

Anthropomorphic Conception of the Sun in Qohelet 1:5

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Abstract: It is suggested that the difficult שואף in Qohelet 1:5 was derived from an original אף שוא, in a densely written Hebrew paleo-script manuscript. The original שם שואף זורח הוא שם, "and the sun rose, and the sun set, and at his place he stationed, he also rises, he is there," describes in non-anthropomorphic terms the sun's repetitive appearance.

1. Introduction

Though Qohelet 1:5 is generally not considered one of the cruxes in the *Book of Qohelet*, it still posed to commentators some difficulties.¹ The verse reads

וְזָרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְבָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׂוֹאֵף זֹרְחָהּ הוּא שָׁם

and is usually translated: "The sun rises and the sun sets, panting to his place he rises there."² The rendition of שואף as "panting," or by the extrapolated sense "hastens," is problematic, for it imbues an inanimate object with anthropomorphic characteristics, and is irregular in the context, where only motion terms such as שב, הלך, סבב, זרח, עמד, בא are used.³

Though the psalmist used metaphorical anthropomorphisms for describing the sun, the *Book of Qohelet* is devoid of such devices. In particular, the noun שמש occurs in the *Book of Qohelet* 32 times mostly as the reference phrase תורת השמש (only found in this book), or something to be seen,

¹ C.F. Whitley, *Kohelet, His Language and Thought*, (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1979), 8. Whitley deletes 1:5b. Graetz says: "שואף, das nur 'schnauben, schnaufen' von Thieren, und transitive 'anschnauben' von Feinden gebraucht, bedeutet, auf die Sonne zu übertragen, wird immer gezwungen bleiben, wie sehr man auch die Bedeutung abschwächt und mildert." See H. Graetz, *Kohelet, oder der salomonische Prediger*, (Leipzig: C.F. Winter'sche, 1871), 55-56.

² G.A. Barton, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 69. Many omit the ו of זורחה, or read זורח (metathesis), and most commentators shift the disjunctive accent קטן זרח from ואל־מקומו to the next word. Hebrew Manuscripts, however, are overwhelmingly in accord with the MT. The terms זרח and בא are perfect consecutive forms, referring to the same temporal spheres and aspects as imperfect forms and having "progression" as a characteristic.

³ M.V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up, A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 166. Fox, however, felt that "panting" is rather natural in 1:5. He says: "Even if the author intended so'ep to be primarily understood as if from SWP, 'to walk, proceed' (thus Rashi, Gordis, Ginsberg; similarly Targum. 'crawls and goes'), the reader would naturally associate the writing ש'פ with so'ep (ש'פ)."

but never as an active body, or a desiring one. Zimmermann observes: "Certainly שואף with שמש is queer; שואף זורח is syntactically abrupt; שם leaves one perplexed. The idea that the sun returns to his place whence it shines is most improbable."⁴ Ginsberg also felt that:

The Hebrew of the last three words of Koh 1:5 is difficult to defend. The absence of a relative particle would be strange for Koheleth under any circumstances, and even in ancient poetry it would be strange before a participle, as would also the use of participles (instead of imperfects) with reference to daily occurrences. Harsh is also the order participle-third person pronoun where neither the participle nor the third person pronoun is emphatic: the latter ought either to be dispensed with altogether (as with *so'ep*) or to precede the participle.⁵

It has been suggested that Qohelet used "panting" under the influence of the Greek mythologies, in which the sun is depicted as drawn by panting steeds (as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* XV, 418., and Virgil's, *Georgics* I, 250). However, Ovid only says: "The day will end, and Phoebus will bathe his weary horses in the deep." He refers to the weary horses after a day of work (not to the night shift) and says nothing about their panting. Virgil says:

And when to us the sun with panting steeds
Hastens at down, far off the star of eve
There lights her glowing lamp.

He mentions "panting steeds" of the Dawn but not a panting sun.⁶ In fact, even if we assume that the horses pulling the sun were panting, there is a quantum jump in figurative perception to view the sun as panting. Already Knobel and Wright objected to this notion because it would be entirely un-Hebraic. The horses and chariots, which the kings of Judah sacrificed to the sun (2 Kings 23:11) were eradicated in Josiah's reforms because they were an anathema of the Jewish faith. Qohelet would not have referred to an idolatrous concept. In the Egyptian mythologies, with which the Israelites were more familiar, the sun made its way at night from west to east in a ship.⁷ Also according to *Mimmermos* Fr. 10, the sleeping Helios is carried across the underground ocean in a hull to its place of rising.

From the interpretational aspect the major problem with Qohelet 1:5 is the question of the perspective that should be adopted within the context. Namely, do the cosmic events described in 1:5-7 present senselessness in nature or they are an expression of purpose. And, what answer do they provide to the fundamental Qohelet question stated in 1:3? Our interest is focused on verse 1:5 only, and particularly on the more narrow textual issue of the meaning of the single word שואף, not the

⁴ F. Zimmermann, "The Aramaic Provenance of Qohelet." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (1945) 23.

⁵ H.L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950), 25.

⁶ L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 162. He notes that: "Die pferde des Helios aber schnauben zu *Beginn* eines neuen Sonnenumlaufs (vgl. *Pindar*, Olympische Oden VII, 4, 69-70; *Mimmermos*, Fr. 10; Homerische Hymnen 31,14-16 [an Helios]; 4,69 [an Hermes]), und so haben die jüdischen Texttradenten V 5 verstanden, wenn sie «lechzen» und «ואל־מקומו» und zu ihrem Ort« durch *zaqéf qatón* abgetrennt haben. ... Dann aber »schnaubt« die Sonne in V 5 zeitlich nach ihrem Untergang. ..."

⁷ K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*, (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 259.

origin of the antiquated perception of the sun, moving through a subterranean path to its position where it rises on time. It is necessary to resolve this problem in context of the ancient understandings of celestial movements, without assigning to the sun anthropomorphic characteristics, which would be alien within the framework of the *Book of Qohelet*. We will first discuss some of the exegetical efforts that were made to understand Qohelet 1:5 and then propose a solution.

2. Discussion

It seems that already the *Versions* had some difficulty with Qohelet 1:5, and were uncertain in their reading of *שׁוֹאֵף*. The Septuagint renders: Καὶ ἀνατέλλει ὁ ἥλιος καὶ δύνει ὁ ἥλιος καὶ εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ ἔλκει (“And the sun arises, and the sun goes down and draws toward its place”).⁸ It apparently takes *וּזְרָח* and *וּבֹא* as perfect consecutive forms; *שׁוֹאֵף* as “draws, drags, pulls” (ἐλκει), leaving out what is being drawn, dragged, or pulled. The Septuagint attaches *שׁוֹאֵף* to 1:6a, which continues to describe the movement of the sun. This subdivision of the text results in a 2:2:2 verse that improves the meter.⁹ However, the MT is not affected by the Septuagint’s understanding of *וּזְרָח* and *וּבֹא*, or its different subdivision into verses. Among the other Greek translations, Aquila has εἰσπνέει (“he inhales, breathes in”) for *שׁוֹאֵף*, and Symmachus and Theodotion have ἐπαναστέφει (“return”), which is interpretative.

The Targum translates: וידגה שמשא ביממא מן סטר מדינחא ואעיל שמשא לסטר

מעברא בלילה ולא תרחה שחיה ואול אורח תהומא ודגה למחר מן אתר דהוא נח תמן מאתמלי

“The sun rises *by day from the east side* and the sun sets *on the west side at night*. And it glides into its place *going by the path of the deep*, and it rises *the next day from the place where it rose there yesterday*.”¹⁰ While the Targum adds significantly, the MT is preserved. The term *שׁוֹאֵף* is rendered by *שׁוּחֵף* = “to crawl, to glide.”

According to Lamsa, the Peshitta translates: “The sun rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it rose, that from thence it may rise again.”¹¹ However, the term *tā’eb* that the

⁸ L.C.L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 819.

⁹ The Septuagint uses the verb ἔλκει for *שׁוֹאֵף* also in Jeremiah 14:6 and Psalm 119:131. The entire phrase *וּזְרָח* and *וּבֹא* is omitted in a small group of manuscripts. Haupt for metrical reasons regards *הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ* after *בֹּא* and *הוּא* before *שׁוֹאֵף* as glosses. Zapletal, for similar reasons, deletes the phrase *וּזְרָח הוּא שׁוֹאֵף*. Barton rightly notes that the metrical form of the book, as a whole, is not a sufficiently substantial base for textual criticism.

¹⁰ P.S. Knobel, *Targum of Qohelet, Aramaic Bible 13*, (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical, 1991), 20. Note that Knobel takes *שׁוֹאֵף* as “where it rested” (דגה = “where it rose”). Levine renders: “And the sun rises in the day from the east, and the sun sets in the west by night, and hastens to its place, and goes through the path under the sea, and rises the following day from the place where it rested yesterday.” See E. Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Qohelet*, (New York: Genesis, 1978), 27. Sperber’s and Levy’s editions of the Targum have *שׁוּחֵף*, but some manuscripts have *שׁוֹאֵף*.

¹¹ G.M. Lamsa, *The Holy Bible From the Ancient Eastern Text*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 686.

Peshitta uses for *שׁוֹאֵף* means “he returns.” Thus, the Peshitta seems to be reading *שׁוֹאֵף* instead of *וּזְרָח*. Similarly, Vulgate’s rendition of our verse *oritur sol et occidit et ad locum suum revertitur ibique renascens* (“The sun rises, and goes down, and returns to his place: and there rising again” [Douay-Rheims]) also takes *שׁוֹאֵף* = “he returns.”¹² Perhaps, the interpretations of the Peshitta and Vulgate are interpretative efforts that harmonize Qohelet 1:5 with the return of the wind and streams in 1:6 and 7, exploiting the fact that *שׁוֹאֵף* and *שׁוֹאֵף* are homonyms.¹³ Gordis believes that the Peshitta and Vulgate translated *שׁוֹאֵף* freely by “return,” but did not have a *Vorlage* that read *שׁוֹב*.¹⁴ Jerome notes in his commentary that the Hebrew text has “*soeph*,” and renders it by *ducit* “he draws.” It seems that the *Versions* attest to the authenticity of the MT, and reflect a cosmological understanding that was comfortable with the linkage of 1:5 with 1:6a.

Barton felt that the *Versions*, except of Aquila, have missed the meaning of *שׁוֹאֵף*.¹⁵ As we shall see, some commentators may differ. It is clear though that the *Versions* struggled with the translation of *שׁוֹאֵף*. This was also the case with the classical Jewish interpreters. Says Rashi (1040-1105): “and it [the sun] will go all night aspiring to return to the place where it rose yesterday so that it could rise there today” (ותלך כל הלילה שואפת לשוב אל מקום אשר זרחת אתמול משם שתזרח שם גם היום). Rashi understands *שׁוֹאֵף* in the strong anthropomorphic sense “aspires” and considers 1:5b as consisting of two acts: getting to the previous spot and rising there.¹⁶ Rashbam (c. 1085-1174) seems to follow Rashi in interpreting *שׁוֹאֵף* as “desires.”¹⁷ Ibn Ezra (1089-c. 1164) understands *שׁוֹאֵף* = “pants” in a metaphorical sense. He says: “as if he [the sun] gulps the wind from much desire to return to its place” (כאלו הוא שואף הרוח מרוב תאוות לשוב אל מקומו). Ibn Ezra, too, ascribes to the sun a desire. Qara (second half of 11th century to beginning of 12th century) uses the French

¹² M. Hetzenauer, *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae, Editionis Sixti V Pont. Max., (Rome, 1922) ad loc.*

¹³ See for instance Genesis 31:40 *חָרַב* (MT) and *חָרַף* (Samaritan); Genesis 31:49 *וּהַמְצַפֵּה* (MT) and *וּהַמְצַבֵּה* (Samaritan); Exodus 15:10 *נִשְׁפַת* (MT) and *נִשְׁבַת* (Samaritan); 2 Samuel 10:16 *וּשׁוּבֵךְ* and 1 Chronicles 19:16 *וּשׁוּבֵךְ*.

¹⁴ R. Gordis, *Koheleth – The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 205.

¹⁵ Barton, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 74.

¹⁶ Rashi entangles himself in additional anthropomorphisms of the sun in the following verse, which he takes as referring to the sun. He interprets *הַרְחוּ שֶׁל שֶׁמֶשׁ* = *רוּחוֹ* “will, or intention, of the sun,” taking *רוּחַ* = “talant” in Old French. See J. Greenberg, *Foreign Words in the Bible Commentary of Rashi*, (Self Published n.d.), 222. See also *bEirubin 56a* and *bBaba Batra 25b*.

¹⁷ S. Japhet and R.B. Salter, *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir Rashbam on Qoheleth*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 72.

awarder="regard, examine, see" for facilitating the understanding of *שואף*.¹⁸ Rashi, Rashbam, and Kara link 1:5 with the following hemistich, as do the *Versions*. This results in a counter-intuitive perception of the sun's daily movements. Ibn Ezra, however, rejects such linkage.

Stuart observes: "In what way the ancient Hebrews conceived this return [of the sun] to be accomplished, whether by going *round* the world, or *under* it, we are unable to say. ... But in the Heb. Scriptures I can recall no passage which seems to designate the common views of the ancient Hebrews on this subject. It must have appeared very mysterious to a thinking man among them."¹⁹ Early Jewish exegesis on Qohelet 1:5 was handicapped by the perception that the earth is flat, resting on an abyss through which there is a subterranean passage for the sun to cross at night from the west to the east. Variants of this cosmological concept can be found in *bEirubin* 56a, *bBaba Batra* 25b, and Targum.²⁰ The much later Metzudot commentary (1753), exploits the relative motions of the Earth's daily rotation and that of the Sun in its orbit. It says that according to 18th century astronomy, the sun moves in its orbit from west to east. However, the daily orbit of the earth forces it to move back toward the west (i.e. the relative motion of the sun with respect to the earth is toward the west). Thus, when the sun sets it 'desires' to continue to move from west to east and shine upon the earth, but the earth's daily orbit 'forces' it to go westward and set. When close to the sun's rising point in the east it 'desires' to go in its own orbit (east-to-west) and shine upon the earth, but the earth's daily orbit 'forces' it to go backwards, that is why it shines where the earth's daily orbit turned it back. It seems that in the Metzudot commentary the term 'desires' is not an anthropomorphism but describes the continuity of the sun's assumed rotation.

Modern exegesis appears to favor the anthropomorphic "panting," or an equivalent expression, for *שואף*.²¹ Commentators often allowed themselves some leeway in the translation of *שואף*. For instance, Gordis has for *שואף* "breathlessly rushing."²² Similarly, Michel translates by "strebt lechzend."²³ Hertzberg renders *שואף* by "Und drängt zu ihrer Stätte zurück," taking *שואף* =

drängt "rushes," and injecting the word zurück ("back") into the MT.²⁴ Similarly, Lohfink has for *שואף* "breathless it races back to the place where it rises again."²⁵ He takes *שואף* = "back," *שואף* = "breathless it races," and adds "again." Longman translates *שואף* "only to hurry around."²⁶ However, this idiomatic translation is not anchored in the text. Seow has for *שואף* "it presses on," which is not attested in the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ Many follow the Kings James Version in rendering the term *שואף* by "hastens." This is an unwarranted extension of the basic meaning of *שואף* "to gasp, to pant, to pant after, to desire, to stomp," which is based on the perception that our verse depicts a racing sun.²⁸ Hengstenberg, who tried to preserve the position of the *שואף* and the meaning of *שואף* obtained: "The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and (goes) to his place where he eagerly rises."²⁹ This translation, which is inspired by Psalm 19:6, does not reflect 1:5b.

Zer-Kavod uses in his interpretation of Qohelet 1:5 II *שואף* (a parallel form of *שואף*, if pointing is right) meaning "crush, trample upon."³⁰ He renders *שואף* = "treads valiantly," drawing on the anthropomorphic imagery in Psalm 19:6.³¹ However, Psalm 19:6-7 makes it clear that the sun's daily course is intended, and the image there is of a runner. Graetz, despairing to find a satisfactory meaning, emends *שואף* to *שואף*, rendering: "returns to its place, again it rises."³² However, the *שואף* and *שואף* are orthographically rather dissimilar in both the paleo-script and the square script. Confusion between these two letters is unlikely (though *שואף* and *שואף* might sound alike). Joüon, relying on the Peshitta and Vulgate, accepted the reading *שואף* instead of *שואף*, and suggested understanding *שואף* as "and."³³

¹⁸ B. Einstein, R. Josef Kara und sein Commentar zu Kohelet, (Berlin: Mamppe, 1886), 5. Qara explains: *מצפה מותי תבוא שעתו ויזרח ממקומו*.

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¹⁹ M. Stuart, A Commentary on Ecclesiastes, (New York: Putnam, 1851), 113.

²⁰ S. Morenz, Egyptian Religion, (London: Methuen, 1973), 207-208. The concept of the earth as a flat disc was shared by a number of ancient peoples.

²¹ See J.L. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, (Westminster: John Knox, 1987), 61; R.N. Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 & the Wonders of Nature," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41 (1988) 108; M.V. Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions, (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 168; D.C. Fredericks, "שואף." New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, ed. W.A. VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 6:11; W.P. Brown, Ecclesiastes, (Westminster: John Knox 2000) 24; D. Rudman, Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes, (Sheffield: Sheffield Acad., 2001), 77-78; T. Longman, The Book of Ecclesiastes, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 69; etc.

²² Gordis, Koheleth – The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes, 146.

²³ D. Michel, Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 3-8.

²⁴ H.W. Hertzberg, Der Prediger (Qohelet), (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung D. Werner Scholl, 1932), 57.

²⁵ N. Lohfink, Qoheleth : A Continental Commentary, (Minneapolis: Fortress 2003), 39.

²⁶ Longman, The Book of Ecclesiastes, 60.

²⁷ C.L. Seow, Ecclesiastes, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 100.

²⁸ In the Hebrew Bible *שואף* is used for a woman in labor (Isa 42:14), wild ass (Jer 2:24, 14:6), unknown persons (Ez 36:3), Israelites (Am 2:7, 8:4), David's enemies (Ps 56:2, 3), Saul (Ps 57:4), righteous (Ps 119:131), Arabs (Job 5:5) [Pinker, A. "Who is the 'hungry' in Job 5,5a?" *HIPPHIL* 4 (2007) (<http://www.seej.net/hiphil>)], slave (Job 7:2), and Job (Job 36:20).

²⁹ E.W. Hengstenberg, Ecclesiastes, (Philadelphia: Smith, English, & Co., 1860) 46.

³⁰ M. Zer-Kavod, קהלת, in *חומש מגילות*, (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1973), 2, note 13. Zer-Kavod calls attention to the fact that *שואף* is kindred to *שואף* (root *שואף*) meaning "tread, walk over," so in Amos 2:7, where Rashi renders "they walk upon them." In a private communication to Gordis (Koheleth – The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes, 205), S.I. Feigin suggested using the Akkadian *šīpu*, "go, march," for interpreting *שואף* in Qohelet 1:5.

³¹ See Genesis Rabba 6:13, where the phrase *שואף* *שואף* *שואף* occurs.

³² Graetz, Kohelet, oder der salomonische Prediger, 55f. He renders: "Die Sonne geht auf und geht unter, sie kehrt zu ihrem Orte zurück und geht dort (wieder) auf." Graetz also links our verse with the first hemistich of 1:6.

³³ P. Joüon, "Sur le nom de Qoh." *Biblica* (1921) 53f.

Jouïon's emendation received some acceptance because of its reliance on the *Versions*, and because it was felt that שואף is impossible in the inner verse and outer verse contexts. Indeed, BHS proposes the emendation אף שָׁב, as well as reading זורח instead of זרח and deleting שם זורח הוא שם. We have already noted that the rendition by the Peshitta and Vulgate (also Symmachus and Theodotion) of שואף as “he returns” is likely interpretative.³⁴

Jastrow reads: “The sun rises and the sun sets, and to his rising place he returns.” He takes זורח as an explanation of the rarer שואף, and emends שם to שָׁב.³⁵ Montgomery suggested the reading אף שָׁב instead of שואף, obtaining for the second hemistich “and unto the place where also he rises.”³⁶ This leaves the hemistich with a missing verb, a function formerly served by שואף.³⁷ Tur-Sinai, strangely says that: “רעות רוח, שואף רוח, שואף here is nothing but רעות שואף.”³⁸ However, רעות ≠ שואף, the MT does not imply שואף רוח, the phrase “to his place he labors for naught” makes no sense, and זורח הוא שם is left hanging. More recently, Whitley suggested the deletion of the entire phrase זורח הוא שם, considering it unauthentic. He says: “the original passage relating to the sun would seem to have been: ‘The sun rises and the sun sets, it goes unto the south and veers to the north’. We would then have a natural reference to the four points of the compass, without the cumbersome intrusion of שם ... ואל-מקומו ...” In his view, the phrase was probably inserted under the influence of Qohelet 1:7b, where a similar elaboration of the preceding line is

³⁴ Gordis, *Koheleth – The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes*, 205. In Gordis' view the emendation שָׁב אף creates the difficult text אף זורח, but does not explain the difficulty. It is not clear in what sense is זורח more difficult than אף חָבַב (Deut 33:3) or אף אִיד־שָׁמַע (Isa 41:26). The word אף occurs also in Ecclesiastes 2:9. Whitley felt that the emendation אף שָׁב scarcely improves the logic of the verse.” See Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought*, 9.

³⁵ M.A. Jastrow, *Gentle Cynic, Being a Translation of the Book of Koheleth, Commonly Known as Ecclesiastes, Stripped of Later Additions, also its Origin, Growth, and Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919), 201-202, 252. Note that the two voiced bilabial consonants, ב and מ, are sometimes interchanged. For instance, we find במצרים in 1 Kings 12:2 but ממצרים in 2 Chronicles 10:2, בראדך in 2 Kings 20:12 but מרדך in Isaiah 39:1, Genesis 25:33 בברתו in MT but מברתו in Severus Scroll, בית פקדים in Jeremiah 29:26 but פקיד בבית in the Septuagint, באדם (Ketib) and מאדם (Qere) in Joshua 3:16, מעבר (K) and בעבר (Q) in Joshua 22:7, בעבר (K) and מימין (Q) in 2 Kings 5:12, במלך (K) and במלך (Q) in 2 Kings 12:10, מראדך in 2 Kings 20:12, מראדך (K) and מראדך (Q) in Daniel 11:18; דימן (MT) and דימן (1Qs^a) in Isaiah 15:9, etc.

³⁶ J.E. Montgomery, “Notes on Eccl.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43 (1924) 242.

³⁷ Hertzberg, Prediger, 60.

³⁸ N.H. Tur-Sinai, *הלשון והספר* Vol. הספר, (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960), 404. Tur-Sinai states that שואף in the Hebrew Bible always means “open the mouth to swallow.” The phrase שואף רוח means “opening the mouth by the hungry or thirsty for food or drink,” but what he gets is only רוח and הבל.

presented.³⁹ While Whitley's emendation gives “a natural reference to the four points of the compass” it also presents an obviously unnatural daily movement of the sun.

Zimmermann, who believes that Qohelet is of an Aramaic provenance, considers Qohelet 1:5 a striking example of mistranslation. The Aramaic original was in his view probably something like וְדָנָה שְׁמָשׁ וְלֹא־תָרִיהַ תֵּאָבֵב. Since the Aramaic text was not vocalized, the translator erred by reading תֵּאָבֵב “desire, long for” instead of תָּאָבֵב “return,” and דָּנָה “shine” instead of דָּנָה “where he rests.” Thus, the translated text should have been, perhaps,

וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שָׁב אֲשֶׁר נָח הוּא שָׁם

(“The sun shines and the sun sets; and he returns to his place where he rests”).⁴⁰ Whitley correctly

notes that: “the idea of the sun resting is not suitable in the context, which is rather concerned with its continuous motion.”⁴¹

Ginsberg, who agrees with Zimmermann that Qohelet was originally written in Aramaic, considers Zimmermann's reconstruction of the Aramaic original of the relative clause in our verse as impossible. He gives the following reasons: “Firstly, because the difficulty of the postpositive *hu* is as acute for Aramaic as for Hebrew; and secondly, because the participle of the verb נָח, is, in Aramaic, not נָח, but נָחַח (or נָחַח).” In his view it is more likely that the original Aramaic was דָּנָה תָּמָה (דִּ) “where it rose,” דִּ having been lost by haplography. The only hesitation that he has regards the vocalizations of דָּנָה, דָּנָה or דָּנָה. That the Hebrew הוא represents a misunderstood Aramaic הוּא seems to him almost certain.⁴²

Ginsberg suggests understanding שואף in the sense that the Targum did, namely that of ‘it glides.’ He says:

The verb *šwp* ‘to glide,’ common in Babylonian Aramaic (corresponding to Palestinian Aram. *šhp*) is employed in Hebrew in Genesis Rabbah I 6 precisely with reference to the motion of the sun. Even on this interpretation, however, the form *šō'ep* (instead of *šāp*, as in the cited passage in Genesis Rabbah, which is formed according to the rule for participles of hollow verbs) would be due to the analogy of the Aramaic participle *šā'ep* (cf. the participles of hollow verbs in Dan 2:38; 7:16) and would be most naturally explained as a thoughtless translation of the latter. I further suggest that שואף is a mistranslation of אֶתְרָה, which was taken as אֶתְרָה ‘its place’ instead of אֶתְרָה ‘the place.’ Koh 1:5b will then have read in the original Aramaic (תֵּאָבֵב?)

³⁹ Whitley, *Kohelet, His Language and Thought*, 9.

⁴⁰ Zimmermann, *The Aramaic Provenance of Qohelet*, 24.

⁴¹ Whitley, *Kohelet, His Language and Thought*, 9.

⁴² Ginsberg, *Studies in Koheleth*, 26. Ginsberg notes that at least in Syriac are the two vocalizations (דָּנָה) equally likely. Ginsberg thinks that Zimmermann's conjecture that דָּנָה represents an Aramaic תֵּאָבֵב is somewhat difficult. He says: “It would be rather strange if a writer who thought that *t'b* (i. e. *tā'eb*) meant ‘(it) desires’ rendered it by the Hebrew verb *š'p*; in as much as the latter, a cognate of *š'b* ‘to draw (water)’ - Arab. *š'b* ‘to drink’ - means simply ‘to swallow, inhale, gasp (for), pant (for)’.”

ושף (ושב?) אל המקום אשר זורה היה of which a correct rendering would have been די דנה הוא תמה (or זרח).⁴³

However, the verb שוף meaning “to glide” is not attested in the Hebrew Bible. Its much later use in the Midrash could be an Aramaism.

This rather short overview of the exegesis on Qohelet 1:5, and in particular of the meaning of the term שואף, indicates that the verse presented to the commentators contextual, grammatical, and thematic problems, which have not found, as yet, an adequate and accepted solution.

3. Solution

In line with the ancient cosmological concepts, it was tacitly assumed that Qohelet refers in 1:5 to the daily movement of the sun from the west to the east through a subterranean path,⁴⁴ the motion being arduous and under pressure of time constraints. Hence, both meanings of שואף “panting” and “crushing, trampling upon” seemed of relevance.⁴⁵ Some commentators felt that the sun’s panting is caused by weariness; others attributed it to the sun’s eagerness to start upon its course again. However, Qohelet says nothing about how the sun gets from the west to the east, where it rises again. It is also interesting to note that Babylonian mythology does not single out the nightly effort of the sun as being anymore difficult than its daily routine. In a hymn to the sun god Šamaš we read:

To unknown distant regions and for uncounted leagues
You press on, Šamaš, going by day and returning by night.
Among the Igigi there is no one who toils but you...⁴⁶

Whether the sun’s panting (or trampling) is caused by weariness, or eagerness to start upon its course again, it still is an uncharacteristic and contextually odd anthropomorphism. In the Hebrew Bible only living beings can “pant” or “trample.”⁴⁷ Moreover, in 1:5 Qohelet is interested in making a statement about the repetitiveness of a natural phenomenon, the daily rise and setting of the sun, not the manner in which it is achieved. Barton is right saying that: “The comparison of Ps 19:6 (Knobel

⁴³ Ibid. I used h = ח.

⁴⁴ It is possible that Qohelet perceived the sun moving at night above the firmaments or under the earth, which was viewed as a flat disk (see *bPesachim* 94b).

⁴⁵ W. Baumgartner and L. Koehler (eds.), *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum alten Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 1967-90), 1280.

⁴⁶ W.G. Lambert, (ed.), *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960) 128-29, lines 43-48.

⁴⁷ The “panting” or “trampling” is done by a woman in labor (Isa 42:14), wild ass (Jer 2:24, 14:6), unknown persons (Ez 36:3), Israelites (Am 2:7, 8:4), David’s enemies (Ps 56:2, 3), Saul (Ps 57:4), righteous (Ps 119:131), Arabs (Job 5:5) [Pinker, A. “Who is the ‘hungry’ in Job 5,5a?” *HIPHIL* 4 (2007) (<http://www.sec-j.net/hiphil>), slave (Job 7:2), and Job (Job 36:20).

and Hengstenberg) is inapt. Qoheleth’s mood is very different from that of the psalmist.⁴⁸ Exuberance of this kind is absent in the *Book of Qohelet*.⁴⁹

Instead of the MT שואף we have to look for a term that can be reasonably derived from שואף, and is as neutral as זרח and בא. We suggest that the original reading was שואף rather than שואף, the confusion between ו and ת being caused by their similarity in the paleo-script and proximity of the words שואף and שואף in the ancient text. Thus, וְאֵלֶי-מְקוֹמוֹ שָׂא would mean “at his place he stationed.” The root of שואף is either שית or שתת, which in Masoretic tradition were apparently considered as being two variants with the same meaning. Olofsson says, “שתת is probably understood as a by-form of שית, but with an intransitive nuance, ‘sit down, encamp,’ or rather, ‘to be set’ or ‘to be appointed.’”⁵⁰

The notion that the sun has a place where it stays before it rises has been described by the Psalmist as a wedding tent בהם לשמש שמי-אהל (Ps 19:5), where שם is the equivalent of שתת. It is dramatically depicted in God’s response to Job:

אִיזָה הַדֶּרֶךְ יִשְׁכַּן-אֹר
וְהַשָּׁךְ אִיזָה מְקוֹמוֹ
כִּי תִקְחֵנוּ אֶל־גְּבוּלוֹ
וְכִי תִבֶן נִתְיֹבוֹת בֵּיתוֹ
Which path leads to where light dwells,
And where is the place of darkness,
That you may take it to its domain
And know the way to its home? (Job 38:19-20)

Job must be referring in נתיבות ביתו to the subterranean roads traveled by the sun during the night until it comes to its place, its ‘home’, where it rises again as in our verse. The daily orbit of the sun was visible and well known to the ancients, the path at night was not. Indeed, each example in Qohelet 1:4-7 has a verifiable portion and an unverifiable one.⁵¹

Commentators seem to have overlooked the close relation between our verse and Psalm 104:19-20:

⁴⁸ Barton, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 70.

⁴⁹ Pinker, A. “On Sweetness and Light in Qohelet 11:7.” *Revue Biblique* (forthcoming). Some commentators tried to detect exuberance in Qohelet 11:7. Pinker refutes this notion.

⁵⁰ Olofsson, S. “Death Shall Be their Shepherd: An Interpretation of Psalm 49.15 in the Masoretic Text and Septuagint,” in C. A. Evans (ed.), *The Interpretation of Scriptures in Early Judaism and Christianity: Studies in Language and Tradition*, (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement) (Sheffield: Continuum International, 2000) 85. Mandelkern includes the two verses, Psalm 49:15 and 73:9, in which verbal forms derived from שתת occur also under שית, saying “שתת אח אל שית וכבר הובאו שני הכתובים שם.” See S. Mandelkern, *Concordantiae Habraicae Atque Chaldaicae*, (Lipsiae: Veit et Comp., 1896), 1238b. It is interesting to note that the difficult Psalm 49:15 in which שתת occurs contains several words associated with sun’s movement: שואף, מות, שאל, ירד, בקר, and זבל.

⁵¹ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 166. He says: “Der Lauf der Sonne, das Wehen des Windes und das Fließen der Flüsse sind in ihrer ständig kreisenden Bewegung Ausdruck einer geheimnisvollen Ordnung, in der die Erde steht (V 4b; vgl. Ps 104,5). Auch in der Abfolge der Generationen ist kein Ende in Sicht. Doch jede einzelne Generation geht im Unterschied zu den Elementen des Kosmos einen Weg ohne Wiederkehr. So kann man mit *Ginsburg* 261f. sagen: »the objects of nature have an advantage over man.« Der Mensch tritt für kurze Zeit in einen Kreislauf ein, den er aber schon bald wieder verlässt, um anderen Platz zu machen

תחת השמש (1:9), and תחת השמים (1:11).⁵⁸ The sun is always in the morning where it is supposed to be.

It is possible that a scribe, copying from a manuscript written in a dense paleoscript, considered **אף** ש**ת** being a single word and thus impossible. He opted for the similar **שואף**, which made to him more sense, though it was anthropomorphic and incongruous with the contextual descriptions of the sun's movement. The restored text

וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁת אֶף זֹרַח הוּא שָׁם

“and the sun rose, and the sun set, and at his place he stationed, also rises, he is there,” makes good sense as a description of the sun's repetitive appearance, which is emphasized at the conclusion by “he is there!” Our reading shows that it is unnecessary to delete various words of Qohelet 1:5, as several commentators felt compelled by metrical considerations. The restored verse can be viewed as having a 2:2:2:2:2 meter, which is also shared by the following verse, if the last **הַרְחוּ** is deleted as has been suggested by some commentators.⁵⁹

Finally, why didn't Qohelet use in the original paleo-script manuscript such terms as **בא**, **שב**, **יצא** or **הולך** instead of **שת**? We can, perhaps, speculate that Qohelet did not want to overuse the terms **שב**, **בא**, and **הולך**, which occur in Qohelet 1:4, 6, and 7, while **יצא** and **הולך** are somewhat indefinite in the possibility of actually reaching the station. It is also possible that Qohelet was more interested in the stationing of the sun in the right place rather than the process of arrival to that place. The term **שת**, a homophone of **טש**, “he went, roved about, sailed,” perhaps, also suggested the Egyptian image of the sun sailing to its post at night.

4. Conclusion

Literary sources indicate “that there existed in the third century B.C.E. broad areas of speculation of a pseudo-scientific kind in Judah and in Jewish circles”, “a rather sophisticated and rich realm of speculation and ‘sacred science’ within Judaism.”⁶⁰ Still one wonders about the thematic relevance of these speculations to the main theme of the book. In Schwienhorst-Schönberger's view, the enumeration of various natural repetitive phenomena sets the stage for the consideration of

⁵⁸ Thematic consistency requires that **הַרְחוּ** ש**ב** (1:6) should provide the permanent element for the wind circulation. Perhaps, instead of **הַרְחוּ** we should read the rare **הַרְחֵף**, “the relief, the respite”; i.e., where the wind blows there will always be some relief or respite from the hot weather.

⁵⁹ The position of the **זקן קטן** has been disregarded by the Septuagint, Targum, Vulgate and most commentators.

⁶⁰ M.E. Stone, *Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts*, Cleveland: Collins (1980) 35.

“advantage” (יתרון) in the presence of “eternity” (עולם), not to create an atmosphere of “senselessness” and an attitude of pessimism.⁶¹

Qohelet's use of the repetitive daily movement of the sun in 1:5, however, is not without problems. The main concern is the attribution to the sun of an anthropomorphic characteristic not found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and a metaphoric anthropomorphism not found in Qohelet. Because the sun was an object of veneration in some neighboring cultures, it would seem highly unlikely that a Jewish author would imbue the sun with any anthropomorphic vestiges, suggesting that it is a living being. Understanding **שואף** as “panting, hastens, stomping” is impossible.

Graetz's reading **שואף** instead of **שואף**, while lacking textual support, points to the potential advantage in considering **שואף** as consisting of two words. Orthographic similarities between the **א** and **ת** in the paleo-script suggest that the two words might have been **שואף** and **תואף**, resulting in the restored text

וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁת אֶף זֹרַח הוּא שָׁם

The assumed original paleo-script text makes good sense, does not have any anthropomorphic connotations, and agrees with the metrical structure of the following verse.

⁶¹ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 180. Schwienhorst-Schönberger says: “Das Gedicht über den Kosmos, das am Anfang des Buches steht, gehört, was den im Buch ablaufenden Erkenntnisprozess anbelangt, ans Ende. In ihm wird der Horizont eröffnet, vor dem das folgende »großkönigliche Experiment« ins rechte Licht gerückt wird. Und damit deutet sich bereits an, was ab 1,12 experimentell und argumentativ entwickelt wird: Nicht das Gedicht über den Kosmos ist Ausdruck von Sinnlosigkeit, sondern die Frage nach einem »Gewinn« (1,3) angesichts der Ewigkeit (1,4-11).”