

Donkey Domain: Zechariah 9:9 and Lexical Semantics

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Zechariah 9:9 is a well-known prophetic text that recalls Jacob's blessing to Judah in Gen 49:11.¹ It is also quoted in two of the NT Gospels as finding its messianic fulfillment in Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem (see Matt 21:5; John 12:15; cf. Mark 11:1–8; Luke 19:28–36).² Additionally, this text employs an unusual clustering of donkey terms, each of them having a unique semantic range. These terms are part of a lexical field that has not been the subject of analysis in any previous publication to date. Such neglect most likely explains why the semantic nuances of Zech 9:9 are often missed or even distorted in the English biblical translations. In order properly to understand and translate Zech 9:9, one must examine the whole lexical field for terms referring to donkeys.

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¹ For discussion of the intertextual relationship between these two passages, see Iain M. Duguid, "Messianic Themes in Zechariah 9–14," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite et al.; Tyndale House Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 267–68; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 501–2; David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 57; idem, "Zechariah 9–14: Methodological Reflections," in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9–14* (ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd with a major contribution by Rex Mason; JSOTSup 370; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 217–18.

² For helpful analyses, see Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (8th corrected ed.; Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1987), 234–36 (#269); G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 63–64, 206, 354–55, 472–74; Duguid, "Messianic Themes," 277; cf. Walter Bauer, "The 'Colt' of Palm Sunday (der Palmesel)," *JBL* 72 (1953): 220–29.

Biblical Hebrew employs three terms for the domestic donkey (*Equus asinus*)—חמור (*hāmôr*), אתון (*ātôn*), and עיר (*ayir*), and all of these occur in Zech 9:9. The donkey hybrid, however, is expressed in the Bible by only one term—פרדה/פרד (*pered/pirdâ*). The most frequent of these lexemes is חמור (96x); after that follows אתון (34x), פרדה/פרד (18x) and עיר (8x).³ The two biblical terms for the onager or wild/half ass (ערוד [*ārôd*] and פרא [*pereʿ*]) are not treated in the present study since they designate a distinct species of equid (i.e., *Equus hemionus*).⁴

A survey of most English translations of Zech 9:9 reveals that the term חמור is translated as “donkey/ass,” עיר is translated as “colt,” and בן־אתונות (*ben-ātônôt*) is translated as “foal of an ass/donkey” (see ASV, English Standard Version [ESV], GNB, Holman Christian Standard Bible [HCSB], KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, Today’s New International Version [TNIV]).⁵ While the rendering of חמור as the generic “ass/donkey” is certainly correct, it is suggested in the following study that the rendering of עיר as “colt” (or “foal”; cf. NEB) is incorrect and that the term has nothing to do with the youngness of the animal. Furthermore, the phrase בן־אתונות is not meant to carry any nuance of youngness but, rather, defines the animal as the “offspring” of a female donkey (the significance of which will be identified below).

Therefore, the string of donkey terms in Zech 9:9 moves from the general to the specific—the second and third terms each add new information to the preceding term. To demonstrate this, it is necessary to describe the semantic range of each donkey term based on its usage in the entire Hebrew Bible. The terms are examined in alphabetical order below. By way of summary, the terms are also compared and contrasted in order to sharpen the semantic distinctions and to appreciate the degree of semantic overlap between them.

³ The frequencies are reckoned by Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1993), 142, 378, 862, 959. Note that the actual frequency for פרדה/פרד is probably 17x (due to a text-critical problem with the occurrence in Neh 7:68).

⁴ For further reference on these terms, see Leonid Kogan, “Animal Names in Biblical Hebrew: An Etymological Overview,” in *Babel und Bibel 3* (ed. Leonid Kogan et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 280; Kenneth C. Way, “The Ceremonial and Symbolic Significance of Donkeys in the Biblical World” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 2006), 92, 117, 256.

⁵ Some additional translations (e.g., CEV, New Century Version [NCV], New Living Translation [NLT], The Message) combine the second and third donkey terms into one English phrase, such as “colt of a donkey.” The best English translation of Zech 9:9 can be found in the NJPS: “humble, riding on an ass, on a donkey foaled by a she-ass.” While this translation is not incorrect, it is still imprecise with regard to the nuances of the second and third terms (see below).

I. אֶתֹן (FEMALE DONKEY; “JENNY”)

The term אֶתֹן designates a female donkey and is best translated “jenny.”⁶ The gender of אֶתֹן is made explicit in Num 22:23–33, where אֶתֹן is the subject of thirteen verbs in the feminine singular form (e.g., וְתָאמַר [vv. 23, 25, 27, 33]; וְתָאמַר [vv. 28, 30]). The female gender of אֶתֹן is also implied in contexts where it is distinguished from either חֲמֹר (Gen 12:16; 45:23) or עֵיר (Gen 32:15 [MT 32:16]).

In addition, the אֶתֹן can serve as wealth/capital (Gen 12:16; 1 Chr 27:30; Job 1:3; 42:12), booty (Job 1:14–15), and tribute (Gen 32:15 [MT 32:16]). It can function as a beast of burden (Gen 45:23) and as a human transport (Num 22:21–33; Judg 5:10; 2 Kgs 4:22, 24). The אֶתֹן may also be associated with royalty (see Gen 49:10–11; Zech 9:9; cf. Judg 5:10; 1 Sam 9:3, 5, 20; 10:2, 14, 16; 1 Chr 27:30). Finally, there is an interesting technical use of אֶתֹן in the phrase “offspring of a jenny.”

The phrase “offspring of a jenny” occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 49:11; Zech 9:9) and three times in the extant Mari texts from the eighteenth century B.C.E. The Mari texts frequently refer to treaty making in terms of donkey dispatch (*ḥayaram qatālum*),⁷ and they occasionally employ the phrase *mār atānim* to specify the preferred animal for treaty ratification rituals (see A.1056:9–10; A.2226:17; ARM 2.37:11).⁸ In all these examples from Mari and the Bible, the phrase is

⁶ On אֶתֹן, see further AHw, 86 (*atānum*, “Eselin”); CAD A (1/2):481–83; DUL (= Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* [Handbook of Oriental Studies; Leiden: Brill, 2003]), 122; HALOT, 102; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 655 n. 18; Kogan, “Animal Names,” 269; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 88, 131; Martin Noth, “Old Testament Covenant-making in the Light of a Text from Mari,” in *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas [from *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*; Munich: Kaiser, 1957]; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 108–11; SED (= Alexander Militarev and Leonid Kogan, *Semitic Etymological Dictionary* [2 vols.; Münster: Ugarit, 2000, 2005]), 2:29 (no. 19); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 362, 366; Way, “Donkeys,” 99–100, 104–6, 201–3.

⁷ For a thorough discussion of these references, see Way, “Donkeys,” 4–5, 98–102.

⁸ For an analysis of the three extant texts, see Dominique Charpin, “Un Souverain éphémère en Ida-Maraš: Išme-Addu d’Ašnakkum,” in *Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires* (8 vols.; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1982–97), 7:182–86; J.-M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari* (3 vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1997–2000), 1:443–47; Abraham Malamat, “A Note on the Ritual of Treaty Making in Mari and the Bible,” in idem, *Mari and the Bible* (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 168–69 (originally published in *IEJ* 45 [1995]: 226–29); Way, “Donkeys,” 98–106.

ARM 2.37 is translated as follows: “To my lord speak: thus Ibal-El, your servant. The tablet of Ibal-Addu from Ašlakka arrived; and to Ašlakka I went. In order to ‘kill a jackass’ between the Haneans and Idamaraš, a puppy and a goat they brought. But out of respect for my lord, a puppy

employed as a clarification of the term עֵיר (= *hayarum* in Amorite/Mari texts). Since עֵיר may be used of both a male donkey and a male hybrid (see below), it is presumably necessary to qualify עֵיר as either the “offspring of an אֶתוֹן” (i.e., a donkey) or the “offspring of a סוּסָה (*sūsā*)” (i.e., a mule).⁹ When עֵיר is qualified as the “offspring of an אֶתוֹן,” the עֵיר takes on the narrower sense of a “purebred male donkey.”¹⁰

In the biblical corpus, the first occurrence of the phrase “offspring of a jenny” is in Jacob’s blessing of Judah (Gen 49:8–12). Verse 11 states:¹¹

אֶסְרִי לִגְפֵן עֵירָה [עֵירוֹ] וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹו

He tethers his jackass to the vine, his purebred to the choice vine.

The second occurrence of the phrase is in Zechariah’s description of Zion’s king. Zech 9:9 states:¹²

עֲנִי וּרְכַב עַל־חֲמֹור וְעַל־עֵיר בֶּן־אֶתְנֹות

... humble¹³ and riding on a donkey, on a purebred jackass.

In this verse the terminology moves from the general phrase “on a donkey” (עַל־חֲמֹור) to the more specific phrase “on a purebred jackass” (וְעַל־עֵיר בֶּן־אֶתְנֹות). The copulative *wāw* is therefore best interpreted as serving an explanatory function (“namely”).¹⁴

and a goat I would not allow. A [ja]ckass—the offspring of a jenny—I caused to be killed. Peace between the Haneans and Idamaras I established” (Way, “Donkeys,” 100). My literal rendering, “A [ja]ckass—the offspring of a jenny,” expresses [ha]-a-ra-am dumu a-ta-ni-im (line 11).

⁹ Although it must be cautioned that the phrase “offspring of a mare (*sūsā*)” is not actually found in any extant text to date.

¹⁰ This observation was first made by Noth (“Covenant-making,” 111).

¹¹ On Gen 49:11, see further Hamilton, *Genesis*, 655–56, 662; Speiser, *Genesis*, 362, 366; Way, “Donkeys,” 67, 71, 105, 202, 213. On the unusual forms אֶסְרִי and בְּנֵי, see GKC §90 l–m; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 655–56 (nn. 14, 18); *IBHS*, 127–28 (§8.2e); Joüon §93m–n; William L. Moran, “The Hebrew Language in Its Northwest Semitic Background,” in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (ed. G. Ernest Wright; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 67, 70.

¹² On Zech 9:9, see further *HALOT*, 102; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah* 9–14, 88, 127–31, 169–73; Noth, “Covenant-making,” 111; Way, “Donkeys,” 72, 105, 110, 202–3. On the use of the plural form אֶתְנֹות, see GKC §124o; *IBHS*, 122 (§7.4.3a); cf. Ugaritic *atnt* in *KTU* 1.4 IV:7, 12 (see Way, “Donkeys,” 67 n. 133).

¹³ Note that “humble” is a royal quality that is also used to describe Moses and the Aramean king Zakkur (cf. Num 12:3; *KAI* #202:2). The word designates a person who has a subservient and receptive posture toward his deity (cf. Ps 22:26 [MT 22:27]; Zeph 2:3). For a helpful discussion, see Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah* 9–14, 127–28.

¹⁴ See GKC §154a. Thus, there is only *one* donkey mentioned in the Hebrew text (cf. LXX and Matt 21:2, 7).

II. חמור (“Ass/DONKEY”)

חמור is the general term for donkey, but it does not seem to include hybrids.¹⁵ In fact, there are no cases in Biblical Hebrew (or even in the cognate languages) where the term חמור unambiguously designates/includes hybrids. It is possible that the general category חמורים includes hybrids when it is listed alongside of סוסים (without any mention of פרידים; see Gen 47:17; Exod 9:3; 2 Kgs 7:7), but this does not constitute unambiguous evidence. It is also possible to argue that חמור in Zech 9:9 could include hybrids, but again, such an interpretation is not required by the context.

חמור is employed when referring to large numbers of donkeys of mixed gender (see Gen 24:35; 30:43; 34:28; 36:24; 47:17; Exod 9:3; Num 31:28, 30, 34, 39, 45; Josh 7:24; Judg 6:4; 1 Sam 27:9; 2 Kgs 7:7, 10; 1 Chr 5:21; 12:40 [MT 12:41]; Ezra 2:67; Neh 7:68; Isa 32:20; Zech 14:15). חמור is generally not gender specific. For example, in Genesis 32 Jacob initially describes himself as having חמורים (Gen 32:5 [MT 32:6]), but later it is said that Jacob gives אתונות and עירים to his brother (Gen 32:15 [MT 32:16]). Likewise, Abraham receives both male and female donkeys from Pharaoh (Gen 12:16); but later in the narrative Abraham's servant refers to Abraham's donkeys only as חמורים (Gen 24:35).

Although חמור is generally not gender specific, there are some exceptions. In contexts where חמור is distinguished from אתון (e.g., Gen 12:16; 45:23), חמור is clearly a male donkey/jackass. The חמור in Zech 9:9 is also qualified as a male (i.e., a “purebred jackass”), and the חמורים of Ezek 23:20 are explicitly described as having male genitalia. But there are two contexts in which חמור is clearly a female donkey/jenny. The first context refers to Mephibosheth's חמור, which is assigned a feminine singular pronominal suffix (2 Sam 19:26 [MT 19:27]):

אחבשה־לי החמור וארכב עליה

Let me tack up for myself the donkey so that I may ride on her.

¹⁵ On חמור, see further AHw, 375–76 (*imērum*, “Esel”); Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1998), 90, 127 n. 22; CAD I–J, 7:110–15; *DUL*, 363–64; *HALOT*, 327, 330–31; Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Man's Other Best Friend”: The Interaction of Equids and Man in Daily Life in Iron Age II Palestine as Seen in Texts, Artifacts, and Images,” *UF* 35 (2003): 261–64; Kogan, “Animal Names,” 261, 269; Dennis Pardee, *Les textes rituels* (Ras Shamra-Ougarit 12; Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 2000), 131 n. 166, 465; *SED* 2:137–39 (no. 98); Way, “Donkeys,” 56–58, 63–64, 72–75, 77–78, 82–83, 89–92, 203–5. Note also an uncertain syllabic spelling of *hmr* in a Late Egyptian/Hieratic ostrakon; see HWBDA (= Rainer Hannig, *Die Sprache der Pharaonen: Großes Handwörterbuch Deutsch–Ägyptisch [2800–950 v.Chr.]* [Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2000]), 379; James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 227 (no. 312); *SED* 2:137.

The second context indicates that a חמור has the capacity to give birth (Exod 13:13; cf. Exod 34:20):

ובל־פטר חמר תפדה בשה

But the first issue of every donkey you shall redeem with a sheep/goat . . .

In other contexts where חמור refers to a single donkey (e.g., Gen 22:3, 5; Exod 4:20; 20:17; 23:12; Deut 5:14, 21; Josh 15:18; Judg 1:14; 15:15, 16; 19:28; 1 Sam 25:20, 23, 42; 2 Sam 17:23; 1 Kgs 13:13, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29), the gender is ambiguous.

III. עֵיר (MALE EQUID, “STALLION/JACK”)

There are two important points that must be made here regarding the term עֵיר,¹⁶ and both of these were initially suggested by Martin Noth.¹⁷ First, עֵיר is used in the Bible to designate a male animal. Note how the term עֵיר is contrasted with the term אתון in a list enumerating Jacob's tribute to Esau (Gen 32:15 [MT 32:16]):

פרות ארבעים ופרים עשרה אתנת עשרים ועירים עשרה

. . . forty cows and ten bulls, twenty jennies and ten jackasses.

The male gender of עֵיר is also indicated by the use of *bēn* (rather than *bat*) in the phrase “offspring of a jenny” (Gen 49:11; Zech 9:9; see above).

Second, it is possible that the semantic range of עֵיר is broad enough to include hybrids. Since the עֵיר is occasionally qualified as a purebred donkey (i.e., “the offspring of a jenny” [Gen 49:11; Zech 9:9; see above]) rather than as a hybrid (i.e., the offspring of a סוסה, a mule [cf. פֶּרֶד; see below]), one deduces that the עֵיר may des-

¹⁶ On עֵיר, see further *AHW*, 328; *CAD H*, 6:118; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 253, 255–56, 266; *DUL*, 178; *HALOT*, 822; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 196, 198–99; Klingbeil, “Man's Other Best Friend,” 261, 263; Kogan, “Animal Names,” 259, 269; Michael S. Moore and Michael L. Brown, “עֵיר,” *NIDOTTE* 3:399 (#6555); Noth, “Covenant-making,” 109–11; Pardee, *Les textes rituels*, 131–32; Marvin H. Pope, *Job: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 15; 3rd ed.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 83, 86; *SED* 2:69–71 (no. 50); Speiser, *Genesis*, 253, 366; Way, “Donkeys,” 98–102, 104–6, 206–8.

¹⁷ See Noth, “Covenant-making,” 110, 111; see also *AHW*, 328 (*h̄arum*, “Eselhengst”); *DUL*, 178; *HALOT*, 822; Klingbeil, “Man's Other Best Friend,” 261, 263; Moore and Brown, “עֵיר,” 399; Pardee, *Les textes rituels*, 131 n. 165; Pope, *Job*, 86; Speiser, *Genesis*, 253, 366. It is interesting that no feminine form of this word is attested in Semitic languages; however, in Egyptian the cognate term can be masculine or feminine (ʿ3 and ʿ3t respectively); see *ÄW* (= Rainer Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch I: Altes Reich und Erste Zwischenzeit* [Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2003]), 259; *HWBDÄ*, 379; *WÄS* 1:165.

ignite the purebred donkey as well as the hybrid (such as the עֵיר). It may therefore be prudent to use the general category “equid” when defining the term עֵיר.

In light of the above observations, it is evident that the עֵיר is a male equid. In the vast majority of cases, however, an identification with the domestic donkey is highly likely. In biblical literature, the עֵיר is employed as a human transport (Judg 10:4; 12:14; Zech 9:9), a beast of burden (Isa 30:6), and as a plough animal (Isa 30:24). It should be noted that the term עֵיר is never applied to a horse. It is possible that the term עֵיר is applied to the onager (פֶּרָא) in Job 11:12, but a more likely interpretation of this difficult passage contrasts the עֵיר and the פֶּרָא as follows:¹⁸

וַאִישׁ נָבוֹב יִלְבֵּב וְעֵיר פֶּרָא אָדָם יוֹלֵד

A stupid man gets understanding when an onager of the steppe is born a jackass.

It is also important to emphasize that an עֵיר is not a “foal” or a “colt.”¹⁹ There is no evidence from Biblical Hebrew or from comparative Semitics to suggest that עֵיר is a young animal. This erroneous interpretation is endorsed by most English Bible translations of Zech 9:9, and it seems to stem from (1) a misunderstanding of the phrase “offspring of a jenny” in Gen 49:11 and Zech 9:9 (see above), and (2) the Septuagint’s employment of the term πῶλος (“young animal”) for עֵיר in Gen 32:16; 49:11; Judg 10:4; 12:14; Zech 9:9.²⁰ The same problem also persists in translations of *ḥayarum*—the Amorite cognate of עֵיר—in the Mari texts.²¹

¹⁸ On Job 11:12, see further Clines, *Job 1–20*, 253, 255–56, 266; Hartley, *Book of Job*, 196, 198–99; Pope, *Job*, 83, 86. On translating פֶּרָא אָדָם as “onager of the steppe,” see Mitchell Dahood, “Zacharia 9,1, *ʿên ʾādām*,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 124; cf. Gen 16:12. In cuneiform onager is written *anše-edēn-na* (lit., “ass of the steppe”).

¹⁹ See esp. Noth, “Covenant-making,” 110; see also Clines, *Job 1–20*, 266; Pardee, *Les textes rituels*, 131 n. 165; Pope, *Job*, 86; Speiser, *Genesis*, 366; Way, “Donkeys,” 105–6, 207. Interestingly, there is no word for equine “foal” in Biblical Hebrew (see Kogan, “Animal Names,” 271, 312).

²⁰ The LXX has ἐπιβεβηκὼς ἐπὶ ὑποζύγιον καὶ πῶλον νέον in Zech 9:9. As a result of the LXX, all four Gospel writers employ πῶλος in the account of Jesus’ triumphal entry (Matt 21:2, 5, 7; Mark 11:2, 4, 5, 7; Luke 19:30, 33, 35; John 12:14–15). It is only in Matthew and John, which explicitly quote Zech 9:9, that the term ὄνος (“ass/donkey”) is introduced. On πῶλος, see further Bauer, “Colt,” 220–29.

²¹ Many scholars writing in French have rendered *ḥayarum*/עֵיר as *ânon* (“young donkey” or “donkey foal”); for bibliography, see Way, “Donkeys,” 105 n. 296), but Pardee correctly points out, “La traduction de *ʿr* par «âne» [i.e., “ass/donkey”] semble préférable à «ânon», car il ne s’agit pas du petit: d’après les textes mythologiques le *ʿr* sert de monture. . . . La traduction de *ʿr* en anglais par «foal» est hors de propos, car un «foal» ne sert pas de monture” (*Les textes rituels*, 131 n. 165). Pardee’s argument bolsters Noth’s assertion that *ḥayarum* “means an adult male ass, not an ass-foal” (“Covenant-making,” 110; see also pp. 108, 111).

IV. פֶּרֶד (HYBRID, PROBABLY “MULE”)

The term פֶּרֶד (fem. פֶּרְדָּה) designates a hybrid that is probably the mule (i.e., male donkey × female horse),²² but one cannot rule out the possibility that פֶּרֶד/פֶּרְדָּה could theoretically also designate the hinny/jennet (i.e., male horse × female donkey).²³ There is no basis for positing that פֶּרְדָּה designates the “hinny/jennet” while פֶּרֶד designates the “mule.”²⁴ Rather, the terms clearly designate the male and female of the same type of animal (cf. סוֹס and סוֹסָה for the stallion and mare of a horse respectively).

The פֶּרֶד is often paired with other transport animals—such as the horse (1 Kgs 10:25//2 Chr 9:24; 1 Kgs 18:5; Ezra 2:66//Neh 7:68; Ps 32:9; Isa 66:20; Ezek 27:14; Zech 14:15) and the camel (1 Chr 12:40 [MT 12:41]; Ezra 2:66–67//Neh 7:68; Isa 66:20; Zech 14:15), but its pairing with the donkey is the most instructive. When פֶּרֶד is distinguished from the donkey (see 1 Chr 12:40 [MT 12:41]; Ezra 2:66–67//Neh 7:68; Zech 14:15), the term used for donkey is always חֲמֹר and never עֵיר. This suggests that the semantic range of עֵיר may actually include the פֶּרֶד (see above).

Like the donkey, the פֶּרֶד is employed as both tribute (1 Kgs 10:25//2 Chr 9:24; cf. Isa 66:20; 1 Chr 12:40 [MT 12:41]) and a beast of burden (2 Kgs 5:17), and it is likewise characterized as lacking understanding (Ps 32:9). The פֶּרֶד was also the preferred mount for Israelite kings and princes during the tenth century B.C.E. (see 2 Sam 13:29; 18:9; 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 44; cf. 1 Kgs 18:5 [ninth century]); note especially the collocation “the royal she-mule” (פֶּרְדַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ) in 1 Kgs 1:38, 44.²⁵ The connection between mules and royalty is attested also for the kings of Mari in the eigh-

²² On פֶּרֶד, see further AHW, 855 (*perdum*, “ein Equide”); Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 108–11; Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power: A History of the Horse and the Donkey in Human Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42–51, 92, 94; CAD P, 12:394–95 (*pirdu*, “an equid”); DUL, 679 (*prd*); HALOT, 963; Kenneth A. Kitchen, “*Prd* > *Ptr* = ‘Mule’ in New Kingdom Egypt?” *Göttinger Miszellen* 13 (1974): 17–20 (Egyptian *ptr*?); Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Methods and Daily Life: Understanding the Use of Animals in Daily Life in a Multi-disciplinary Framework,” in *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Richard E. Averbeck et al.; Bethesda: CDL, 2003), 405, 411–27; idem, “Man’s Other Best Friend,” 261, 263, 265, 267, 268–70, 277; Kogan, “Animal Names,” 271; SED 2:235–36 (no. 177); Way, “Donkeys,” 109 n. 312, 208–9, 213 n. 29.

²³ For the scientific distinction between the mule and the hinny/jennet, see Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 108–9; Clutton-Brock, *Horse Power*, 44–45; Way, “Donkeys,” 109, 208, 256.

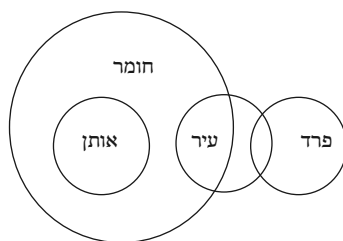
²⁴ This erroneous distinction appears to be assumed by Klingbeil, “Methods and Daily Life,” 416; idem, “Man’s Other Best Friend,” 261, 263, 267; cf. Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 108, 110.

²⁵ See Klingbeil, “Methods and Daily Life,” 416–17, 425–26; idem, “Man’s Other Best Friend,” 266–67.

teenth century B.C.E. (see ARM 6.76).²⁶ The prestigious appeal of the פֶּרֶד is presumably due to its rarity and resulting high price tag.²⁷

VI. SUMMARY

The lexical field of donkeys in Biblical Hebrew can now be summarized. חֹמֶר is the general term for donkey, which can be male, female, or an unspecified gender. אֹתוֹן always designates the female donkey/jenny. עֵיר always designates a male equid; it is usually the donkey/jackass but it may also designate the male hybrid. פֶּרֶד always designates the hybrid (probably a mule as opposed to a hinny/jennet). The lexical field can be diagrammed as follows:



The diagram is obviously not designed to show the percentages or proportions of semantic overlap (that would require an expanded lexical base). Rather, the diagram merely shows that the terms do overlap (where specified).

It is likely that אֹתוֹן is completely subsumed under חֹמֶר (except in contexts where חֹמֶר refers only to a male donkey, e.g., Gen 12:16; 45:23).²⁸ It is unlikely that עֵיר is completely subsumed under חֹמֶר because עֵיר seems to include male hybrids. It appears that the basic sense of עֵיר has to do with “maleness” rather than with species. Likewise, the same may be said regarding אֹתוֹן—it has to do more with “femaleness” than with species. Although not demonstrable from the corpus

²⁶ See Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, 2:484–88; Way, “Donkeys,” 107–10. In this royal context a contrast is made between the horse and the mule. Bahdi-Lim advises king Zimri-Lim to “honor his kingship” and “not ride on horses” but on “palanquin-and-mules [kūdanum].” Interestingly, Zech 9:9–10 is also set in a royal context (although dated much later) that contrasts two equids—the horse and the purebred jackass, rather than the horse and the mule (as in ARM 6.76).

²⁷ See Borowski, *Every Living Thing*, 109–10, 129 n. 52, 233; Klingbeil, “Methods and Daily Life,” 417–18; Way, “Donkeys,” 209 n. 21.

²⁸ Akkadian *atānu(m)* seems to denote “female equid” since it is used of both donkeys and horses (see CAD A, [1/2]:481–83); such is apparently not the case in both Amorite (i.e., in the Mari texts) and Biblical Hebrew, where the word is used only for the female donkey.

of Biblical Hebrew, it is possible that **אתון** may be used for female hybrids; and if that is the case, then **אתון** would overlap with the term **פרדה**.

All of these observations may inform the interpretation and translation of Zech 9:9. Instead of the very popular translations “donkey,” “colt,” and “foal of a donkey” (for **חומר**, **עיר**, and **בן־אתנות**), it is suggested that Zion’s king is riding on a donkey (**חומר**), but not just any donkey. He is riding on a jackass (**עיר**), but not just any jackass. He is riding on a purebred (**בן־אתנות**) jackass.

The purity of the royal mount may in fact be the primary focus of the prophecy in Zech 9:9. Just as the hybrid was inappropriate for Amorite treaty ratification rituals in the Mari texts, so the **פרד** is inappropriate in this eschatological passage, which employs covenant terminology (see Zech 9:11, “the blood of your covenant”).²⁹ Zion’s king comes not on the usual royal means of transportation associated with military conquest in Zech 9:10 (**רכב** and **סוס**). Rather, Zion’s king comes on a “purebred jackass,” which is a royal mount that is associated with peace (see Zech 9:10: “He will speak **שלום** [*šālôm*] to the nations”) rather than elitism or conquest.³⁰

²⁹ This phrase recalls Exod 24:8 (“the blood of the covenant”; see Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). For discussion of the intertextual relationships, see Beale and Carson, *Commentary*, 90–91, 229–32, 382–83, 736.

³⁰ All three of these equids (mules, horses, and donkeys) can function as royal mounts, but they have distinct symbolic nuances in biblical literature (see Way, “Donkeys,” 212–13 n. 28). For additional evidence that associates the donkey with royalty, see Gen 49:10–11; 1 Sam 25:20, 23, 42; 2 Sam 16:1–2; 19:26 [MT 19:27]; CAD I–J, 7:113 and the Hittite Tale of Zalpa (see Way, “Donkeys,” 96–97); see also Judg 5:10; 1 Samuel 9–10; 1 Chr 27:30. For the donkey as a mount for the deity in Ugaritic texts (viz., *KTU* 1.4 IV:1–19; 1.20 II:1–4; 1.22 II:20–24), see Way, “Donkeys,” 66–68, 70–72, 128.

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