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*On the Mechanism of Semantic Shift:
Causation of Symmetric Locativity*

by

Eliezer Rubinstein



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**ON THE MECHANISM OF SEMANTIC SHIFT:
CAUSATION OF SYMMETRIC LOCATIVITY**

by

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Verbs signalling "causation of symmetric locativity" will often occur within expanded syntactic frames. These latter may contain syntactic protagonists over and above those that are to be expected in the light of the underlying semantic structure of the verb. The presence of such "excess" syntactic protagonists may serve as evidence of a shift in the meaning of the verb. This phenomenon may, on the other hand, frequently reflect the presence of an attached proposition quite unrelated to the meaning of the verb itself. Expanded structures of this type may, however, in the final event, effect a shift in the meaning of the verb. Thus, verbs signalling "causation of symmetric locativity" also have other meanings which originated in the semantic absorption of attached propositions not initially connected with the verb itself.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study is based on a linguistic theory which considers the surface structure of a given sentence to be the realization of an abstract semantic structure without syntactic form or lexical realization. A variety of transformations determining the syntactic shape act upon the basic semantic structure consisting of elementary propositions and primitive predicates. The most important of these transformations for the case in point is that of predicate-fusion: the verb in the given sentence will frequently not be a lexical realization of the

primitive predicate (which would be a transparent realization of the semantic structure), but the realization of the fusion of a number of elementary primitive predicates.¹

2. SYNTACTIC FRAMES AND EXPANDED FRAMES

AS REFLECTIONS OF SEMANTIC STRUCTURES

Since the verb is the realization of an underlying semantic structure comprising primitive predicates and propositions, we must look upon these elements of the structure as the elementary semantic components of the verb. It would seem justified to distinguish between the universal semantic components of the verb and the meaning additional to that which consists of the totality of universal components.

It is an obvious fact that every verb has meaning relevant to the syntactic structure and meaning irrelevant to the syntactic realization. Thus, numerous verbs in Hebrew have the syntactic structure

$NP_1 + \text{Verb} + \ell\partial + NP_2 + NP_3$
($\ell\partial$ being a preposition in Hebrew)

These verbs, while different in meaning, have a common significance relevant to this syntactic structure — namely that of "causation of possession," which is a semantic mixture of "cause" + "change to" + "X has Y" (the elementary proposition of "possession").² We shall call the meaning relevant to the syntactic structure the BASIC MEANING of verbs, and that which is additional to it the SPECIFIC MEANING.

Similarly, there will be numerous Hebrew verbs displaying the syntactic structure

$NP_1 + \text{Verb} + NP_2 + b\partial + NP_3$
($b\partial$ being a locative preposition in Hebrew)

¹In this connection, *vide* various articles by the author, and especially — Rubinstein, E.: "Lipne + NP as Locative Expression and as Representation of the Notions 'Receiver' and 'Causer'" — in *Lešonenu* (Academy of the Hebrew Language, XL - 1976) (in Hebrew). The approach is close to that of Postal in Postal, P.M.: "On the Surface Verb 'Remind'" — in Fillmore C.J. & Langendoen, D.T. (eds.): *Studies in Linguistic Semantics* (New York, 1971) pp. 181-270.

²For the sake of convenience, the notation here used is

X "has" Y

which is the case in the English sentence. On the other hand, it is obvious that "has" is not the realization of some elementary predicate in the underlying semantic structure — since the semantic structure underlying "possession" sentences contains no action. It is instructive to note here that in Hebrew there is no verb in the syntactic realization of the "possession" proposition, the sentence-frame being

A $\ell\partial$ B

where $\ell\partial$ is a preposition — and, obviously, in such Hebrew sentences the realization of the underlying semantic structure is more transparent than in English.

all with the same basic meaning (namely a "causation of locativity" proposition), but differing from one another in point of their specific meaning. The basic meaning, which is principally a bundle of logical-semantic relationships realized as syntactic relationships, consists of a relatively small number of final components — whereas the specific meaning, which goes beyond the basic one, is definitely non-final, since it contains nuances of meaning made up of various references to the real world. And, since these various references to the real world are not object-restricted, they may be language-specific.

A study dealing with the basic meaning of verbs may help us discover the mechanism operating in such verbal semantic shifts. This study will therefore deal with the important process of semantic shift as reflected in syntactic structure.

It is a crucial fact that the syntactic structure reflects those elements relevant to the realization of the basic semantic structure. And, while there is no one-to-one relationship between the semantic and the syntactic structure, it is clear that the syntactic components of a sentence relate in some way to the elements of the underlying semantic structure. The presence of any additional syntactic protagonist indicates the presence of a semantic relationship in the underlying semantic structure relevant to the presence of that syntactic protagonist at the surface level.

Accordingly, it is of considerable importance to the reader or listener to relate to those parts of the sentence which form the syntactic framework to the verb in its SPECIFIC frame — since effectively relating to what is present in the syntactic structure and its elements will inevitably elucidate the semantic structure. This is particularly noteworthy in a comparison of two syntactic frames of one and the same verb — thus:

I. $NP_1 + herim + NP_2$

II. $NP_1 + herim + NP_2 + lo + NP_3$

In Frame I, the meaning of the verb is close to that of the English verb *lift*, which means that we have here a verb realizing a deep semantic structure of "locativity causation":

$A\ herim\ B = A\ \text{"caused"}\ (\text{"change to"}\ (B\ \text{"in"}\ C))$

The syntactic component relating to C is not explicitly specified after this verb, unlike ordinary locative sentences — since the verb itself contains the indication that the place of the object notated as NP_2 is higher after the action than it was before it.

In Frame II, on the other hand, which is the syntactic structure suitable for verbs signifying "causation of possession" the meaning is close to that of the English verb *offer*:

$A\ herim\ B\ lo\ C = A\ \text{"caused"}\ (\text{"change to"}\ (C\ \text{"has"}\ B))$

The historical connection between the two basic meanings of this verb is of no interest here. It is, however, important to note that the second meaning of the verb *herim* contains no sense whatsoever of "locative change." This is particularly noteworthy in the meaning of the noun *teruma* 'contribution' derived from this verb.

Together with this phenomenon of the syntactic structure elucidating the basic meaning of the verb, there is another important linguistic phenomenon, namely that the syntactic structure is likely to include syntactic elements over and above what may be justified by the semantic features of the verb. This is particularly noteworthy in the following sentence: *vosaraḇta ba'eḇ ʔeṭ-ha'ir voʔeṭ-kol-ʃalalah kalil lajəhova ʔeloheka* 'and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the Lord thy God' (Deuteronomy XIII, 16/17). In this sentence, too — as in the one where *herim* = 'offer' — we have syntactic elements relevant to the underlying semantic structure "causation of possession": and, indeed, the communicated content of this sentence is that the city is given to God by burning. However, there is a decisive difference between this sentence and the one with the verb *herim*, in that *herim*

signals the meaning of "causation of possession." This meaning will be featured in the dictionary, while the verb *šaraḇ* does not indicate "causation of possession." Here, too, the sentence with the syntactic feature relevant to the indication of possession has a verb with the meaning —

A "caused" ("change to" ("not" (B "exist"))).

In this case, we do not wish to fully elucidate the specific meaning of the verb. The feature "possession" in this sentence is ADDITIONAL to the meaning of the verb in the sentence. Thus, the full meaning of the expanded sentence is —

A gave B to C by burning B.

On the other hand, the meaning of the sentence containing the verb *herim* 'offer' is NOT

A gave B to C by lifting B

even though matters may originally have stood so.

This is no extraordinary or unusual phenomenon in language. In Biblical Hebrew, there are very many sentences in which, side by side with the realization of the meaning of the verb in its given form, there are additional syntactic elements relevant to semantic relationships not immediately obvious as being part of the semantic composition of the word. Anyone reading the Bible will thus find it extremely important to examine very strictly the actual extended syntactic structure of a sentence as compared with the expected structure, for the verb may gain a new meaning which must then be included in the lexicon. On the other hand, the additional meaning may be no more than a secondary element.

It is a characteristic feature of language that additional meanings may be absorbed in the basic meaning, or may achieve the status of principal meaning, where the previous meaning of the verb remains as only a certain nuance of the new meaning, or even vanishes completely. In this study we shall consider a group of Hebrew verbs with a common basic meaning. We shall consider the meanings additional to the basic one, and determine how the additional meaning may cause a semantic shift in the verb.

The verbs *ʾasaḇ*, *qibbeṣ*, *hiqhil*, *kinnes* and *liqqeṣ* have the common basic meaning of "causation of symmetric locative proposition," as follows:

A *ʾasaḇ* B = A "caused" ("change to" (B₁ "with" B₂))

The meaning of these verbs under consideration will be obvious when compared with verbs featuring the meaning "causation of non-symmetric locative proposition," such as *šam* 'put':

A *šam* B bə C = A "caused" ("change to" (B "in" C))

The verb *ʾasaḇ* and its class-members signal that someone (A) causes it to happen that several objects (B₁, B₂, B₃, etc.) which were not previously together should join together, such that B₁, B₂, ... B_n should each be the locus of the other. The implication here is obvious: if B₁ is the locus of B₂, then B₂ is also the locus of B₁; that is the significance of the primitive symmetric predicate "with" of this proposition.

The situation is entirely different in respect of verbs with the meaning "causation of non-symmetric locativity." The verb *šam* 'put' and its class-members signal that someone (A) causes it to happen that another object, or several objects, (B) be located at C. The implication here is a different one: if B is at C, this does not mean that C is at B. Thus, if there is a sentence to the effect that the book is on the cupboard it does not mean that at the same time the cupboard is on the book: the two propositions contradict each other. It is therefore a condition for the presence of the syntactic structure signalling "causation of symmetric locativity" that in the frame

NP₁ + Verb + NP₂

NP₂ should signal "more than one object" —

1. *va-jjε²εsoṗ laban ²εṭ-kol-²anʃe hammaqom*
'And Laban gathered together all the men of the place' (Genesis XXIX, 22)
2. *va-jjiqboṣ melek-jisra²el ²εṭ-hannāḇi²im*
'Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together' (I Kings XXII, 6)
3. *²az-jaqhel ʃolomo ²εṭ-ziqne jisra²el*
'Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel' (I Kings VIII, 1)

This holds good even where NP₂ stands for a noun in singular form representing a group of objects:

4. *²εsoṗ ²εṭ-ha²am*
'Gather the people together' (Numbers XXI, 16)
5. *uḇen-hadaḏ melek-²aram qabaṣ ²εṭ-kol-²hejlo... va-jja²al va-jjaṣar ²al-ʃomməron*
'And Ben-hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together:...and he went up and besieged Samaria' (I Kings XX, 1)

Verbs featuring the proposition "negation of symmetric locativity" have a similar semantic structure. The verbs *pizzer* 'scatter' and *heṗiṣ* 'scatter' belong to this class:

A *pizzer* B = A "caused" ("change to" ("not" (B₁ "with" B₂)))

In other words, A caused it to happen that B₁ and B₂, which were together (B₁ "with" B₂), are now not so.

6. *bizmo²a uzzəḵa pizzarta ²ojḇəḵa*
'Thou hast scattered Thine enemies with Thy strong arm' (Psalms LXXXIX, 10/11)
7. *usə²ara taṗiṣ ²oṭam*
'and the whirlwind shall scatter them' (Isaiah XLI, 16)

Similar to these are sentences where the noun at NP₂ is singular, but signals a number of objects:

8. *vnaḥalati jisra²el ²aʃer pizzaru baggojim*
'and My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations' (Joel III/IV, 2)
9. *haṗiṣoṭem ²εṭ-ṣoni va-ttaddihum*
'Ye have scattered My flock, and driven them away' (Jeremiah XXIII, 2)

Close to these in meaning are verbs concerned with putting things together or keeping them apart, such as *hibber* 'add', *hilleq* 'divide', and *hibdil* 'separate'. However, these verbs are also different in meaning from their predecessors. The verbs in Sentences 1-9 signal that objects in a certain locative state (one object together with others, or not together with others) have MOVED FROM THEIR POSITION, thus giving rise to a new locative state of being (one together with others, or not together with others). However, the verbs *hibber*, *hilleq* and *hibdil* do not signal any actual movement to a new locative state. At the same time, we are entitled to look upon these verbs as signalling the causation of symmetric locativity: as they are perceived as communicating that certain objects will either be MORE

TOGETHER OR LESS TOGETHER than they were before. Hence, the transition in these verbs from communicating physical addition or separation to spiritual addition or separation is quite clear.

Compare the following:

- I. 10. *jōhi raqī'a...vīhi mābdil ben majim la-majim*
'Let there be a firmament,...and let it divide the waters from the waters'
(Genesis I, 6)
11. *vohamej jərijoṭ hibbar ʔahāt ʔel-əḥāt*
'and five curtains he coupled one unto another' (Exodus XXXVI, 10)
- II. 12. *ben qodēj ləḥol lo hiḇdilū*
'they have put no difference between the holy and profane' (Ezekiel XXII, 26)

Sentence I 10 is concerned with causing the waters not to be together with other waters — not by moving them from one place to another, but by a process of separation: the sky divides water from water. Sentence 11 is concerned with the curtains being MORE together with one another by means of coupling: this sentence gives strictly formal expression to symmetric locativity by the presence of a phrase explicitly signalling the symmetry —

ʔahāt ʔel-ʔəḥāt 'one unto another'

Sentence II 12, on the other hand, only signals a spiritual process: this sentence, rather than signifying the CAUSATION that two objects should not be together, expresses the PERCEPTION that two objects are separate. It would, accordingly, seem that this sentence signifies --

'not' (A "perceives" ('not' (B₁ "with" B₂))).

This is done by means of a metaphor replacing a sentence signifying —

'not' (A "perceives" ('not' (B₁ "is" B₂))).

In other words, what is perceived here is a non-perception that two objects are not one. This metaphorization of the verb *hiḇdil* does not include the semantic feature "change to." In actual fact, however, this meaning — which is secondary to the physical significance historically — gained added importance and became the standard meaning of this verb.

3. ATTACHED MEANING

The syntactic structure assumed for the semantic features of the verbs discussed above is —
NP + V + NP.

However, some of these verbs display an expanded syntactic structure which, in addition to these syntactic elements, also displays a prepositional phrase signalling direction or source. This indicates the presence of the underlying semantic structure "causation of non-symmetric locativity" or "causation of movement" (which is the causation of dynamic locativity):

13. *vəʔasaḇti ʔēṭ-kol-haggojim ʔel-jəruʔalajim la-mmilḥama*
'For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle' (Zechariah XIV, 2)
14. *vəqibaṣti ʔēṭkem min-haʕamin vəʔasaḇti ʔēṭkem min-haʔaraṣoṭ*
'I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries' (Ezekiel XI, 17)

15. *vəkinnaštim ʔel-ʔadmaṯam*
'but I have gathered them unto their own land' (Ezekiel XI, 17)
16. *va-jjaṣṣeš jəhova ʔoṯam miṣam*
'So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence' (Genesis XI, 8)

Clearly, even this expanded syntactic frame features "causation of symmetric locativity" in the semantic structure of the verb. And, since the features

B₁ "with" B₂ and B "in" C

are totally different, we must concede that Sentences 13-16 comprise two different propositions: one generally realized by verbs such as *ʔasaṣ* and *kinnes*, and another realized by such verbs as *hebi* and *hoši*. In other words, these sentences include the potentiality of two other sentences such as "someone gathers something" and "someone brings something to a certain place." We must therefore here consider "causation of symmetric locativity" to be a BASIC semantic feature, and "causation of dynamic (non-symmetric) locativity" to be an ATTACHED semantic feature. Now, the statement that a certain semantic feature is attached need not necessarily indicate that this feature is trivial. Thus, the main content signalled in Sentence 13 is "the bringing of the nations to Jerusalem": "someone will bring the nations to Jerusalem by gathering them." However, it is clear that the general semantic definition of the verb *ʔasaṣ* in this frame does not rest on such an expanded syntactic and semantic framework.

Not dissimilar are those sentences where the syntactic frame proper to a verb signalling "causation of symmetric locativity" is expanded by means of a prepositional phrase indicating "possession."

17. *hakeseṣ...ʔaṣer ʔasoṣu šomre hasaṣ meʔet haʕam*
'the silver...which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people'
(II Kings XXII, 4)
18. *vəqibbaṣu mikol-jisraʔel kesēṣ*
'and gather of all Israel money' (II Chronicles XXIV, 5)

It is very doubtful whether we should analyze the verbs in these sentences semantically otherwise than by allotting the feature "causation of symmetric locativity" to them. We must therefore consider that Sentences 17 and 18 contain two potentially different causations. Full paraphrases of the two sentences would then be —

- a. They gathered the silver by taking it from the people.
- b. They gathered the money by taking it from all of Israel.

As stated previously, the general semantic definition of these verbs should not be based on the expanded structure. As we shall see below, extensive use of the expanded syntactic frame is likely to shift the meaning of the verb itself. This is what happened to the two verbs in question at different times in the development of the Hebrew language.

It may be that this general uncertainty as to their meaning — i.e. whether one is faced with the attached meaning of "causation of possession," or whether one is faced with a new meaning of the verb itself — is reflected in the different translations of the Bible into English. Thus, the translators of Sentence 18 have used the verb 'gather', whereas some translators of Sentence 17 have made use of the verb 'collect' — and it is difficult to understand why

they make this distinction.³

4. SEMANTIC SHIFTS IN THE VERB

There are many Hebrew verbs whose meaning has been shifted by the absorption of an attached meaning. This is what happened to different verbs signalling "causation of symmetric locativity." There are verbs which, following upon this shift, totally lost their previous meaning, and there are others whose previous basic meaning contributes a certain specific nuance to their new meaning — which, however, displays a totally different underlying semantic structure. Thus the verb *ʾasaḇ* developed the meaning "causation of dynamic (non-symmetric) locativity" already in Biblical Hebrew, where this verb had very clearly signalled "causation of symmetric locativity."

19. *va-ʾasaḇto ʾel-toḵ beṯḥa*
'then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house' (Deuteronomy XXII, 2)
20. *va-jjīṣlah david va-jjaʾasḇah ʾel-beṯo*
'David sent and fetched her to his house' (II Samuel XI, 27)
21. *qah-lōka mikol-maʾakal...vʾasaḇta ʾeleka*
'take thou unto thee of all food..., and thou shalt gather (it) to thee'
(Genesis VI, 21)

The extensive use made of the verb *ʾasaḇ* in sentences where, side by side with its basic meaning, it has been given the attached meaning of "dynamic (non-symmetric) locativity" has shifted its whole meaning towards one close to that of the verb *hiknis* 'bring in'. It is a decisive fact that in Sentences 19-21, and others of the same type, there will be a singular noun in object position — which would be absolutely impossible in sentences where the verb has its original meaning.

It is instructive to note how this semantic shift has confounded translators. Thus, most English translators (including those of the 1611 Authorized "King James" Version) have rendered the verb in Sentence 19 as *bring ... home* — giving it a significance of "dynamic (non-symmetric) locativity." On the other hand, the renderings of Sentences 20 and 21 differ in that Sentence 20 generally features the verb as *fetch*, while Sentence 21 features the verb *gather* itself. Furthermore, the Revised Standard Version renders the verb in Sentence 20 as *bring*, and the verb in Sentence 21 as *store ... up*.

In the following sentences, the semantic feature "causation of possession" clings to the basic meaning of the verb *ʾasaḇ*: the verb itself, in fact, has this meaning here — but metaphorically, and not in the strictest sense of transferring ownership from one person to another —

³Vide various English translations of the Old Testament, e.g. —

- a. The Authorized ("King James") Version of 1611;
- b. The Bible — Revised, Standard Version (The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1952).

22. *ki-ʾasaḇti ʾet-šalomi meʾet haʿam hazze*
 'for I have taken away my peace from this people' (Jeremiah XVI, 5)
23. *ʾesop̄ ḥerpaṯenu*
 'to take away our reproach' (Isaiah IV, 1)

A similar — and, indeed, even far clearer — semantic shift has occurred at various stages in the development of the Hebrew language in connection with the verbs *qibbeš*, *pizzer* and *ḥalaq*. In Biblical Hebrew, the verb *qibbeš* always signalled "causation of symmetric locativity," whether that is its sole meaning in the sentence or whether the sentence contains a syntactic expansion relating to an attached meaning. In Modern Hebrew this is likewise the meaning signalled by the verb in point — and, indeed, of the nouns derived from it as well — *qobbeš* 'collection', *qobuša* 'group', etc. And yet, side by side with these, current use is made in Modern Hebrew of the noun *qabšan* 'beggar' — the term for someone collecting money from others: in this fashion, our verb has now absorbed the attached meaning of "causation of possession."

Even more characteristic is the case of the verb *pizzer*. While in Biblical Hebrew it signals "causation of symmetric locativity," in Post-Biblical Hebrew one of its uses may be seen in sentences such as —

pizzer maʿoṭav la-ʿaniyim.

This is a paraphrase of 'gave his money to the poor' — or, rather, 'gave generously to the poor' — and, in this sense, we are clearly dealing with the semantic feature of "causation of possession." The original sense of this verb has here contributed the specific meaning (additional to the basic one) of 'giving generously'.

It may, indeed, even be the case that this new meaning was already current in Biblical Hebrew, as may be seen in the various English translations:

24. *pizzar naṯan la-ʾeḇjonim*
 'He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor' (Psalms CXII, 9)
25. *jeṣ mṣpazzer vṇosaḇ ʿoḏ*
 'There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth' (Proverbs XI, 24)

The translators of the Authorized ("King James") Version of 1611 render Sentence 24 by making use of the verb *disperse* and Sentence 25 by using the verb *scatter*. In other words, we find no hint here of any semantic shift. The Translators of the Revised Standard Version, on the other hand, render the verb in Sentence 24 as *distribute* and the one in Sentence 25 as *give freely*. In other words, the latter translation considers that these verbs, in the instances in point, signal "causation of possession." If, indeed, the verb *pizzer* in the above sentences signals "causation of possession," we must consider the sentences to be incomplete realizations of the syntactic frame proper to this meaning, namely —

$NP_1 + pizzar + NP_2 + lo + NP_3$.

Further, if we are right in our assumption that *hilleq* is essentially a verb signalling "causation of negative symmetric locativity" — i.e. that it signifies separation between the parts of something, the causing that parts of something should not be together — then the semantic shift in Biblical Hebrew is greatly in evidence, and even more so in Post-Biblical Hebrew.

Side by side with sentences featuring its basic meaning, the Bible contains sentences where this verb is followed by a prepositional phrase indicating THE RECEIVER of the object, which makes the whole sentence signal "causation of possession."

26. *va-jjāhalleq ləkōl-ha'am...lə'ij hallat lēhem*

'And he dealt among all the people...to every one a cake of bread' (II Samuel VI, 19)

Here the sense of "possession" is clearly in evidence, and it therefore seems justified to include this meaning in the Biblical lexicon among the definitions of this verb. At any rate, the use of the verb *hilleq* 'distribute' in the sense of 'giving parts' is extremely widespread in Modern Hebrew. This semantic shift finds clear expression in the derived noun *haluqa*, which has two meanings in Modern Hebrew:

- a. Causing that parts of something should not be together, which may be translated as 'division';
- b. Causing that certain objects (forming parts of something) should go over into the ownership of other people, which may be translated as 'distribution'.

Also of interest in this connection is the usage connected with the verb *halaq* in the sentence *halaq lo kabod* 'honoured him'. In this sentence, the verb has a clear-cut meaning close to that of the verb *naʿan* 'give'.

It would seem from these examples that there is a fairly straightforward linguistic process operating here: a sentence may contain a syntactic expansion over and above what may be expected in connection with the meaning of the verb. This expansion relates to the attached meaning, which is not an integral semantic feature of the verb itself. This syntactic-semantic expansion may cling to the verb, whose basic meaning then changes. A new linguistic approach stressing the relationship between the syntactic phenomenon and the underlying semantic structure is likely to shed new light on the mechanism of semantic shift in verbs.

SOURCES AND MONOGRAPHS ON THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Editors: Giorgio Buccellati, Marilyn Kelly Buccellati, Piotr Michalowski

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