

On the Origin and Meaning of *ḥānīk* in Genesis 14:14

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Abstract

For the past hundred years, scholars have generally referred to an alleged, but in fact obscure, parallel in an Akkadian letter from Bronze-Age Tell Ta'anak in order to establish the meaning of the Hebrew noun ḥānīk at its sole occurrence in Gen 14:14. The reason is that the sense "retainer," as required by the context, seems to be difficult to square with the normal use of the underlying verb ḥnk "to inaugurate." However, a connection with the meaning "to train up" of this root as it is sufficiently well attested in later Aramaic languages and in Rabbinic Hebrew deserves preference on grounds of both semantics and historical-comparative philology. Aramaic lexical influence moreover chimes with the late post-exilic or Hellenistic date of Genesis 14 that has become by far the dominant view among source critics since the middle of the twentieth century. Hence ḥānīk should rather be understood as "trained man," as nineteenth-century commentators of Genesis had already supposed in light of cognate evidence from Arabic. The same explanation is likely to apply to the only other instance of ḥnk meaning "to train" as well (Prov 22:6), which presumably belongs to a later redaction of Proverbs and is thus likewise post-exilic.

The account of the campaign of four eastern kings against five Canaanite cities in Genesis 14 belongs to the most debated parts of the patriarchal cycle. Its global outlook, its interest in learned topography and exuberant, but mysterious, toponymy (a third of the entire vocabulary consists of names of places and persons), and its whimsical depiction of Abraham as a warlord of superhuman heroism deviate so markedly from the rest of the narrative that its origin and place in the redaction history raise many questions. Following Julius Wellhausen's devastating assessment of the manifold anachronisms and inconsistencies, a post-exilic date of this chapter is now widely if not universally accepted.¹ To name but one representative example from early-, mid-, and late-twentieth-century criticism, respectively: Hermann Gunkel views it as a late, originally independent, piece that breathes the air of Achaemenid or even Hellenistic cosmopolitanism; Gerhard von Rad concurs with Gunkel's impression of a strange combination of antiquarian learning and fanciful exaggeration that cocoons Genesis 14 from all known layers; and J. Alberto Soggin, too, assumes a "Sonderüberlieferung."² Its patent literary purpose of glorifying Abraham betrays a midrashic character that also chimes with a late Persian or Hellenistic background. As a result, dissenting voices, which assigned the allegedly archaic material to Israel's monarchic or even pre-monarchic period, by and large fell silent after the 1960s.

A relatively minor detail among the many problems of composition, which nonetheless bears on the time when the story was supposedly written, is the unclear provenance and meaning of the noun *ḥānīk* in Gen 14:14. Historical-linguistic arguments do not normally feature in discussions of Genesis 14,³ but hopefully, some observations on this curious *hapax legomenon* bespeak Lawson Younger's long-standing interest in, and foundational work on, Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts, political history, and, of course, Aramaic. Judging from the immediate context in which it occurs, the word must refer to particularly apt and dependable members of a commando unit that Abraham mobilized in order to free his nephew Lot, who, as an inhabitant of Sodom, had been taken captive by Chedorlaomer's victorious coalition:

¹ Wellhausen ³1899: 311–13, where he also engaged with Nöldeke's older hypothesis of an eighth-century date. Levin 1993: 146 has a crisp and insightful summary of all relevant points. Granerød 2010 provides an extensive review of the discussion about the internal growth of Genesis 14, but he, too, concludes that the received text must be post-exilic.

² Gunkel ³1910: 288–90; von Rad ¹²1987: 134–35 (originally 1952); Soggin 1997: 222 and 1995: 288–91 (who suggests a Hellenistic background). Each also has a selection of further bibliography.

³ Excepting the few general, but impressionistic, remarks about alleged archaisms by Andersen 1995: 500–503, which are not further elaborated, pass over the problem of *ḥānīk* altogether, and remain inconclusive. Schatz's compilation of Semitic cognates and lexical glosses for each noun and verb in Genesis 14 (1972: 241–62), conversely, is purely descriptive and does not address semantic shifts. One can find occasional speculations about linguistic remnants of either an older poetic or an Akkadian source of Genesis 14 in earlier literature, but Emerton 1971 has effectively put these to rest.

Abraham heard that his nephew had been taken captive and mustered (based on the reading *wydq* of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which also seems to underlie ἡρίθμησεν ‘he counted’ in the Septuagint and the Vulgate’s *enumeravit*, instead of MT’s *wyrq* ‘he emptied’)⁴ his *ḥānīks* (*ḥ^anīkāw*), born in his house, 318 men, and went in pursuit as far as Dan (Gen 14:14).

The exact meaning of *ḥānīk* remains opaque, however, as the underlying root is apparently *hnk*, but one cannot easily establish any direct connection with the ritual context in which most instances of the verb *hnk* “to inaugurate” (Deut 20:5; 1 Kgs 8:63 par. 2 Chr 7:5; excepting Prov 22:6, on which see below) and all instances of the derived noun *ḥ^anukkā* “inauguration, consecration” (Num 7:10.11.84.88; Ps 30:1; Neh 12:17; 2 Chr 7:9) occur in Biblical Hebrew, the latter also in Biblical Aramaic (Dan 3:2–3; Ezr 6:16–17).⁵ Undoubtedly, a semantic development from “inaugurated” to “proven,” as several older commentaries propose, sounds unnaturally strained.⁶ The somewhat ingenious attempt to interpret the noun *ḥānīk* against the background of the dominant ritual use of the root,⁷ conversely, inspires even less confidence, since the focus of the passage in question rests on the military prowess and personal loyalty of these men; it is also relevant that *hnk* in this particular sense is only used with buildings and never with persons. And if one postulates a common non-ritual basic sense “to begin, put to common use,” despite the evident cultic associations of almost all passages in which derivations of this root occur in the Hebrew Bible (the act of putting something to common use always has at least a faint ceremonial dimension, even in mundane situations such as driving a new car for the first time, cooking the first meal with a new pot or pan, or taking a new suit, shirt, or pair of shoes on a maiden voyage), that would invariably, and most implausibly, imply that the band with which Abraham defeated the invincible armies of the eastern kings consisted of “trainees.”⁸

By contrast, a connection of the noun *ḥānīk* in Gen 14:14 with the sense “to train up,” in which the verb is once employed in Prov 22:6, seems more probable and yields the contextually adequate meaning “trained man,” which the Vulgate aptly reproduces: *numeravit expeditos vernaculos suos*. This is also the same understanding that appears in the paraphrase of the expression in the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran: *wbḥr mn ‘bdwhy gbryn bhryn lqrb* “and he picked from his servants men chosen (i.e., trained) for war” (1QGenAp 22:6),⁹ whereas the Septuagint circumvents the difficulty by assimilating the problematic term to the pos-

⁴ This is an old and palaeographically easy emendation that was already endorsed by Gunkel ³1910: 283 and frequently after him (cf. Westermann 1981: 236). The meaning of the C-stem of *rīq*, as in MT, would be “to empty out” or “to draw a weapon,” but the metaphorical sense required in this context, i.e., “to let loose” (cf. Tuch ²1871: 253; Spurrell 1887: 141–42; Dillmann ⁶1892: 241; Driver ⁴1905: 163; de Fraine 1963: 132), is not attested elsewhere. Note, however, that Wevers 1993: 195 suggests that the Septuagint did not understand the Hebrew and merely contextualized the rendering. Contrary to Schorch 2021: 86 (apparatus), the Syriac’s *wzyn* “and he armed,” at any rate, supports MT’s *wyrq* and not *wydq*, because in the vast majority of cases in the Syriac Bible, *zūn* translates the common verb *hlš* “to draw off” (see Borbone et al. 1997: 272, s.v.), but *hlš* is semantically closer to the C-stem of *rīq*.

⁵ In the light of the parallelism between 2 Chr 7:5 and 2 Chr 7:9, it is not at all certain whether the use of the same lexeme in Num 7:10.84.88 requires a more specific nuance “dedication offering,” as some lexicographers assume. See Dommershausen 1982: 21.

⁶ Pace Delitzsch ⁵1887: 268 (“Eingeweihten oder Eingebübten”), Gunkel ³1910: 283 (“eingeweiht, bewährter Krieger”), Procksch ^{2/3}1924: 508–9 (“geweihte Krieger”), Skinner ²1930: 266 (“‘initiated’ [...], hence ‘trained,’ ‘experienced,’ etc.”), and Westermann 1981: 236. Ehrlich 1908: 56 perceptively sensed the difficulty involved in this interpretation: against the background of normal Hebrew usage, *ḥānīk* would rather mean “novice” according to him, since the root and its derivatives “have a novel ring” (“haftet der Begriff des Neuen an”). His own solution of emending *ḥ^anīkāw* to *ḥ^anīlō* (and thus preserving MT’s reading of the preceding verb *wyrq*) “[and he drew] his spear” remains unsatisfactory in the end, though, because it would require supplying another full clause in order to make sense in the context, which is too convoluted to be credible. Other conjectures occasionally proposed in earlier literature (e.g., *ḥ^alūšāw* “his girded, i.e., equipped men” according to Meinhold 1911: 14) are even less likely and have not found support. Wevers 1993: 194, however, bypasses the whole discussion when he states that “the root 𐤆𐤍 is well known” and “The noun thus means ‘those trained or experienced.’”

⁷ So Holzinger 1898: 144, who showed himself aware of the semantic problem and therefore suggested that the term referred to slaves who had been received into the cultic community. De Fraine 1963: 132 has a proposal along similar lines (“gewijde krijgers”).

⁸ This is nonetheless how Reif 1972: 499 apparently understood Gen 14:14.

⁹ Similarly Fitzmyer ³2004: 242, whereas Beyer’s rendering “kämpferprobt” (1984: 183) puts the emphasis on experi-

sessive suffix it carries in the original text and thus simply translating ἡρίθμησεν τοὺς ἰδίους οἰκογενεῖς αὐτοῦ “he mustered his own house-born ones.” (Secondary variants within the Septuagint textual transmission are insignificant for this matter.) Targum Onqelos, Targum Neophyti, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis on the one hand and the Syriac on the other, too, all infer the meaning from the context and translate “his servants,” while the manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum either read *hnykyw*, thereby copying the word one-to-one from its Hebrew source text, or render it with “his servants” as well.¹⁰ So the Vulgate is the ancient version that translates the Hebrew lexeme most exactly.

Even so, one would still have to explain how precisely the nuance “to train up” that yields the best sense here relates to the predominantly cultic employ of forms of the root *hnk* in the Hebrew Bible. It is of no major importance whether both shades of meaning ultimately derive from the word “palate” (North-West Semitic **hink*, Arabic *ḥanak*), as is often assumed,¹¹ since they are clearly differentiated in terms of semantics and situation of use in Hebrew. The *qaṭīl* noun pattern, too, requires some comment, because this form, though by no means infrequent, mostly occurs with lexicalized adjectives in Hebrew, many of which in substantivized use, that by and large belong to the common vocabulary and are usually well-attested (just as *pālīṭ* “fugitive” in the preceding verse). Contrary to Aramaic, where *qaṭīl* corresponds to the regular basic-stem passive participle (its Hebrew counterpart would obviously be **hānūk*), it is thus not productive here.¹² The combination of an untypical meaning and an unproductive nominal template does not strictly exclude a Hebrew origin, but it renders the possibility of a borrowing from another Semitic language reasonably likely.

While the older hypothesis of an Egyptian loan has not been met with universal agreement in scholarship,¹³ *hānīk* is still often connected with the word *ḥa-na-ku-u-ka*, likewise unparalleled and purportedly meaning “retainer” (in the sense of “follower, henchman,” here with a second-person masculine singular suffix), in a peripheral Akkadian letter from Tell Ta‘anak in Canaan, dating to the fifteenth century BC.¹⁴ However, even if one disregards the basic implausibility of an isolated and at best partial lexical parallel between a second-millennium Akkadian documentary text and a post-exilic Hebrew literary composition with not a single attestation from the thousand years in-between (the possibility of *yliḏē bēlō* “born in his house” being an explanatory gloss¹⁵ would still imply that such an extremely archaic lexeme was known and understood by the writer), the reading and interpretation of the word in the alleged source, Tell Ta‘anak tablet no. 6, line 8, is by no means assured. First, the presence of the initial *ḥa-* at the beginning of the line is quite possible but not entirely certain, because the left-hand margin is broken, as one can see on the pho-

ence rather than on professional training.

¹⁰ The evidence from the Samaritan Targum can be found in Tal 1980: 42–43 (main text and apparatus). The Targumic rendering thus does not necessarily presuppose an influence of the connection between *hnk* and *n'r* “youth” in Prov 22:6, as Aberbach and Grossfeld 1982: 88 note 21 maintained. Gen 14:14 is lacking in both the Genizah fragments of the Palestinian Targum and the Fragment Targum.

¹¹ E.g., Fleischer in Levy ²1924: 206; Gesenius ¹⁸1987–2012: 372, s.v.; cf. also Gzella 2018: 293.

¹² As Fox 2003: 192–93 rightly observed.

¹³ Proposed, in the footsteps of William Foxwell Albright, by Lambdin 1953: 150 and accepted by, among others, Speiser 1963: 104 and Schatz 1972: 255, but rejected by Muchiki 1990: 327–28, who, very reasonably, analyzed it as a *qaṭīl* noun derived from the Semitic root *hnk* “train, dedicate.”

¹⁴ So, e.g., König ^{6/7}1936: 116; Schatz 1972: 255; Dommershausen 1982: 22; Koehler and Baumgartner 1994–1999: 333, s.v.; Soggin 1997: 226; Granerød 2010 44; and, albeit with a question mark, Gesenius ¹⁸1987–2012: 372, s.v. Apparently, this understanding was also endorsed by von Rad ¹²1987: 137, who translated the word with “Gefolgsleute” and explained it as “a Canaanite (Egyptian) technical term for military allies.” The text of the Akkadian tablet is conveniently accessible in Horowitz, Oshima, and Sanders 2018: 146–47 (with bibliography; they, too, ultimately derive it from Egyptian). “Retainer” is also the gloss given by CAD VI: 76, s.v., where it is categorized as a West Semitic loan; von Soden 1965–1981 did not include the word, although, being the memory prodigy he was, he must have been aware of it. Westermann 1981: 236, on the other hand, identified the sense “initiated” according to the normal meaning of the root in Hebrew with the customary gloss “retainers” (“Gefolgsleute”) according to the context but referred to early second-millennium Egyptian execration texts for comparison, as did Schatz 1972: 255 before him, yet such a connection seems even more tenuous.

¹⁵ As already suggested by Gunkel ³1910: 283, who rejected an Akkadian connection of *hānīk* following a personal communication by Zimmern.

tograph.¹⁶ Second, if the conventional reading is accepted, the meaning “retainer” is still conjectural and generally informed by a comparison with Gen 14:14, but not established by independent evidence. And third, the underlying pattern is obviously different, because the cuneiform writing notes an *a*-vowel in the second syllable.

Thus, if the lexeme in question is indeed a native Semitic word, the spelling would rather point to a substantivized *qaṭal* adjective *ḥanak*-¹⁷ or, perhaps more likely, a *qaṭṭāl* substantive (a highly productive class that typically occurs for *nomina p̄rofessionis*) *ḥannāk*-¹⁸ than to a *qaṭīl* form as attested in Gen 14:14. Then again, *qaṭṭāl* (or, for that matter, *qaṭal*) and *qaṭīl* nouns generally do not act as each other’s synonyms across different Semitic languages, so both *ḥa-na-ku-* and *ḥānīk* invariably have to be treated as different words. As the root *ḥnk* does not occur elsewhere in Akkadian, it must, in any case, be a loan, hence the debated question of its origin (Egyptian or West Semitic?) adds another unknown factor. Cumulatively, these caveats should caution one against accepting any clear connection between both passages, because that would be a case of *obscurum per obscurius*. The reference to *ḥa-na-ku-u-ka* in discussions of Gen 14:14 must be taken with a large grain of salt or, even better, abandoned.

By contrast, the nineteenth-century commentaries on Genesis, which frequently refer to Arabic *ḥanīk* “experienced” or “tried and tested,” from the cognate verb *ḥanaka* “to experience, to make wise,” for comparison, seem to be closer to the mark.¹⁹ It is somewhat unfortunate that the modern reference works no longer include this pertinent etymological information in their lemma on *ḥānīk*, because it does fit the context of Gen 14:14 very nicely.²⁰ As is well known, a reasonable knowledge of Arabic belonged to the toolbox of all serious nineteenth-century Old Testament scholars, but it has since then been replaced by Akkadian, Egyptian, and the Syro-Palestinian languages – the latter are particularly relevant due to their linguistic, historical, and cultural proximity to the world of Ancient Israel – as the default point of comparison for unclear Hebrew lexemes. In addition, evidence from Arabic has been employed time and again by Biblicists in fanciful etymological speculation without a clear historical path of transmission, so some hesitation is not at all out of place when exegetes begin to wave their Arabic dictionaries in front of a textual or lexicographical difficulty.²¹

A related meaning of the root *ḥnk* that goes beyond its predominantly ceremonial use in Hebrew is not peculiar to Arabic, however, but also occurs in Aramaic, a language that has been in contact with Hebrew for centuries, and here may well lie the solution to the problem. Whereas the meaning “to dedicate” of the verb is very rare in Aramaic (its appearance in a non-Jewish inscription from Palmyra, PAT 1347:4, nonetheless shows that it was not borrowed from Hebrew),²² only the sense “to prepare, train” occurs, in the factitive stem, several times in the later literary languages Jewish Palestinian and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic.²³ Its presence in both dialect groups, that is, Western Aramaic and Eastern Aramaic, suggests a wider distribution in the language; it may thus simply be due to the documentary character of the surviving material composed in the older varieties that this particular use does not yet appear there. Furthermore, the pattern underlying Hebrew *ḥānīk* can easily be explained as an originally Aramaic passive participle, hence “trained.” Incidentally, the exact same Aramaic form, *ḥnykyw* “his servants,” occurs in Ms. A of the Samaritan Pentateuch to Lev 31:23, where the Hebrew reads *ʾeḥāw* “his brothers” instead. Admittedly, this may

¹⁶ See Horowitz, Oshima, and Sanders 2018: 238 (drawing on page 220).

¹⁷ According to Gesenius ¹⁸1987–2012: 372, s.v., following the analysis in CAD VI: 76, s.v. *ḥanaku*.

¹⁸ Compare Sivan 1984: 223, s.v., who, like CAD VI: 76, assumed a Canaanite loan in Akkadian.

¹⁹ Tuch ²1871: 253; Spurrell 1887: 142; Dillmann ⁶1892: 241. See Wehr ¹⁸1985: 300 for the meaning of the Arabic root, with Fleischer’s additional notes in Levy ²1924: 206–7; on *ḥanīk* in particular, cf. also Freytag 1830: 473 (*Experientia edoctus et firmatus vir*) and especially Lane 1865: 659–60 (“rendered firm, or sound, in judgment, by means of experience”).

²⁰ It is not even acknowledged in the most comprehensive Hebrew dictionaries, Koehler and Baumgartner 1994–1999: 333, s.v., and Gesenius ¹⁸1987–2012: 372, s.v. In accordance with older scholarship, however, Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906: 335, still derived *ḥānīk* from the verb *ḥnk*, to which they assigned the primary meaning “to train,” as in Arabic – hence their gloss “trained, tried, experienced” – and the usual sense “to dedicate” only as a secondary one.

²¹ Compare Gzella 2019 for some observations on the underlying method and its place in the history of scholarship.

²² The older evidence has been surveyed by Gzella 2018.

²³ See the attestations in Sokoloff ³2017: 215 and Sokoloff ²2020: 425.

be an assimilation to the very similar expression in Gen 14:14 according to the Hebrew and part of the Samaritan Targumic manuscripts rather than independent evidence, even though Ms. A translates *h^anīkāw* with *lymyw* “his servants” there. Hence the possibility of a genuine lexeme in Samaritan Aramaic, which belongs to the Western branch and reflects the use of Aramaic in Palestine, cannot be excluded either.²⁴

Despite its obviousness, the suggestion that *hānīk* with the meaning “trained” or “tried” in Gen 14:14 is an Aramaic borrowing in Biblical Hebrew seems to be new. It adequately accounts for the differences in use of the underlying root *hnk* in both languages (mostly “to dedicate” in Biblical Hebrew and “to prepare, train” in Aramaic at large), for the specific noun pattern (which is unproductive in Hebrew but, as a passive participle, highly productive in Aramaic), and for its occurrence in a text whose received form is, on grounds of its contents, by now practically universally acknowledged as post-exilic. It was written at a time when Aramaic influence on Hebrew at all levels increased markedly due to a shift in the linguistic situation, oral and written alike, that was caused by the installation of Aramaic as the official Achaemenid administrative code on the one hand and by the spread of Aramaic vernaculars following demographic developments after the Babylonian Exile on the other.²⁵

The observation that the factitive stem of the verb with the meaning “to accustom,” which is evidently related to the basic-stem nuance “to teach,” only occurs in post-Biblical Hebrew provides additional support for the hypothesis of an Aramaic origin of its non-ceremonial use.²⁶ In Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic, moreover, the basic-stem feminine passive participle *h^anīkā* is regularly attested with the previously unknown sense “nickname” (the ordinary Semitic root for “to use as a nickname” is *knī*, a verb common in Hebrew and Aramaic as well), presumably because a nickname is an appellation one has to get accustomed to.²⁷ This particular semantic development can also explain why the Aramaic Targumic tradition quite consistently renders *hānīk* in Gen 14:14 with a different lexeme, that is, *olēm* “boy, servant,” excepting occurrences in manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum (see above): After the meaning of the feminine passive participle of *hnk* had shifted to “nickname” in Jewish – but not Samaritan – usage at some point in the Rabbinic period, another translation equivalent had to be found for the purpose of disambiguation. The rendering in the Syriac Bible may subsequently have been influenced by the Targumic tradition, as happens often.

As a corollary, an Aramaic origin would better account for the contextually superior reading *wydq* “and he mustered” in the same verse, which receives strong support from the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate, instead of MT’s unidiomatic *wyrq* “and he emptied,” for *dūq* “to observe” is a common Aramaic verb that does not occur elsewhere in Ancient Hebrew;²⁸ the military sense “to inspect, examine” is well-attested in Syriac in particular.²⁹ Since *d* and *r* are more likely to be confused in square script than in Samaritan letters (which bear greater resemblance to Paleo-Hebrew), this is presumably a textual variant that first arose outside the Samaritan tradition. The appearance of two Aramaisms next to each other in a sentence of narrative prose further corroborates the late date of the episode of Abraham’s assault.

An analogous explanation may, finally, account for the only other non-ceremonial use of *hnk* in Ancient Hebrew in a piece of educational advice in the Book of Proverbs:

Train up (*h^anoḵ*) a youth according to his way: even when he grows old, he will not deviate from it (Prov 22:6).

The context obviously requires a verb “to train” here. Unfortunately, the situation in the ancient versions is obscured by textual difficulties: verse 6 is lacking in most manuscripts of the Septuagint, whereas other witnesses copy a rendering that has the noun *ἐγκαίνισμός* “inauguration,” following Theodotion, or the verb *ἐγκαίνισον* “inaugurate!” as in the Syro-Hexapla, for *h^anoḵ* and thereby schematically reproduce the most

²⁴ Tal 1980: 127 (Lev 31:23) and 43 (Gen 14:14). On the position of Samaritan Aramaic in the context of Palestinian Aramaic in general, cf. also Gzella 2020: 50–51 (with further bibliography).

²⁵ See Gzella 2020: 28–38.

²⁶ Compare the evidence in Levy ²1924: 81.

²⁷ See Levy ²1924: 82; cf. Sokoloff ²2020: 425.

²⁸ The likely presence of this second Aramaism often goes unmentioned in scholarly discussions of the passage, but it was already correctly pointed out by Holzinger 1898: 144 (“דוק ist aram.”).

²⁹ A number of relevant citations can be found in Sokoloff 2009: 286.

frequent sense of *ḥnk* in Hebrew. The Vulgate curiously has *proverbium est* at the beginning and thus apparently omits *ḥ^anoḵ* altogether, but it translates the rest of the verse quite literally. The Syriac, however, has the Aramaic cognate of the Hebrew verb (even though it employs a wholly different word in Gen 14:14, see above).³⁰

While it is not impossible to derive this meaning from “to inaugurate” via “to initiate someone into a position,” the difference between the employ of the verb in this educational context (with persons) as opposed to all other attestations in Ancient Hebrew (with buildings) and its accordance with Rabbinic Hebrew and Jewish literary Aramaic is remarkable.³¹ In terms of diachronic typology, the use of *ḥnk* for “to train up” in Hebrew is thus late. Moreover, it only occurs in material from phases of Hebrew that clearly reflect the influence of Aramaic at all linguistic levels, i.e., the noun *ḥānīk* in the indisputably post-exilic, presumably even Hellenistic, chapter 14 of Genesis and the verb in post-biblical literature. Proverbs, too, bears the mark of Achaemenid or Hellenistic reworkings that once in a while introduced Aramaic vocabulary.³² Another example is the adjective *māhīr* “competent,” employed as a scribal attribute in 22:29, in the vicinity of Prov 22:6.³³

In conclusion, many redaction-critical arguments marshaled during the past hundred years suggest that Genesis 14 is a composition of the late Achaemenid or Hellenistic period. A hitherto neglected linguistic piece of evidence is the origin of the noun *ḥānīk* in Gen 14:14, which means “trained man” and refers to a group of particularly qualified military specialists, for which one would normally use *gibbōrē ḥayil* or, less frequently, *gibbōrē milḥāmā* in Hebrew. It is derived from the verb *ḥnk* in the sense of “to train up,” a meaning to be distinguished – despite the possibility of a common origin – from its sense “to inaugurate” elsewhere in Ancient Hebrew and presumably influenced by the use of this root in Aramaic as a result of post-exilic language contact. (Aramaic here agrees with the nuance of the same root in Arabic, to which older commentators of Genesis regularly and, in terms of semantics, rightly referred.) A similar explanation may apply to the imperative *ḥ^anoḵ* “train up!” in Prov 22:6. On the contrary, the unknown word *ḥanak-* or *ḥannāk-* in the fifteenth-century Akkadian letter Tell Ta’anak 6:8, often adduced as a parallel by dictionaries and commentaries since the early twentieth century until today, is unlikely to be directly related to either passage. Even though that term may still derive from the same root, the chronological distance is simply too great for any meaningful direct comparison.

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³⁰ See the concise note in Baumgartner 1890: 198.

³¹ As has already been observed by Hitzig 1858: 220, who explicitly compared it to *ḥānīk*, after Schleusner 1829: 84 (top of the left-hand column) had made a remark along similar lines (“*aluit, educavit*”); cf. also Fox 2009: 698. Plöger 1984: 252 (correct the typographic error תגך to תגך) seems to presuppose the sense “to inaugurate” here, but his explanation remains extremely vague (“die Verwendung des Wortes will hier die Bedeutung der Erziehung betonen”). By contrast, Toy 1904: 420, like many nineteenth-century commentators of Gen 14:14, perceptively referred to the meaning of the Arabic cognate.

³² See Schipper 2019: 4 note 21 and 39–40 for further recent bibliography on a late Achaemenid or early Hellenistic final redaction of Proverbs.

³³ This adjective demonstrably derives from Aramaic scribal ethics and otherwise only occurs in clear post-exilic compositions or additions (Ezr 7:6, Isa 16:5; Ps 45:2), see Gzella 2022.

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