

SEMANTICS OF ANCIENT HEBREW DATABASE PROJECT

Minutes of the Meeting of the SAHD Executive Committee and Co-Workers held on
Friday 6 August 2010 in the University of Helsinki

Present: Committee: G.I. Davies (Cambridge), H.G.M. Williamson (Oxford,
Secretary).

Co-Workers: C. Masi (Florence), J. Stökl (Oxford)

Apologies: J.K. Aitken (Cambridge), M. Amadasi (Rome), H. Gzella (Leiden), J.
Hartley (Azusa), A. Lemaire (Paris), M. Marrazza (Florence), K. Spawn (Simpson
University), F. Zannella (Bonn), I. Zatelli (Florence).

In the absence of Professor Gzella, Professor Davies took the chair.

It was noted that there had been an excellent session devoted to the project at the
IOSOT a few days previously. Four papers had been delivered and there was a
reasonable audience. Unfortunately M. Marrazza had withdrawn for personal
reasons, and Dr Aitken had been obliged to leave early following the death of his
father. Those present expressed their condolences. Members of the Dutch Bible
Society had been present: see further under Leiden below.

1. Minutes of the last meeting (Florence 2010)

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

2. Matters arising and not taken elsewhere

(a) *Archive* [Florence 2]. It had been agreed that Dr Reimer and Professor Williamson
would weed and amalgamate the materials they held suitable for retention.
Professor Gzella then agreed to the further proposal that they should be deposited in
Leiden thereafter. No progress had been made with this over the past year.

ACTION: HG, DR and HGMW

(b) Professor Davies reported that Professor M. Kartveit (Stavanger) had shown
interest in the project and that he had a doctoral student whose work was making
use of SAHD's methods; he might eventually be able to contribute to the project.

3. Chairman's report

Professor Gzella had written to say that he had taken forward the suggestion that A.
Gianto might be involved in the project. He was interested in principle and it was
agreed that he would be a fine addition to the team [Florence 3 (f) (ii)]. The
committee were anxious that he should be included within the Rome centre, so that

Professor Amadasi should be kept fully in the picture. Other inquiries through the year had been more informal.

ACTION: HG

4. Reports from centres

(a) *Cambridge*. The 'deliverance' group of lexemes was in its final stages of preparation. *Prq* and the introductory overview had recently been completed. Some entries still have gaps, for which the help of a research assistant would be required. Funding would need to be sought, and this will clearly delay progress a little. Completion is expected in 2011, however, and the results in this instance will be put on the website rather than being printed in hard copy. There was no further progress to report on work on the *tsedeq* group by Mr C. Thomson, but he and C. Masi had been in fruitful discussion.

(b) *Florence*. Professor Zatelli had written to say that her students were progressing well with their research and she hoped that in the coming year entries might be completed on *semel* (A. Pecchioli), *hlh* and *shlm* (M. Marrazza), and *tsaddiq* and *rasha'* (C. Masi). It was agreed that it would be valuable to have C. Masi's paper to the IOSOT considered for mounting on the website. He should seek approval first from Professor Gzella and then establish a SAHD site in Florence to which a link would be established by Dr Reimer with the main SAHD site. The same might apply to the entries which Professor Davies had translated into English and which were awaiting editorial approval.

ACTION: CM, HG

(c) *Oxford*. Dr Stökl was nearing the end of his work to prepare four entries for the database on prophets. Again, these would then require editorial approval before being put on the Oxford site.

ACTION: JS

(d) *Leiden*. (i) Professor Gzella was continuing his work on *ThWQ* and *TDOT IX*. (ii) It is now considered unlikely that Mr W. Dekker will be able to produce material for the database [Florence 3 d (ii)]. (iii) A new Leiden PhD student (Peter Juhás) might be able eventually to write in the field of politeness/impoliteness. (iv) Two scholars associated with the Dutch Bible Society had attended the IOSOT meeting and drew attention to their work, including a recent database of some sort concerned with realia. Although SAHD colleagues had looked at similar material previously it was agreed that this new project might be of greater direct interest and agreed to ask Professor Gzella to make contact with these colleagues in Holland.

ACTION: HG

(e) *(Harvard) Austin*. Following the Florence meeting the secretary had received clarification that Harvard was no longer involved in the project in any way. Professors Huehnergard and Hackett had recently moved to new positions at the University of Austin in Texas and would be interested to be kept in touch with developments as they hoped to return to preparing a revision of BDB.

(f) *Rome*. (i) Professor Amadasi was again encouraged to request F. Scagliarini to submit material for her entry on *'abbir* even if it was not finally complete so that the work she had undertaken would not be lost. (ii) On possible participation by A.Gianto, see item 3 above.

ACTION: MGA, HG

(g) *Azusa*. Professor Hartley had written to say that his volume on colour terms was about to be printed. He had left open the possibility of other contributions, but not in the near future [Florence 3 (g)].

(h) *Edinburgh*. See 5 below.

ACTION: DR

(i) *Paris*. Professor Lemaire had mentioned orally that there was no progress to report.

(j) *Sydney*. Professor Young had successfully contacted Dr Jordan [see Florence 3 (j)] and had forwarded copies of all his work to the secretary. Some entries appeared to be reasonably complete while others were clearly not in a position to be published. They had been sent to the editor for consideration, and this was awaited before deciding how to proceed.

ACTION: HG

(k) *Israel*. The secretary had heard back from Dr Talshir [Florence 3 (k)] that there was continuing interest in participation in the project, but not for a couple of years while other commitments were being met. He had been at the IOSOT session, but the secretary had not had the opportunity to follow this up in conversation. He would write again to maintain close contact.

ACTION: HGMW

(l) *Dr Kevin Spawn* apologized that he had not made any progress with the preposition *kaph* this past year.

(m) *Dr Zecharias Kötze*. The secretary had tried without success to contact Dr Kötze [Florence 3 (m)]; emails were returned and he was unable to establish his new address. It was agreed that his name should be deleted from the project for now, although of course he could always be reinstated if he came forward with work for consideration.

(n) *Bonn*. There was no further news to report.

5. Website and Database

Dr Reimer had submitted a full report on the past and current position regarding the website and database, and this is appended to these Minutes for reference.

In discussion it was noted that no progress had been made with seeking funding for somebody who might be employed for a year to prepare all the material so far completed into a fully searchable database and related tasks [Florence 4 (c)]. It was agreed that this should now become an urgent priority.

ACTION: GID, HGMW, DR

6. Next meeting

This would be in Cambridge if the meeting were in June or September or in Oxford if it were in July when it could be on the day when the Society for Old Testament Study begins (18 July). Colleagues would then be able to attend SOTS as guests if they so wished. The secretary would ascertain the most favoured date from the Chairman and others and then circulate everyone as soon as possible.

ACTION: HGMW

Secretary's note: following some informal discussion, it has been decided that the meeting will be in Oxford on the afternoon of Monday 18 July 2011

SAHD – Technical Notes for Helsinki

Legacy

- Since the Project's inception in the early 1990s, SAHD project co-workers have **produced** a considerable number of articles on a variety of lexemes. Some of this has been published in hard-copy (see especially the items listed on the online bibliography at the project website [<http://bit.ly/SAHDProject>]).
- It is the intention of the Project to make this material **available** online. As yet, only a very small proportion is available, the constraints facing us being of two main types: technical and financial. These are related.
- The main **technical** obstacle is that the format of the published material makes it impossible (so far as we know) to automate export to a web-friendly version.
- It would be possible to do this manually, but the time involved would be very high, thus the need for **financial** support for this activity.

Database

- SAHD co-workers first worked with a **proprietary** database system. However, it was found cumbersome to use, and in practice articles tended to be produced in a variety of word-processing platforms.
- It was the intention from inception, however, that the articles produced in an agreed structure would eventually be structured in **SGML** (Standard Generalized Markup Language).
- The (now) better known derivative of SGML, **XML** (eXtensible Markup Language) now provides a *de facto* standard for markup of structured documents. SAHD's structured articles now have an XML document definition.
- This will make possible not only plain text searching of SAHD materials, but ultimately also will provide the framework (via **XSLT**, or eXtensible Stylesheet Language Transformations, perhaps most easily understood as a scripting language for querying XML databases) for extracting and re-mixing certain kinds of information contained in individual lexeme articles.

Website

- At present, only '**static page**' websites exist, with a central 'portal' (Edinburgh) as well as local repositories (e.g., Oxford, Cambridge).
- The intention is to mount all materials in an XML-based **content management system** (CMS), although at present the best means for doing this eludes us. Trials have been run in local systems, however, and we hope to make progress on this front in the near future.
- One of the dramatic 'technical' developments (alongside many others!) during the brief lifetime of the project has been the emergence of '**Web 2.0**', a term introduced by Tim O'Reilly to capture the 'social networking' aspect

online life. People browsing the web no longer expect only to find information which they passively consume, but rather visitors to sites actively engage with material *via* blog comments, wikis, shared contributed content,¹ 'friendship' sites,² etc.

In recent meetings, SAHD has begun to consider the impact of this development on its own online activities, especially in terms of interacting with and enhancing its online offerings. This naturally has the potential to widen participation in an unpredictable way, so it requires careful thought.

Some of SAHD's online goals remain aspirational at the moment. However, with ever more accessible tools, and the stabilization and dispersal of those only in their infancy when the project began (especially Unicode, now a widely understood and used standard), these hopes draw ever closer to being realized.

David Reimer
10 July 2010

¹ E.g., deli.cio.us for 'social bookmarks', Flickr for photo sharing, etc.

² Think 'Facebook'!