots in Rabbinic Hebrew after the grammar no longer permitted the expression of present states with stative roots in the Perfect.⁸⁸ Particularly noteworthy are the following: the Participle form of היה (2:22), which is one of just two in the Hebrew Bible (see Neh 6:6), but which is a form that appears some 96 times in Qumran; and ידע, which is more frequently encoded by the Perfect than the Participle in the Hebrew Bible (500 Perfects versus 99 Participles), but shows a reversal in the Mishnah (112 Participles versus 51 Perfects) that parallels the pattern in Qoheleth: 15 Participles versus 8 Perfects.⁸⁹

3.2 The Imperfect

About an equal number of Imperfect forms appear in Qoheleth as Perfect forms, and together they comprise well over half of all the verbs in the book. These Imperfect forms are about equally distributed between the two mood categories of Realis and Irrealis meanings. Realis Imperfects include generic expressions as well as statements with future, present, or past temporal deixis. The meaning of the Imperfect in generic expressions in Qoheleth, as in Proverbs,⁹⁰ expresses a typical situation or an inevitability, as in (29).⁹¹

cases feature just five roots (אהב, היה, ידע, מות, רוש).

88 See John A. Cook, “Diachronic Typology and Stative Encoding in Biblical Hebrew,” in *Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew*, ed. Cynthia L. Miller and Ziony Zevit (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

89 These statistics are based on searches in the Accordance texts (Westminster BHS, Qumran sectarian texts and Mishnah Kaufmann A 50 manuscript prepared by Martin Abegg).

90 See Cook, “Genericity, Tense, and Verbal Patterns,” 127–29.

91 Generic Imperfects: 1:3 (or general present), 18[2x]; 2:3 (or general present), 16, 21 (or future); 3:14[2x], 15, 17; 4:10[2x], 11, 12; 5:9 (stative), 11, 17 (or general present); 6:7 (stative), 12; 7:3, 7[2x], 9, 12, 18, 19, 20[2x], 26[2x]; 8:1[2x], 3[2x], 5[2x], 12, 13, 15; 9:4, 11; 10:1[2x], 8[2x],

(29) a. 7:3

טוֹב כְּעֵס מִשְׂחֹק כִּי־בָרַע פְּנִים יֵיטֵב לֵב:

Better vexation than laughter, for by a sad face the heart is made well.

b. 7:7

כִּי הָעֶשֶׂק יְהוֹלֵל חָכָם וַיֵּאֱבֹד אֶת־לֵב מִתְּנָה:

Surely oppression makes a fool of the wise, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

What is notable compared with Proverbs is the ratio of Imperfects to Participles in generic expressions in Qoheleth: the sentence literature of Proverbs contains 272 generic Imperfects and 73 generic Participles; by contrast, Qoheleth contains only about 51 generic Imperfects versus 110 generic Participles.⁹² Another notable point is that apart from 12 relative clauses, these generic Imperfects occur in main/independent rather than subordinate clauses. By contrast, the Imperfect has become frequent in subordinate clauses in Rabbinic Hebrew.⁹³

There are 15 examples of Imperfect expressing a variety of present-time expressions, including general and habitual, which both differ from generics only by their expression of particular events or episodes, and differ from each other by the contextual implication of regular repetition.⁹⁴

10:9[2x], 12, 14, 15, 18[2x], 19[2x], 20[2x]; 11:3[2x], 4[2x], 5.

92 This comparison is slightly exaggerated because the numbers from Proverbs (Cook, “Genericity, Tense, and Verbal Patterns,” 124) do not distinguish irrealis (e.g., dynamic and epistemic) Imperfects from realis generic ones, whereas I have distinguished such categories in the Qoheleth data. However, these irrealis examples account for less than 50 of the 272 Imperfects in Proverbs, so that the point is still valid: Qoheleth shows a significant increased use of the Participle in generic expressions versus the Imperfect.

93 Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 125.

94 General present Imperfects: 5:3, 4[3x], 15, 16; 6:2[3x]. Habitual present Imperfects: 7:21; 9:10; 10:16, 17.

(30) a. 5:4

טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִדָּוֵר מִשְׁתִּדּוֹר וְלֹא תִשְׁלֵם:

Better that you do not make a vow than that you make a vow and do not fulfill it.

b. 10:16–17

אֵי־לֶךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֵלֶכֶד נָעַר וְשָׂרִיד בְּבֹקֶר יֹאכְלוּ: אֲשֶׁר־יֶדְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֵלֶכֶד בְּיַחְזוּרִים וְשָׂרִיד בְּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ בְּגִבּוֹרָה וְלֹא בְּשִׂתִּי:

Woe to you, O land whose king is a lackey and whose princes dine in the morning! Happy are you, O land whose king is a nobleman and whose princes dine at the proper time — in a manly fashion without drunkenness!

Only one present-imperfective (8:4) and one present-stative expression with the Imperfect occur in the book (4:8) (31). The latter combination of stative root with Imperfect (versus Perfect) may alternatively be interpreted as future, but in either case seems to serve to reinforce the negative, by its sense of eventuality: ‘His eyes are not satisfied (Pf.)’ versus ‘His eyes are never/will never be satisfied (Ipf.)’.

(31) a. 8:4

בְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבְרֵי־מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֵטוֹן וּמִי יֹאמַר־לוֹ מִה־תַּעֲשֶׂה:

... inasmuch as the word of the king is authority, and who will dare say to him, “What are you doing?”

b. 4:8

גַּם־עֵינָיו לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֶשֶׂר

Also his eyes are not sated with riches.

Similarly few, only two past habitual and one past imperfective examples of the Imperfect appear in the

book (8:10[2x]; 10:6). The former examples (8:10[2x]) occur in a passage of uncertain interpretation, while the latter (10:6) occurs within a past anecdotal context.

(32) a. 8:10

וּבִיָּן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קִבְּרִים וּבָאוּ וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְלְכוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר בְּזֵעָשׂוֹ גַם־זֶה הִבָּל:

And then I saw the wicked buried. They used to come and go from the holy place! But those would be forgotten in the city who had acted justly. This also is absurd.⁹⁵

b. 10:6

נָתַן הַסֶּכֶל בְּמָרוֹמִים רַבִּים וְעַשְׂרִים בְּשֹׁפֶל יֵשְׁבוּ:

Folly was placed on lofty heights, and rich men were sitting in low estate .

Of the 31 Imperfects that denote a future-time event, היה accounts for 17 examples while 5 others occur in the context of a Perfect-Imperfect past-future contrast.⁹⁶ Finally, the two Imperfect forms in the past anecdotal context of 4:15–16 seem to call for a relative future (future-in-the-past) interpretation (33).⁹⁷

(33) 4:15–16

רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהֻלְכִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ עִם הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֵד תַּחְתָּיו: אֵיזֶקֶץ לְכָל־הָעַם לְכָל־
אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם גַּם הָאֲחֻרֹנִים לֹא יִשְׁמְחוּ־בּוֹ

I saw all the living who were walking under the sun with the second youth who would step into his place. There was no end to all the people who were before him; and those who come

95 First verse half translation from Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 79.

96 Future היה forms: 1:9, 11[3x]; 2:18–19; 3:14, 22; 6:12; 8:7[2x], 12–13; 10:14[2x]; 11:2, 8. The example in 3:14 could alternatively be analyzed as simply generic or with a particularly future sense: ‘. . . exists/will exist forever’. Past-future contrast: 1:9; 5:14–15; 6:4[2x]. Remaining future Imperfects: 2:12, 14–15, 19; 4:15–16; 11:6, 9; 12:14.

97 See comments in F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, trans. M. G. Easton, Reprint ed., vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989) 280.

after him would not praise him.

The largest category of Irrealis Imperfect is the expression of dynamic modality (i.e., ability). In several cases, it is lexically based (יכל),⁹⁸ but various other roots, both stative and dynamic, appear (34).⁹⁹

(34) 8:17

כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לְמַצּוֹא אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּשׂוֹל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמַל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא

Indeed, man is unable to discover what occurs under the sun, so that man toils to seek but cannot discover (it).

Other modalities are modestly represented, including deontic necessity and permission,¹⁰⁰ and epistemic necessity and possibility.¹⁰¹ A final category, which may be referred to simply as Irrealis Imperfect, consists mainly of Imperfects appearing in subordinate clauses (e.g., conditional and temporal protases)¹⁰² in addition to three counter-factual interrogative clauses: ‘Why should this be the case (when it is not now)?’ (5:5).¹⁰³

4 The Deontic-Volitive system: Imperative, Jussive (and Cohortative)

Semantically there is nothing strikingly unique about the directive modal system in Qoheleth. There are

98 Qoheleth 1:8, 15[2x]; 6:10; 7:13; 8:17[2x].

99 Qoheleth 1:8[3x], 15[2x]; 2:25[2x]; 3:11, 13, 22; 6:10, 12; 7:13, 14, 24; 8:7, 17[3x]; 9:1, 18; 10:4, 14[2x]; 11:2, 5.

100 Deontic necessity (‘must’): 2:24; 3:22; 7:2, 18; 10:10; 11:8[2x]. Deontic permission (‘may’/ ‘let’): 6:2; 7:21; 8:8.

101 Epistemic possibility (‘may’): 1:1; 2:3; 3:14; 5:14; 8:17; 11:1. Epistemic necessity (‘must’): 2:18.

102 Subordinate clauses: 4:10, 11, 12, 17; 5:3, 7, 19; 6:3[4x]; 8:17; 9:12; 10:4, 11; 11:3[3x], 8; 12:01; 12:1, 2, 3, 4[2x], 5[4x], 6[3x], 7[2x].

103 Counter-factual questions: 5:5; 7:16, 17.

29 Imperatives, 18 second-person Jussives (all negated by לֹא), and 7 third-person Jussives (3 negated by לֹא and 4 in coordinate structures with negated Jussives or Imperatives),¹⁰⁴ all of which express directive modality. Two first-person Jussives (Cohortatives) occur, both expressing volitive modality.¹⁰⁵

More significantly, the syntax of the directive system in Qoheleth shows notable peculiarities, as outlined by Joosten; however, he makes some notable misstatements that obscure the patterns.¹⁰⁶ For example, he claims that 9 times the Imperative is clause initial and 9 times it is not; but he seems to be counting verses rather than occurrences. The data actually show that the Imperative occurs clause-initially 18 times in the book and 11 times it appears in a position other than clause initial.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, this is significant in contrast to Genesis–2 Kings, in which Shulman finds 96% of Imperatives occur clause-initially.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Joosten finds that negated (with לֹא) Jussives occur 10 times clause initially and 9 times non-clause initially. However, we obtain a more complete picture if we include the two first-person Jussives (Cohortatives) and 4 positive Jussives (above), in which case there are 17 Jussive clause-initial examples versus 10 non-clause-initial examples in the book.¹⁰⁹

104 Third-person Jussive negative: 5:1; 9:8; 11:6. Third-person Jussive: 5:1; 8:3; 9:8.

105 Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 89–90 misses the form in 2:1, treating the form in 7:23 as the only Cohortative.

106 Jan Joosten, “The Syntax of Volitive Verb Forms in Qoheleth in Historical Perspective,” in *The Language of Qoheleth in Its Context: Essays in Honor of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Berlejung and P Van Hecke (OLA; Leuven: Peeters, 2007) 47–61.

107 Clause-initial Imperatives: 1:10; 2:1[2x]; 4:17; 7:13, 27; 9:7[3x], 9; 11:1, 2, 9[3x], 10[2x]; 12:1.

Non-clause-initial Imperatives: 5:3, 6; 7:14[2x], 29; 8:2; 9:10; 11:6; 12:12, 13[2x].

108 Ahouva Shulman, *The Use of Modal Verb Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996) 138.

109 Clause-initial Jussives: 2:1; 5:1[2x], 5[2x], 7; 7:9, 10, 16[2x], 17[2x], 23; 8:3[3x]; 11:9. Non-clause-initial Jussives: 5:1, 3; 7:18, 21; 9:8[2x]; 10:4, 20[2x]; 11:6.

Again, these data are significant in either case. Especially notable is the subject-verb order for the negative Jussive in 5:1 (35).

(35) 5:1

אַל־תִּבְהַל עַל־פִּיךָ וְלִבְךָ אַל־יִמְהַר לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים

Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart rush to bring forth speech a word before God . . .

Joosten also examines the Imperfect with *waw*-conjunction, noting that in Standard Biblical Hebrew clause-initial, *waw*-prefixed Imperfects are generally Irrealis mood. In Qoheleth, however, this pattern of clause-initial *waw*-marking of Irrealis Imperfects does not seem to exist. By my own count of data, excluding the negative and other conjunctions (e.g., ׀א) there are 5 examples of Realis Imperfect with *waw* conjunction versus 9 examples of Irrealis Imperfect with *waw* conjunction.¹¹⁰ The significance of these data, Joosten notes, is that Qoheleth exhibits a “loosening” of word-order conventions that is diachronically significant given both the freer word order evident in the Qumran writings and beyond, which loosening was predicated by the loss of distinction between the Imperfect and Jussive.¹¹¹

5 The Infinitive Forms

Qoheleth has 108 Infinitives Construct and 3 Infinitives Absolute.¹¹² The Infinitive Constructs are used

110 Realis Imperfect with *waw* conjunction: 1:18; 2:19; 6:12; 7:7; 8:10. Irrealis Imperfect with *waw* conjunction: 11:8; 12:4[2x], 5[3x], 6[2x], 7.

111 Joosten, “The Syntax of Volitive Verb Forms in Qoheleth,” 59–60.

112 Infinitive Construct: 1:7–8, 13, 15–17; 2:3, 6, 11–12, 20, 26; 3:2–8, 10, 12, 14–15, 18, 22; 4:10, 13–14, 17–5:1; 5:3, 5, 10–11, 14, 17–18; 6:2, 8–10; 7:1–2, 5, 9, 13, 25, 27; 8:8, 11, 15–9:1; 9:10; 10:10, 15; 11:7; 12:4, 10, 12. Infinitive Absolute: 4:2; 8:9; 9:11. A fourth Infinitive Absolute should be read in 12:10 in place of the passive Participle pointing כְּתוּב (so Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 352–53). I have discounted two Construct examples and one

in predictable ways, mostly as the predicate of subordinate complement or adjunct clauses. More significantly the Infinitive Construct in Qoheleth behaves most like the form in Rabbinic Hebrew. First, 94 of the examples occur with the ל preposition, like Rabbinic Hebrew: “In practice, the infinitive construct simply does not occur except with the prefixed -ל.”¹¹³ Of the remaining cases, the ל preposition is gapped in 2 instances (1:17 and 7:25), 5 occur with מן preposition (Ecc 1:8; 3:5; 4:17; 6:9; 7:2), and 2 occur with temporal preposition 5:10 ב and 12:4) and one is preceded by the construct מיום with a temporal sense ‘since the day of . . .’ (7:1). Second, the dearth of temporal expressions using ב or כ with the infinitive is also similar to Rabbinic Hebrew, in which such constructions are unknown.¹¹⁴

The Infinitive Absolute cases, though few, have attracted more attention than the Construct ones. Much has been made of both their use in the book and their paucity. That there are only three might be understood as indicative of the lateness of the book, given that the Infinitive Absolute disappears in later Hebrew.¹¹⁵ At the same time, Qoheleth’s use of the Infinitive Absolute in place of a finite verb (8:9; 9:11) and in temporal succession (4:2) are in keeping with its use elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and cannot be convincingly taken as evidence of Phoenician influence.¹¹⁶

Absolute: the Ketiv reading in 6:10 is Infinitive Construct, but the Qere שְׁתַּקִּיר adjective reading is preferred; and לְאָמַר (only 1:16) is not properly an infinitive but a speech complementizer (see Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, 199–200); the form קָרוֹב in 4:17 may be parsed as an Infinitive Absolute or an adjective with the sense of ‘suitable, appropriate’ (Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, 230; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 194).

113 Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 144.

114 Idem.

115 Idem.

116 Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 84–85; Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*,

(36) a. 4:2

וּשְׁבַח אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שְׁכַבְרֵם מֵתוּ

Then I praised those who are already dead . . .

b. 8:9

אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנָתַן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נֹעֵשׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

All these things I saw and gave my heart to everything that occurs under the sun . . .

c. 9:11

שָׁבַתִּי וְרָאִה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

I turned and saw under the sun . . .

6. Significance of the findings

The longstanding view of a majority of scholars is that Qoheleth represents some of the latest Biblical Hebrew.¹¹⁷ Several conclusions of this study uphold this judgment on the basis that the verbal system in Qoheleth exhibits not simply dialectical differences but evidence of diachronic change away from the pattern of earlier Biblical Hebrew towards the grammar of post-biblical Hebrew (e.g., Qumran and/or Rabbinic Hebrew). These findings include the following points. First, the paucity of Past Narrative cannot be explained fully on the basis of genre or stylistic grounds. It seems reasonable that there is an element of diachronic change that led to the use of Perfect verbs, even in anecdotal narratives in the book where one might well expect the Past Narrative form.

Second, the decline of the Irrealis Perfect in Qoheleth, which subsequently disappears in Hebrew just as the Past Narrative, would also seem to admit a diachronic explanation.

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117 See discussion and sources cited in John A. Cook “Hebrew Language,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed by T. Longman III and P. Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008) 265–66 as well as the standard commentaries and introductions.

Third, the ratio of Perfect to Participle encoding of statives aligns Qoheleth with Qumran and Rabbinic Hebrew over and against the rest of the Hebrew Bible. This too seems to be diachronically significant as evidence of a change that cannot easily be explained as register or dialectal variation.

Fourth, the frequency with which the Imperfect form occurs in subordinate clauses in Qoheleth is less than Rabbinic Hebrew, in which it approaches becoming a subordinate and volitive verb form, but it is also more frequent than in other biblical books.¹¹⁸ The ratio in Qoheleth may be evidence of the gradual restriction of the Imperfect to subordinate clauses.

Fifth, the reversal in dominance of the Imperfect and Participle in generic expressions between Proverbs and Qoheleth may point to the encroachment of the Participle on the Imperfect as a contributing factor in the increasing restriction of the Imperfect to subordinate clauses.¹¹⁹

Sixth, the loosening of restrictions on word order in the deontic-volitive system and Imperfects may also be diachronically significant, as Joosten claims.

Seventh, and finally, the ubiquity of ה preposition on Infinitives Construct in Qoheleth hints at the conventionalization of the construction as in Rabbinic Hebrew.

Although any of these findings might be individually challenged with respect to my claim that they are diachronically significant, together they constitute a strong argument that Qoheleth lies diachronically between earlier portions of the Hebrew Bible and later post-biblical Hebrew (i.e., it is exemplary of late Biblical Hebrew). The case is strengthened when these changes are viewed within the

118 The Imperfects in independent clauses versus subordinate clauses in Qoheleth is about 1.5:1

(135/87). A search of Accordance's initial syntax data shows a ratio ranging from 2.6:1 to 4.6:1 (4.1:1 in Genesis (533/130); 2.6:1 in Joshua (142/54); 2.7:1 in Judges (186/70); Psalms (828/219); and Proverbs (606/133).

119 Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar*, 148 note that generic is one of the last meanings retained by a present/imperfective verb when a progressive form begins to take over the former's functions.

context of the diachronic typological models presented in (1): the decline of the Past Narrative and Irrealis Perfect are attributable to the gradual displacement of the older Past Narrative by the Perfect form, which precipitated the exclusion of non-past Irrealis meanings for the Perfect; the restriction of the Imperfect to subordinate clauses and increased use of Participle for generic expressions are results of the Participle's gradual appropriation of meanings earlier associated with the Imperfect; the loosening of word order among the Jussives and Imperfects points to the merger of these categories evident in later Hebrew. From the perspective of its verbal system, Delitzsch's famous quip about the book can hardly be denied: "If the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language."¹²⁰

120 Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*, 190.

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