Biblical books conclude in several ways. Sometimes the text employs specific terms that mean “conclusion.” An example of such a formula would be, “Thus far the words of Jeremiah” (Jer. 51:64), using the term צֶּדֶק הָדוֹת. Another style of ending relies on the events of the plot: the passing of a major character—Joseph at the end of Genesis, Moses in Deuteronomy, Joshua in the book which bears his name—winds down the story and simultaneously heralds the completion of the book. The completion of a chapter in history and the onset of a new one is a variation on this theme—the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy about seventy years marks the end of Chronicles. The first sort of ending is formulaic, the second is literary.

In several books we find both patterns of conclusion, the formulaic and the literary, combined. In such cases, the formula is grammatically adapted to the literary conclusion. An example of this would be, “And when you finish reading this scroll” (Jer. 51:63), which refers to the scroll Jeremiah gave to Seraiah (v. 61). Events of the story aside, the verb “finish” הלכת, though integrated into the syntax of the sentence, is a formulaic term of conclusion that signals the imminent end of the book of Jeremiah.

Indeed it is found as a formula, appended to the text rather than integrated into it, in Ps. 72:20: שֵׁפָּה הָרֵד בֵּן יִשָּׁי, “End of the prayers of David son of Jesse.” Returning to Jeremiah, the literary ending we have just seen is reinforced by another formula of conclusion in the next verse (64), צֶּדֶק הָדוֹת, already discussed above.

A second example of the formulaic combined with the literary, quite similar to the case of Jeremiah, is to be found in Daniel, who is told to “seal the book until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4). The book to be sealed was introduced at the beginning of the chapter (12:1), but no doubt the author had in mind “sealing up” the book of Daniel as well; no less than three words from the lexicon of ending appear in this sentence: מַעֲמִא, תָּהָמ, הָדוֹת. Here too, the end of the external book of Daniel is bound up with the events of the internal story, and the vocabulary of ending is worked into the conclusion.

1. Though there is yet another chapter in Jeremiah, Yair Hoffman, Jeremiah, Mikra Le-Yisra’el (Tel Aviv, 2001), 2.868 (Hebrew) notes about צֶּדֶק הָדוֹת: “The formula of conclusion (nushat ha-batima) . . . comes to say that all that follows, i.e., chapter 52, is not part of Jeremiah’s words.”
3. In Chronicles we also find the same root זֶדֶק הָדוֹת in מַעֲמִא (2 Chron. 36:22), making this a combined ending as well. In each case the root צֶּדֶק is grammatically suited to the context.
4. On sealed books, see Isa. 29:11–12.
The end of the Scroll of Esther has Mordecai and Esther addressing books (šēfārîm) or a letter (‘iggeret) to the Jews in the Persian Empire (Est. 9:20, 29). Although no formula of conclusion is associated with this writing, recording the events that had occurred seems, as in Jeremiah and Daniel, to allude to the impending end of the external Book of Esther.

Where do the formulaic words for “end” come from? It cannot have escaped the reader’s attention that the endings of Jeremiah, Daniel, and Esther are tied up with the business of writing books and scrolls. The preoccupation with writing may be related to extensive scribal activity at the time these books were composed, or to the fact that archival material (letters, legal documents) was included in them. The earlier records might have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic, and they may have been Jewish or gentile in origin. Possibly from such documents formulaic words were taken into the Bible, not only for conclusions but for beginnings and for transitions in the middle of compositions as well.

Thus not only endings combined set formulae with a literary setting of conclusion. So too in the case of opening formulae, e.g., bērēšît “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1), paralleling Akkadian ina šarrî. These terms have been worked into literary units whose content speaks of the beginning events of creation, but they simultaneously mark the opening of the narrative or the incantation, and in the case of Genesis, the opening of a book.

In an earlier article I compiled a list of endings in biblical books; in that study my treatment of more than forty examples was necessarily brief and schematic. I would like to concentrate here on phrases for “beginning” and “end” whose origins lay in different contexts, such as letters or legal documents. Originally formulaic, these words have been worked into their new literary settings in the Bible. Since the original lists, letters, legal documents, and epigrammatic collections from which they were taken had long been forgotten, these fixed terms were now understood as integral parts of the biblical text, often not without difficulty.

Stock expressions and formulaic vocabulary in Biblical and Near Eastern writings from the realms of law, letters, and literature have been the subject of books and

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5. But a formulaic term for “end,” מַסְכִּים, is found in 9:28.
6. Whether the act of writing alludes only to events in the plot or to the composition of the Book of Esther is debated by medieval exegetes. Rashi would have it that Mordecai’s writing is a reference to the actual Megillah: “And Mordecai wrote—this Megillah, as it is” (Est. 9:20). Ibn Ezra limits the letter Mordecai wrote to an event within the story: “Mordecai wrote that they observe Purim as joyous days next year and in all the successive years” (ibid.).
7. It is of interest to note that Deuteronomy 31 records the act of writing a book (sefer hattōrah) “until its completion,” using the term מַסְכִּים “completion” (31:24), and repeating this verb in the phrase מַסְכִּים לְﬠָסֹב in the final words of the chapter (31:30). As in the case of Esther, there is a double allusion here, both to the sefer or širāh that Moses wrote and to the Book of Deuteronomy.
8. Adele Berlin, The JPS Bible Commentary: Esther (Philadelphia, 2001), 88, has noted that the story has a “propensity for written documents.” Qohelet as well mentions books near its conclusion: “ The making of many books is without limit” (12:12).
monographs.  From Formula to Expression in Hebrew and Aramaic Texts


14. In other words, Fitzmyer found the word כענת misunderstood in the Bible. It is not clear who “wrongly linked” the term כענת to the preceding greeting. Perhaps we may compare the case of Isa. 8:23, where the word כענת has been taken by Michaelis and Tur-Sinai to belong to the first part of the verse, against the Masoretic cantillation signs; see J. A. Emerton, “Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah viii. 23,” JSS 14 (1969), 151–75; Y. Komlosh, “Ve’a’fu – Mu’a’af,” Bar-Ilan 4–5 (1967), 42–49 (Hebrew). Fitzmyer’s particular consternation at the syntax of Ezra 7:12 is surprising, since he himself (Semeia, 22, n.30) had already noted that the meaning of gmyr is “problematic.” He added (loc. cit.) that “H. L. Ginsberg . . . takes it as ‘et cetera’.


17. NJPS Tanakh (1985).
reading tradition in the synagogue, in which the congregation and the reader repeat the penultimate verse after the conclusion of the book to make it the ultimate verse.\footnote{This is the custom today when Qohelet is publicly read in the synagogue during Sukkot (mainly in Ashkenazic traditions).} This tradition received textual expression already in the Aleppo Codex (c. 930 C.E.) where verse 13 was recopied after verse 14. The phrase \textit{sôf dâvâr} therefore heralds the final words of the book.

However the phrase can easily be taken as part of its context, parallel to \textit{neshâmâh} in Hebrew. That is how it was translated in NJPS, cited above. It seems to me that \textit{sôf dâvâr} is indeed a stock scribal phrase that indicates “the conclusion of the text.” One of the signs of “formulary” or “scribal vocabulary” is a phrase without contextual meaning, one that stands outside the particular text, e.g., “The End,” \textit{cu’innâ “and now,”} \textit{hâdôh “till here.”} I think that \textit{sôf dâvâr} in Qohelet is of this nature. I make use of the NJPS version for Qoh.12: 9–13 to support the point:

9 A further word: Because Koheleth was a sage, . . . He listened to and tested . . .
12 A further word: Against them, my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit . . .
13 The sum of the matter, when all is said and done . . .

Traditionally, \textit{wêyôter} was translated “and more than” and read in conjunction with what follows: “and more than [the fact that] Koheleth was a sage (9),” or “and [of] more than these, my son, be warned! (12),” but such readings make for syntactically difficult sentences.\footnote{- This is the sole instance in the entire book. Thus, Michael Fox’s remark that “The narrator of Qohelet speaks to ‘my son’ (12:12)” in the context of a section entitled “Fathers as Teachers” (\textit{Proverbs 1–9, AB} [New York, 2000]) is misleading. Nor does it matter if Fox thinks “that Qohelet is ‘by’ the epilogist”; see M. Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition in Qohelet,” \textit{HUCA} 48 (1977), 91; the appearance of the address to “my son” is still exceptional.} In the NJPS version given above, “a further word” translates the Hebrew \textit{wêyôter} and is marked off by a colon in translation.\footnote{- There is also the (unlikely) possibility that the original author intended to make the end of Qohelet seem like an epilogue by an additional hand. See Fox, “Frame-Narrative and Composition.”}\footnote{- “more,” “more than,” appears only in Qohelet (7x), Esther (1x) but is common in Mishnaic Hebrew. Perhaps the examples from Qohelet 12 that function as scribal terms for “postscript” are related to the summary phrase \textit{yârûth yôter}, “the rest of,” “remainder,” punctuated as \textit{yeter}, found at the end of chapters in Kings and Chronicles.} The traditional understanding which reads this
term as a parallel to the following stich is itself proof that we are dealing with scribal formulary, reminiscent of Fitzmyer’s claim about the misunderstanding of קָלָם and Paul’s observation about a legal term that was misunderstood to be part of the text. 23

Thus far, we have identified two scribal terms in Qohelet: sôf dâvâr and wêyôter. The NJPS reading of the above verses in Qohelet, which supports this interpretation of wêyôter seems to be based on an observation made by H. L. Ginsberg. Ginsberg had earlier authored an independent Hebrew commentary on Qohelet and edited a translation of the five Scrolls for JPS in a separate volume. 24 In his commentary, Ginsberg took the word כָּד in verse 9, like the term wêyôter, to indicate a scribal addition. According to Ginsberg, the end of Qohelet is marked by no less than three additional comments, each prefaced by a formulaic word:

9. Further: Kohelet was a sage; moreover: he instructed the people . . .
12. Further: Do not be hasty, my son, beware! 25

As I understand Ginsberg’s commentary, each formula stands apart from the following text. To these three scribal addenda, then, I would add a fourth: sôf dâvâr, which originally indicated “the final addition.” This term was followed by an epigram that “all is heard [on high],” 26 therefore one should “Revere God and observe His commands!” All three terms הָיִיתָו, טָהָר, סָפַר dâvâr are indeed scribal formulae to introduce a number of postscripts, with sôf dâvâr doubling as a closing formula for the entire book. These terms in Qohelet parallel Greenfield’s “reflection” 27 of a legal formula when found in non-legal contexts. In the case of Qohelet, original scribal terms are now used (or understood) as ordinary phrases in a literary text, but should be understood in their original meanings.

As for the origins of v. 14, the last verb in Qohelet, which comes after “the end” and is preceded by no formulaic term, I would reconstruct the following course of events: despite the clear indication of closure in v. 13, yet another verse was appended to the book to introduce several staples of Second Temple Judaism such as judgment day, reward and punishment, divine providence, and observance of the commandments. These cardinal ideas in rabbinic Judaism were found to be seriously wanting in the body of Qohelet. However, in order to restore the original ending of the book as marked by sôf dâvâr, v. 13 was repeated both in the Masoretic scribal tradition and in the synagogue reading.

23. See nn. 15–16 above.
25. The translation and italics are mine, following Ginsberg, Koheleth, 133–34 and 138. In the last reference he vocalizes הָמָה as the imperative form of the verb מִמּוּת “to delay, take one’s time.”
26. This is my understanding of the epithet כְּלָל וֹא, כְּלָל וֹא “All is seen.” The relationship between “all is heard” and fear of God in Qoh. 12:13 is paralleled by M. Abot 2:1: “Consider three things and thou wilt not fall into the hands of transgression: know what is above thee—a seeing eye and a hearing ear and all thy deeds written in a book.” On parallels between Qohelet and M. Abot, see I. B. Gottlieb, “Pirqe Abot and Biblical Wisdom,” VT 40 (1990), 152–64.
27. See, e.g., “The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar,” in Hommages à A. Dupont-Sommer (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1972), 49–59, where he finds that the words of the proverb “reflect the legal practices and presumptions of that Empire” (p. 59).
2. *Reš millin* (Dan.7:1)

Avi Hurvitz recently noted that biblical *rōš dāvār* (Ps. 119:160) and *sôf dāvār* (Qoh. 12:13) are “analogous opposites” which denote “the beginning of the matter” and “the end of the matter.” Both compounds find their exact correspondences in Biblical Aramaic *reš millin* and *sōf dāvār* in Daniel 7. Hurvitz identified the Biblical Aramaic phrases as a pair of technical terms: ṭɲ qmv indicates the start of “an authentic written (‘he wrote down’) account of Daniel’s vision”; 29 ṭɲ sml “marks the end of the quoted text.” Both “evidently form part of the scribal vocabulary current at the time.”

The two Aramaic scribal terms, claimed Hurvitz, determine the provenance and chronological setting of the Hebrew expressions *rōš dāvār* and *sôf dāvār*. Both Hebrew phrases reflect the linguistic milieu of the Second Temple or late biblical period, when the language came under the influence of Imperial Aramaic. To prove this, Hurvitz carried out a lexical study of words that mean “end” in classical Biblical Hebrew and concluded that *sôf* makes a late appearance. While neither component of the parallel expression *rōš dāvār* is lexically late, Hurvitz noted that the two apposite phrases stand in antithetical relation, “‘twin’ phrases which echo each other in form and meaning.” Finally, he surveyed the function and semantic range of these terms within Biblical Hebrew based on the function of the Aramaic terms in Daniel as cited above. His conclusion is embedded in the title of his article—the Hebrew terms are reflexes of scribal terms used in the Imperial Aramaic formulary.

Presumably Hurvitz chose “reflexes” over “cognates” because very near the conclusion of his brief study, the close correspondence that he had developed between the Aramaic and Hebrew phrases comes to an abrupt end:

> Obviously, the terminological connotation, attested by the Aramaic technical idioms used in Daniel 7, is missing in the Hebrew counterparts employed in Qoheleth and Ps 119; ṭɲ qmv and ṭɲ sml have become ordinary phrases, denoting “the beginning of the matter” and “the end of the matter” (also, in extended applications, “the first/primary part of the matter” and “the conclusion/summing-up of the matter”), instead of the scribal “beginning/end of a [written] word (=text).”

As to the question of why two phrases in late Biblical Hebrew that are identical to their Aramaic counterparts in every way should end up having different meanings and functions, Hurvitz attributed this to the “phenomenon of ‘semantic erosion’.”

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29. Ibid., 285.
30. Ibid., 286.
31. Ibid., 285.
32. Loc. cit.
33. Hurvitz never cites the two phrases *rōš dāvār* and *sôf dāvār* in context—the verses in Ps. 119:160 and Qoh. 12:13 are not quoted in the article, neither partially nor in full.
34. Hurvitz, ibid., 286.
35. Loc. cit.
This process resulted in “the ‘worn-out’ sense of סנהר of לארם and לְרֵכֶר and observable in Hebrew.”

The pattern of analysis employed by Hurvitz in this study has become his hallmark. Occasionally however, one yearns for monographs that treat words and phrases idiosyncratically, as unique individuals whose behavior is unparalleled. The search after a lexeme’s trail can take surprising turns and twists, and the outcome, for all the rules of phonology, morphology, and semantics, is never predictable. Such may be the case with סנהר ומלשנא לארם מילין.

Hurvitz posited that the Aramaic words סנהר ומלשנא לארם מילין could shed light on the origin and history of the Hebrew terms סנהר of לארם not only by virtue of their function and meaning, but also by their position: both Aramaic phrases are found in a single chapter, most appropriately in the first and last verses:

Dan. 7:1
בָּאָדָד הַמַּלְוַתָה חַטָּב / לְרֵכֶר מילין אֶפֶר

Dan. 7:28
שָׁרוּ נַסָּה וְרָמָה

Hurvitz gives the following translations, taken from the NJPS version:

Dan. 7:1: In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream ( . . . ) he wrote down the dream. Beginning the Account (לארם מילין), Daniel related the following: “In my vision . . .”

Vv. 27–28: [“] . . . His kingdom shall be. . . . Here the account ends (רשב מילין)].

Note that the NJPS sentence division for the verses in Daniel cited above differs from MT. The MT Hebrew for “Beginning the account” (לארם מילין) comes at the end of verse 1 and does not begin a new sentence. Further, “Here the account ends” is

36. Ibid., 286, n. 23.
37. Beginning with his identification of post-exilic psalms on a lexical basis, the comparative study of the language of Ezekiel and Leviticus, through his book on Wisdom psalms and countless articles which employ these methods to study individual expressions, he has put the chronology of biblical texts on a scientific footing and has enriched the dictionary of post-exilic and late Biblical Hebrew with many previously unidentified words and phrases.
39. I follow Hurvitz exactly in copying the verses, Hebrew insertions, brackets, parentheses, capitalization, and slight changes to the text; the ellipsis in the middle of the line in vv. 27–28 is mine.
40. Strictly speaking, Hurvitz should have noted that he was quoting a translation of Dan 7:1 and 2, not 1 alone. NJPS actually left out the first three words of 7:2, ‘אִדֵּנָה דָּרֵכֶר וֶשְׁאָמָר, about which see further.
the concluding sentence in the NJPS version: it takes a period and stands alone. In MT 7:28, it stands at the beginning of a much longer sentence which continues: “I, Daniel, was very alarmed . . .” The remainder of the MT verse is typeset in NJPS not only as a separate (unnumbered) verse, but as a separate paragraph. Put differently, reš millin “beginning” comes in MT at the conclusion of verse 1 and sōfā di millētā “the end” stands at the beginning of verse 28, while the NJPS translation makes each term respectively a beginning or an ending both in meaning and position within the sentence. These differences are not solely stylistic: they imply what Hurvitz has set out to prove, that each phrase is a so-called terminus technicus or “scribal phrase.”

However, I find reason to support the sentence division of MT, for it lends poetic balance and parallelism to the first verse (7:1):

Daniel saw a dream/ a vision upon his bed,
Then he wrote the dream/ this is what he said:

As the fourth and final stich, reš millin ’āmar provides repetition (rešēl/ reš), parallelism (kētab/’āmar), and balance to the entire sentence. Clearly it is an integral part of the verse. But if I sever it from verse 1 and attach it to verse 2, as did NJPS (“Beginning the account”), what purpose does it serve? If indeed it is a terminus technicus to indicate the start of quoted text, its form should have been reš millin alone, without the verb ’āmar. At present, the word ’āmar is totally superfluous and makes for bad prose, followed as it is by ’ānē Dāniyyēl wē-’āmar in verse 2. Quite the contrary, the real terminus technicus is to be found in the words נון אֲדָמָר . . . “he said,” a phrase which introduces direct speech in Daniel over thirty times. If, however, reš millin serves to introduce Daniel’s account of the dream, what need was there to duplicate with the stock expression ’ānē . . . wē’āmar?

One is tempted to compare our case with Fitzmyer’s, cited above, as both seem to be formulae introducing a quotation. The difference, however, between Fitzmyer’s term and our case is that reš millin ’āmar, as I have argued, seems particularly suited to its context in verse 1; detaching it adversely affects the poetry and renders either the word ’āmar or the following formula ’ānē . . . wē’āmar superfluous. Further, as we shall soon see, reš millin can also mean “the entire matter,” the entire dream and its interpretation, and is thus not necessarily a technical term for “the beginning.”

41. This is not necessarily synonymous parallelism. While ’āmar may be the equivalent of kētab, reš millin may indicate a specification of ḫelmā, i.e., “the beginning of the dream.”

42. This explains why NJPS deleted it; see above, n. 40.

43. Indeed MS Theodotion omits הַכְּנַנְת.
3. sōfā’ di milletā’ (Dan. 7:28)

Turning to the expression at the end of Daniel 7, sōfā’ di milletā’, “the end of the matter,” it certainly appears to be a formulaic marker, combined with another formula to stand as a complete sentence: גָּרָה כְּמָא רֵידָּמַלְאַה, “Here the account ends.”44 But if sōfā’ di milletā’ signals “endquote,” it should have been the final phrase in the verse, as taken by NJPS. Instead, Dan. 7:28 in MT continues on, bringing Daniel’s first-person monologue to a conclusion. I think we should take the entire clause “Here the account ends” as part and parcel of Daniel’s first-person speech, a literary ending which is worked into the story itself and comes to herald the end of the entire chapter. In its current setting, it has other nuances as well. Chapter 7 is divided into two equal parts of fourteen verses each. The first half (7:1–14) describes Belshazzar’s dream, the second (7:15–28) its interpretation. The chapter has a double closing: הָלְשָׁמְדָה יִלְּדוּהָ בְּדִימָא, “and the account is ended” in verse 26 means, in context of the narrative, “to be destroyed and abolished for all time,” but דּוּר רֶפּאָא, literally “until the end,” also marks the impending end of the chapter.45 The second ending is found in 7:28, גָּרָה כְּמָא רֵידָּמַלְאַה “Here the account ends.” Further, if we assume together with MT that rēš millin appears at the end of 7:1, a frame structure is provided by the first and final verses: רָאָשׁ מֵלִילִי / כְּמָא רֵידָּמַלְאַה, “the beginning of the matter, the end of the matter.” Clearly these expressions which bear a role in the structure of the chapter are part of the literary context and do not serve as formulaic terms alone.

There is, however, another obstacle to seeing the Aramaic phrases as technical terminology. Even were I to accept the NJPS translation which supports Hurvitz’s claim to see the phrases in Aramaic as scribal expressions for “open quote,” “close quote,” the fact that these two expressions appear only in Daniel and nowhere else—neither in the Bible nor in any Aramaic text—is hardly indicative of the “Imperial Aramaic formulary” of the period.46 By way of comparison, רֹשׁ דָּבָר and its variations are clearly scribal terms. Aside from the fact that they stand as a form of punctuation outside the contents of a specific letter, they are formulaic because they are found very often.

4. Rōš dāvār (Ps. 119:160)

If frequency of appearance is a requirement for an epistolary or scribal term, it must be noted that the Hebrew phrases rōš dāvār and sōf dāvār also appear but once each in the Bible. Further, the first term appears only in the phrase rōš dēvārēkā: ראָשׁ דָּבָרָךְ אַמָּת / גָּלְעַל כְּלֵי מַשְׂפָּת צְרָךְ (Ps. 119:160). This phrase, whose original meaning is purportedly “beginning,” stands as far from the beginning as can possibly be: within the psalm it is found in the 160th out of 176 verses. Further, Psalm 119 is an acrostic that repeats each letter eight times, and our verse is the final example—

44. So NJPS. Compare גָּרָה כְּמָא רֵידָּמַלְאַה Ἰερ. 51:64.
45. Like other complex endings we examined at the beginning of this article, e.g., גָּרָה כְּמָא רֵידָּמַלְאַה (Jer. 51:64), which combine the end of the prophet’s words and the end of the literary unit (chapter or book).
46. Not only does sōfā’ di milletā’ not appear, but “it must be admitted, that . . . פסוק does not seem to be attested in extra-biblical Aramaic documents dated to the Persian period”; Hurvitz, “Two Scribal Terms,” 283, n. 10.
not the initial one—for the letter reš. Moreover, the form with possessive suffix dēvārēkā completely changes the picture. A terminus technicus is not to be adapted to the context morphologically; if it is, it is no term at all! Finally, parallelism would demand a meaning for ṣôf that corresponds in some way to the Hebrew: “The essence of your word is your truth, O Eternal One/ The content of your judgment is your justice.”

In Dahood’s translation, “essence/content” are parallel. Another way to reflect the poetic symmetry is RSV “the sum of your word is truth,” paralleled by “and every one of your righteous ordinances endures forever.” By way of contrast, NJPS is apparently oblivious to parallelism here: “Truth is the essence of Your word; Your just rules are eternal.” However, all interpretations and translations must reckon with the fact that this final verse for the letter reš must be a concluding statement about God’s law, and seeing parallelism here reinforces the sense of conclusion and totality. This accounts for the frequent translation of rōš dēvārēkā in its one biblical appearance as essence, sum total or the like. It most definitely does not have the meaning or function of a scribal term indicating the beginning of a quotation.

It must be said that Hurvitz conceded as much; in his opinion, the attenuated sense of the scribal phrase rōš dēvār in Hebrew denotes ‘the beginning of the matter’ . . . (also, in extended applications, “the first/primary part of the matter” . . .) instead of the scribal ‘beginning/end of a [written] word (= text).’ But the meaning of rōš dēvārēkā—primary, essence, or sum—is quite removed from “beginning, first”; one could argue that “sum” is actually closer to “end.” Therefore, Hurvitz’s thesis that a purported terminus technicus—an asterisk is in order, since the actual form is nowhere attested—was originally a scribal term in late Biblical Hebrew remains tentative. His conclusion that “semantically, they [the two Hebrew phrases rōš dēvār, sōf dēvār] represent a mirror image, denoting ‘beginning’ vs. ‘end’ ” is not warranted by the meager evidence.

If rōš dēvār/ dēvārēkā bears little relation to its Aramaic counterpart, the case is otherwise with sōf dēvār. Without doubt, as Hurvitz pointed out, the phrase sōf

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47. Grammatical adaptation makes it part of the literary context, see above.
48. M. Dahood, Psalms III: 101–150, AB (New York, 1970), 170. In a note (ibid., 192) he compares rōš dēvārēkā to rēšit šēmānim, “finest oils” (Amos 6:6), Phoenician rʾšt nhšt, “the finest bronze.” One does not have to accept Dahood’s translation of other elements in the verse (ʿu-lʾʾolām as a divine epithet, kol as “the content of”) to agree with ṣôf “essence”; “ʾolām is very questionably a divine epithet in the Bible” (private communication, Ed Greenstein). Further, ʾolām clearly parallels ṣēmet in other verses and both mean “forever” (Pss. 119:142, 146:6).
49. Note that between the RSV translation “the sum of your word” for Ps. 119:160 and the NJPS rendering “the sum of the matter” for Qoh. 12:13, rōš dēvār and sōf dēvār mean the same thing (!)—“the sum of.” This meaning is closer to “end” than to “beginning.”
51. One might be tempted to cite ṣôf dēvār as an idiom meaning “to take the sum of.” But this expression derives from the literal meaning “to lift the head of,” i.e., to count each individual.
52. Hurvitz, “Two Scribal Terms,” 285. Of course, some forms of rōš and sōf may be considered “mirror images” if they appear together in merismus, e.g., ṣēf kōdesh (Qoh.3:11) or, as in Babylonian Aramaic, to indicate the beginning and end of a tannaitic text (e.g., a Mishnah) in the forms rēša and sēfā. In fact, it is their frequent appearance together in the Talmud in this sense that caused original sōfā to be vocalized as sēfā; see J. N. Epstein, A Grammar of Babylonian Aramaic (Jerusalem, 1960), 175 [in Hebrew].
dāvār in its one biblical appearance functions as an “ordinary phrase,”53 which I take to mean an original formulaic phrase that also fits neatly into its present literary context, a pattern of ending examined above. Since I have made a similar claim in this article for sōfā’ di millētā’, the Hebrew and Aramaic phrases are indeed parallel.

In summation, I have traced a number of expressions that Hurvitz has seen as technical terms, originally indicating quoted text, but which I see as literary expressions that mesh with their contexts and indicate “beginning” and “ending.” Hurvitz included סוף דملك and אמור דבר-letter,” “and now,” “memorandum” and called them all “scribal vocabulary,” a single “lexical category.”54 But there is a clear distinction to be drawn between those three epistolary terms which actually appear in letters and the pair of Aramaic phrases under scrutiny, which does not. By placing them together, Hurvitz was moved to seek a formulaic sense and function for the Aramaic terms and for their Hebrew counterparts as well.

I have tried to show that in Daniel the phrases rēš millīn and sōfā’ di millētā’ are not part of a particular jargon. Unlike epistolary terms or legal terminology, they are not technical additions to the text or stock phrases, but have been fully contextualized and individualized within the prose or poetry. Nor can we consider them terms, clichés, or stock phrases outside the context of Daniel, because we have no further examples of their use. Indeed, Fitzmyer already noted that “as for the biblical letters, those in Ezra supply the closest parallels to the extrabiblical material; those in Daniel less so—and there is a real question whether the latter should even be considered.”55 If indeed these ever functioned strictly as technical terms, we might have anticipated a more exact correspondence between them, such as *rēšā di millētā, sōfā’ di millētā’.

Likewise, if sōf dāvār functions in conjunction with the word wēyōter as a scribal term in Qohelet to indicate a final epigram, its analogous opposite might well have been *rōš dāvār, as Hurvitz thinks.56 Another possibility, however, suggests itself: *rēšīt dāvār, on the pattern of rēšīt hōḵhmā, “the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). Such an opposition lies behind נב חכירה דבר אלהים וראיה “The end of a matter is better than the beginning of it” (Qoh. 7:8). The two expressions rēšīt dāvār and ʾaḥārīt dāvār have indeed become stock phrases for “beginning,” “end” in Modern Hebrew speech and writing.57

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53. Hurvitz’ expression for both rōš dāvār and sōf dāvār; “Two Scribal Terms,” 286.
54. Ibid., 281.
56. Analogous to Qoh. 3:11: mērōš wēʿad sōf.
57. Ṛēšīt often means “beginning” in Biblical Hebrew; “On the basis of Prov. 9.10 (tehilla), rēšīt [in Prov. 1:7, Ps. 111:10] is to be taken in the sense of ‘beginning’ and not of ‘principal part,’ ‘total,’ ‘best part.’” G. von Rad, Wisdom In Israel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972), 66. However, von Rad notes that “in themselves, both translations (‘beginning’ or ‘best’) are possible. Indeed, the meanings are very close” (ibid., n. 10). Another Modern Hebrew phrase related to our topic is מְסַכֵּת שָל דֶּרֶךְ וּלְכֹהֵנָה finally,” “in sum.” The lexical base is Qoh. 12:13-13:13, though while the syntax is Mishnaic Hebrew (cf. ribbōnō šēlaʾ ʾolām > ribbōnō šel ʾolām). However, the expression is not attested in rabbinic Hebrew save for a single occurrence. Moreover, מַכֶּה המ דֵּרֶךְ מְסַכֵּת the “end of the matter,” in Midrash Tanhumah (ed. Buber) Vayera 46 s.v. הָלָם 113). It is also found thrice in the medieval Hebrew translation of Maimonides’ Commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 8:5; 11, 2; Kelim 5:10). I thank Gary Rendsburg for mentioning the Modern Hebrew phrase upon reading an earlier version of this study.
5. Qadmat millôh

I would see a term for “beginning” in a phrase in Imperial Aramaic that has not been viewed as such. *The Wisdom of Ahiqar* found at Elephantine opens as follows:58

1These are the words of one named Ahikar, a wise and ready scribe, who taught his son . . .

2Before his words Ahikar had become great and had been counsellor of all Assyria.

The formulaic opening phrase is אלאלה מִלּוֹחי קַדָּמַת "these are the words.” In line 2 we find the phrase קְרַמֶת מְלָهى קַדָּמַת “Before his words.” Subsequent translations, for the most part, have not added understanding. Jean-Hoftijzer render “avant ses mots (i.e., avant il disait ses mots) Ahiqar fut un homme grand (? , contexte endomm.).”59 Porten-Yardeni’s “Before his words, Ahiqar became great” is identical.60 Both are taken from Cowley’s rendition as cited above. Presumably, since the story opens with אלהל אֵל מַלְלי קָדָּמות "These are the words of one named Ahikar,” line 2 was understood as saying, “Before his words (i.e., prior to his proverbs and wisdom sayings), Ahiqar had become great.” “Before his words” is an odd construction; it seems to be a scribal term that was misunderstood and hence read as part of the following sentence.

I view the phrase as a marker to indicate the beginning of the story. Qadmat taken as a noun in the construct state dependent on millôh means “the beginning of the matter.”61 Alternatively, it might carry the adverbial sense “first,” “first things first.”62 Either way, it comes to introduce the narrative which commences by relating that Ahiqar was a famous man. After the opening expression אלהל מַלְלי קָדָּמות, an overall introduction to Ahiqar and his epigrams,63 the narrative begins with a flashback to Ahiqar’s own beginnings, how “he grew to become the advisor of all of Assyria.” This flashback is prefaced by the phrase קְרַמֶת מְלָهى קַדָּמַת “the beginning of the matter” to mark the inception of Ahiqar’s story.64 There is a sort of play on words at work here, millê in line 1 referring to the words of the epigrams, millôh in line 2 meaning “his matter, affair.”65 Together they mark the beginning of this composition. In similar fashion the repeated use of millêtäh in Dan. 7:28 signals the end of the chapter:

61. Babylonian Aramaic knows the fem. nouns מְלָهى קָדָּ omit קְרַמֶת with the same meaning; M. Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic*, 987. It is conceivable that a word meaning “the dawn of” would also connote “the beginning of.”
63. Cf. אֲלָלָה דְבִרֵי דָּרָי מַלְלי קָדָּמות in 2 Sam. 23:1, followed by David’s words in first person, just as the opening expression in Ahiqar is followed by first-person speech: בַּרְאֶשֶׁת לִי yhwh ly.


Here is the end of the matter. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly alarmed me, and my color changed; but I kept the matter in my mind. 66

So too in the case of Aḥiqar, I find formulaic openings that indicate the beginning of the work while also carrying an internal meaning: זו אלה מלי ארחיקר “These are Ahiqar’s sayings,” קרמת מלחחי “The beginning of his story.”

6. Ḥaqdâmût Millin

I did not find additional examples of qadmat millôhî in Aramaic inscriptions. The one parallel I have found is enshrined in the title of a medieval liturgical acrostic poem (piyyut) in Aramaic composed for the Festival of Shavuot, Ḥaqdâmût millîn, by R. Meir son of R. Isaac who lived in Worms, Germany, c. 1060.67 The initial line אקדמות מלוח מיילם is loosely translated by most interpreters as “before I begin to speak.”68 A literal translation yields two parallel expressions, “the beginning of words (or composition) and the initiation of speech,” where šârayyût is cognate to Akkadian šurrû (noun and verb) “beginning,” “to begin.”69 Ḥaqdâmût millîn is but a variation of qadmat millôhî in Aḥiqar. Close to 1500 years separate Elephantine Aḥiqar from Ashkenazi Ḥaqdâmût, and no direct path can be traced between them. However, the fact that this poem was written in Aramaic to be recited right after the Torah scroll has been unrolled hearkens back to the ancient custom of reading the Torah and simultaneously translating each verse into Aramaic.70 This practice is cited in Mishnah Megillah 4:4 but goes back to Neh. 8:8: “They read from the book of the law of God in translation to make it intelligible and so helped them to understand the reading.”71 It is feasible that the medieval composer drew on older Aramaic liturgical poems which prefaced the weekly Aramaic translation.

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66. N. W. Porteous, Daniel, OTL (London, 1965), 95. NJPS: “Here the account ends. [new paragraph] I, Daniel, was very alarmed by my thoughts, and my face darkened; and I could not put the matter out of my mind.”

67. His name is worked into lines 21–29 of the poem. This is the person called šalîlah ṣizbûr “cantor, reader” in the Worms Mahzor. “R. Meir šalîlah ṣizbûr of blessed memory” is cited several times by the commentator Rashi (1040–1105). See A. Grossman, The Early Sages of Ashkenaz (Jerusalem, 1981), 292–96 [in Hebrew].

68. So J. Frankel, Mahzor Shavuot (Koren; Jerusalem, 2000), 385 (in Hebrew) in his explanatory notes. In the body of the text, however, the translation is literal: “The introduction of words and the initiation of speech.”

69. CAD Ș/3, 357. Of course, the Akkadian word was mediated by Aramaic šrû “to begin.” Șûâ in Aramaic is “talk, speech.”

70. Ḥaqdâmût is considered to be an introductory proem to the actual Aramaic translation of the Torah reading on Shavuot, which still prevailed in medieval times. See M. Ginsburger, “Les introductions araméennes à la lecture du Targoum,” REJ 73 (1921), 14–26. In the Worms Mahzor, Germany, 1272, Ḥaqdâmût is followed by the Targum to Exod. 19:1–11, the Torah reading for Shavuot. Grossman, Ashkenaz, 294–95, does not allude to this idea and instead explains the Aramaic of Ḥaqdâmût as an attempt to lend to the poem an ancient patina, or perhaps it is to be connected to the author’s reputed mystical leanings.

Finally, a related phrase crops up in the Zohar, dated to the late thirteenth century in Spain. Several times we find the sentence ungalow translated as “Let us return to our subject” or “Let us return to the earlier words.” This phrase too is a literary convention to indicate Weideraufnahme, returning to the subject after a digression, here expressed as a return to “first matters.” Gershom Scholem studied the Aramaic of the Zohar and summed up his findings as follows:

The Aramaic of the Zohar is a purely artificial affair, a literary language employed by a writer who obviously knew no other Aramaic than that of certain Jewish literary documents . . . The expectation expressed by some scholars that philological investigation would reveal the older strata of the Zohar has not been borne out by actual research.

Nor must the stereotyped homiletical phrases be forgotten which are entirely foreign to the old Midrash and which the author has borrowed . . . chiefly from the stock of standing expressions habitually employed by the preachers of his age.

One such example of a stereotyped phrase or cliché which Scholem cites in the latter paragraph is none other than ungalow: “Let us return to the earlier words.” Unfortunately, I do not know where Scholem found the phrase “habitually employed” in contemporary literature, but it is entirely possible that the author of the Zohar coined the term “earlier words” or “first words” based on the Ashkenazic liturgical poem ungalow. The poem was copied into the famous Worms Mahzor (1275) and also into the Northern French Miscellany (1273), which may indicate its then widespread popularity. There is another example of an Ashkenazic liturgical poem cited in the Zohar, and the influence of the Ashkenazi rite on Sephardic mysticism has been the subject of various studies and a recent book.

Then again, the Zohar may have translated a Hebrew expression which appears in Rashi’s biblical commentaries: ungalow, “As a man says [to his friend], ‘Let us return to the first matter’ ” (1 Sam. 1:31), or: “Like a man who shortened his words and then goes back to say, ‘I did not yet tell you the beginning of the matter’ ” (Rashi, Song 2:8), Hebrew ungalow. A fair translation of Rashi’s phrase “the beginning of the matter” into Aramaic would be ungalow. But the possibility exists that the phrase in the Zohar is the evolution of a formulaic expression such as that found in Elephantine.

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76. Scholem’s views on the Aramaic of the Zohar are being questioned. See Ada Rapoport-Albert and Theodore Kwasman, “Late Aramaic: The Liturgical and Linguistic Context of the Zohar,” *Aramaic Studies* 4 (2006), 5: “This article challenges the standard scholarly opinion whereby the Aramaic in which it was written was an artificially manufactured idiom.” Outlining a future project, the authors “propose to examine the relationship between the Aramaic of the Zohar and . . . Aramaic Piyutim, liturgy, magical texts, legal documents and *Responsa*” (p. 9). Another article in the same issue by Yehudah Liebes, “Hebrew
The Aramaic phrases qadmat millôhi, ′aqdâmût millîn, and millî qadmâ′ê seem to me to be expressions for “beginning.” Much as I would have liked to link their stories, I have no proof for any relation between them, nor have I found additional examples. Aside from the fact that they use the same two lexemes, they all must be considered, at this point, as coincidental coinages of their respective authors. However, they bear a marked resemblance to their biblical counterpart רַאֶשׁ מַלֵּי and like it, serve to open a text. Whether they are links in a long chain of scribal tradition, as I have tried to show for the biblical expressions, is a difficult question to answer.

and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar,” 35–52, also denies the label “artificial.” However, it is unclear if the respective authors think that Zohar Aramaic is related to a spoken dialect of the language or just to other literary texts.
In some cases the textual differences were relatively inconsequential. For example, two texts may differ over the spelling of a person’s name. However, in other cases they were presented with textual variants which made a considerable impact upon doctrine or prophecy. YaHUShA quoted from the original Hebrew Scriptures as he taught the people in Aramaic (by then the common Shamitic language of the people); he was at odds with the Pharisees/Talmudists (oral law/traditions of the fathers) and clarified the written and only Twrth/Instructions from YHUH for our personal understanding.