

Ἐν πάσῃ γραμματικῇ
καὶ σοφίᾳ

En pāsē grammatikē kai sophiā

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The Article in the Book of Qoheleth

The Problem

The use of the definite article in the book of Qoheleth has been considered by some scholars to be irregular, erratic or chaotic.¹ The presupposed irregularities in the use of the article have been used as an argument in favor of a non-Hebrew original of the book or its late date of composition. ZIMMERMANN argued that all these anomalies can be explained only if the Hebrew is a translation from Aramaic.² DAHOOD, on the other hand, regarded the erratic use of the article as cogent proof of the Phoenician syntactic influence in the book.³ SCHOORS adopted a more balanced stance as he recognized that Qoheleth's irregular use of the article may be compared with some inconsistencies found in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. Nevertheless, he considered the use of the article as an indication of a later stage of the language, close to Mishnaic Hebrew.⁴

It is my contention that scholarly opinions on the use of the article in the book of Qoheleth are based on faulty assumptions about the regularity of the use of the article in the Hebrew Bible and in Northwest Semitic languages. Moreover, the methodology must take into consideration a larger, cross-linguistic perspective of the study of definiteness and use the definitions elaborated by modern linguistics. By doing so, I shall show that, in spite of the widespread claims, there is much regularity in the use of the article in the book of Qoheleth and that many apparent contradictions and exceptions are, in fact, nothing of the sort.

¹ For example, a recent commentary lists "der unregelmäßige Gebrauch des Artikels" among the peculiarities of the language of the book, See SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER, *Kohelet*, 110. It should be remarked that it is impossible to polemicize against lists of inconsistencies of the use of the article such as these in ISAKSSON, *Studies*, 145-147, or DELSMAN, *Zur Sprache*, 358-359, because they do not state the reason for which each case is considered abnormal.

² ZIMMERMANN, *Aramaic Provenance*, 20-23.

³ DAHOOD, *Canaanite-Phoenician Influence*, 197-201.

⁴ SCHOORS, *Preacher*, vol. I, 169.

Notes on the article in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic languages

A glance at modern grammars of Biblical Hebrew reveals a self-contradictory treatment of the use of the article. On one hand, grammar books offer lengthy and detailed discussions of the rules that concern the article. On the other hand JOÜON and MURAOKA confess openly that “the use of the article in Hebrew is rather loose.”⁵ This diagnosis of our understanding emerges also from James BARR’s comprehensive critique of the rules of the Hebrew article.⁶ He convincingly shows that the present understanding of the function of the Hebrew article and the rules that predict its occurrence are rife with contradictions and *ad hoc* solutions.⁷ This is not to say that we do not have any understanding of the sense of the article and of the usual situations in which it occurs. One should, however, be cautious about pronouncing clear-cut opinions about the appropriateness of the occurrence of the article in a particular case or about the grammatical error in the case of its lack. In short, the lack of research on the article in the Hebrew Bible suggests that the characterization of the use of the article in the book of Qoheleth as chaotic should be reinvestigated.⁸

A similar impression of an inconsistent use of the article emerges not only from the scrutiny of the Hebrew Bible in general and the book of Qoheleth in particular but also from a perusal of cognate Northwest Semitic languages. Indeed, in our rather limited corpus of inscriptions there are quite a few instances in which scholars find the occurrence or lack of the article puzzling.

Epigraphic Hebrew sources show few instances of the absence of the article in phrases where it is expected.⁹ For example, in a few seals from Kuntillet Ajrud that belong to the governor of the city the article in the word “city” is lacking while it appears on two similar seals.¹⁰ A similar case of the omission of the article occurs on two seals on which the word *mlk* is anarthrous.¹¹ In the

⁵ JOÜON-MURAOKA, § 137 d.

⁶ BARR, Determination.

⁷ However, the main thesis of BARR should not be accepted. Indeed, by arguing on the basis of the problematic cases that the article in Hebrew Bible is only loosely related to definiteness, BARR merely transposes the fuzziness of our understanding to the blurriness of the grammatical function itself. For a systematic critique of his argumentation see MÜLLER, Zu den Artikelfunktionen.

⁸ An example of reinvestigation that corrects a long-lasting statement of the traditional grammars is MILLER, Definiteness. She concludes that the definite article does not mark the vocative in Biblical Hebrew. See MILLER, Definiteness.

⁹ This discussion of Epigraphic Hebrew is based on GOGEL, Grammar, 173-175, and SCHÜLE, Syntax, 53-65. Interesting observations on the omission of the article can be found in SARFATTI, Hebrew Inscriptions, 71-73.

¹⁰ GOGEL, Grammar, 413; DAVIES, Inscriptions, vol. II, 207. LEMAIRE thinks that omission of the article in this case is a dialectal characteristic of Israelite Hebrew. See LEMAIRE, Hebrew and Aramaic, 193.

¹¹ DAVIES, Inscriptions, no. 101.176: *lhšyhw bn mlk* and AVIGAD-SASS, Corpus, no. 1205:

Samaria ostraca the article appears inconsistently before the ordinal numbers in the formula *bšt* written in hieratic numerals.¹² In Lachish letter no. 13 the article seems to be omitted after the nota accusativi.¹³ Also, the absence of the article with the word *ym* in Arad letter no. 40 is considered by scholars to be another problematic passage since it appears that the author refers to a definite day. On the other hand, the article is prefixed to the word *ymm* without any apparent reason in Arad letter no. 2:1-3: *ntn lktym b\ l l yyn l'rbšt hymm*.¹⁴

The Phoenician epigraphic texts attest to a gradual development of the article and this partially explains why its use is fluctuating. One finds many examples similar to the problematic cases of the use and non-use of the article in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the article may lack in the pronoun that follows an arthrous noun (*hspr z*, KAI 24:15) or a word that qualifies a personal name.¹⁵ Puzzling also are the lack of the article in the words that follow the nota accusativi (KAI 14:4: *ʔl ypth ʔyt mškb z*) and the apparent occurrence of the article on the first word in the construct chain (KAI 10:4: *hmzbh nḥšt zn [...]* *whpth ḥrs zn*).¹⁶ The lack of the article on the noun followed by an arthrous adjective in KAI 14:22: *ʔlnm hqdšm*¹⁷ is also baffling.

Similar difficulties may be detected in the corpus of the Transjordanian languages. YUN speaks about inconsistencies in the use of the article as he considers it lacking in the Moabite incense altar from Khirbet El-Mudeiyneh (AḤITUV, Echoes, 424: *mqr ʔš ʔš ʔlšmʿ*) and in the Ammonite Tel Siran Bottle (KAI 308:4-5: *hkrm wh{.}gnt whʔthr wʔšht*).¹⁸ On an Ammonite seal one notes also the lack of the expected article with the word *mlk*, a case similar to those on the Hebrew seals discussed previously.¹⁹

ʔšy[w] bn ml[k]. AVISHUR and HELTZER consider the absence of the article a sign of the archaic character of the seals. See AVISHUR-HELTZER, Studies, 73. One may argue also that the word *mlk* in these seals is a personal name that is known from rare attestations in the Hebrew Bible and epigraphic sources. See ZADOK, Pre-Hellenistic, 433. Indeed, this seems to be the opinion of AVIGAD and SASS who translate the legend of the seal: “Belonging to Ašay[aw] son of Mel[ek].”

¹² It is possible that the omission of the article with the hieratic numerals was an orthographic convention. See GOGEL, Grammar, 175.

¹³ Lachish 13:3: *[J ʔt . ʔšpt*. Since the text is short and broken scholars resort to different hypotheses in order to explain this puzzling omission. See GOGEL, Grammar, 174.

¹⁴ GOGEL, Grammar, 175. DOBBS-ALLSOPP, Hebrew Inscriptions, 13, speculates that the article could refer to the number of days for some ceremony or a journey.

¹⁵ KAI 14:1: *mlk ʔšmnʿzr*; SEGERT, Grammar, no. 83.41: *ʔnk ʿbdy bn ʿbdʿlmn ʿrwdy*.

¹⁶ For more examples see DAHOOD, Canaanite-Phoenician Influence, 198-199.

¹⁷ For an overview of the article in Phoenician see FIRMAGE, Definite Article, and especially GZELLA, Entstehung, for the syntax of the article in Phoenician and the importance of these apparent anomalies for tracing the origin of the West-Semitic article.

¹⁸ YUN, Transjordanian Languages, 759.

¹⁹ AVIGAD-SASS, Corpus, no. 861. SIVAN has no satisfactory explanation for this omission. See SIVAN, On the Grammar, 228.

From this short overview one concludes that the “inconsistencies” of the use of the article were rather common in the Northwest Semitic languages. Hence, one should not be surprised to find them in the Hebrew Bible in general and in the book of Qoheleth in particular.

Observations on the linguistic study of the article

It seems that the scholars who studied the article in the Hebrew Bible did not always consider the complexity of issues that involve definiteness, indefiniteness and the article. Indeed, as KOSESKA-TOSZEWA and GARGOV observe: “the definiteness/indefiniteness category belongs to the class of extremely general linguistic semantic categories, any approach to which has inevitably to deal with the most fundamental issues of linguistics.”²⁰ The traditional idea of the article is, however, narrowly focused on the fact that the article should refer to something known, particular or specific. This concept of the article and definiteness explains only a small part of the attestations of the use and non-use of the article in the Hebrew Bible and does not consider the variety of articles and their uses found in the languages of the world. Modern linguistic research on definiteness and the article points to a few fundamental facts that should not be overlooked.²¹

The most important of these facts are the relevance of the context and the need for the collaboration of the participants in a communication act in order to understand the reason for the use of the article in a particular case. Indeed, it is only in the context, when a particular world of references is established between the participants in the communication act, that the use or non-use of the article is meaningful. For example, the definite article in the sentence “The dog attacked me” is understandable if the preceding sentence is “I saw a dog this morning.” Similarly, the nurse who enters the operating theater and, using the definite article, asks “Who is the anesthetist today?” appeals to the context in which the presence of an anesthetist is expected. In the latter case the referent of the noun “anesthetist” is unknown to her and yet the use of the article is natural. This example shows too how important is the collaboration of the hearer who must accept the definite reference as such and interpret it. This being the state of the matter, the immediate consequence for our research is that many cases of the use and non-use of the article may be difficult to understand because of our imperfect comprehension of the context and of the author’s thought.

²⁰ *Semantic Category*, 11.

²¹ An accessible synthesis of modern research can be found in LYONS, *Definiteness*.

The problems with understanding definiteness call for a new definition. According to contemporary linguistic research it can be defined as a grammatical category which is on par with tense, number or gender and that expresses such concepts as identifiability, inclusiveness, uniqueness and familiarity. The prototypical concept of this category is probably identifiability. Since it is a grammatical category, it does not exclude uses other than prototypical ones. The article can be seen, therefore, as a means of encoding this category.²²

Having in mind the complexity of the study of definiteness, both in the Northwest Semitic languages and in linguistics in general, we shall now turn to the book of Qoheleth in order to examine anew the use and non-use of the article.

General observations on the study of the article in the book of Qoheleth

There are two fundamental difficulties with the study of the article in the Hebrew Bible in general. The first is the Masoretic vocalization; the second is the lack of a general and diachronic study of the article in the Hebrew Bible.

It is widely recognized that many instances of the non-consonantal article, that is, the one that appears as a vowel under the prepositions אַ, אָ and אֵ, are due to the *Naqdanim* and so do not belong to an earlier, original form of the text.²³ It follows that the article with these prepositions may or may not reflect the uses of the author of the book. Hence, it would seem to be methodologically appropriate to exclude the occurrences of the non-consonantal article from the study. This radical approach, however, will not be adopted because the non-consonantal article in the book of Qoheleth appears to be in general employed in a similar way to the consonantal article.²⁴ Moreover, both the consonantal text and the vocalization display well established use of the generic article.²⁵ Since this use of the article is frequent in the book of Qoheleth, the exclusion of the non-consonantal article from the study would mean the exclusion of many interesting study cases. The cases of a problematic non-consonantal article will be judged one by one, bearing in mind the possibility of their spurious origin.²⁶

²² For a detailed explanation of this definition see LYONS, *Definiteness*, 253-281.

²³ BARR, *Determination*, 325-333.

²⁴ Another reason for choosing the study of the actual Hebrew text as transmitted by the Masoretes is the fact that if one chooses not to consider the vocalic article some problematic cases disappear, but others arise. Thus, one ends up studying the difficulties that do not exist and leaves aside the real problems of the Masoretic text.

²⁵ SCHORCH, *Determination*, 309-310.

²⁶ The vocalic article is almost certainly a Masoretic addition in מִהֲלֵעָנִי יוֹדֵעַ (6,8) and בְּמִקְוִיִּם רַבִּים (10,6). Accepting this possibility, a question arises. Didn't the Masoretes know such

The need to compare the use of the article in the book of Qoheleth and other books of the Hebrew Bible brings another methodological question: should the book of Qoheleth be compared with narrative or poetic sections of the Bible? This question is particularly relevant to the study of the article because Hebrew poetry has its own peculiarities of use, most notably its frequent omission. It seems that most appropriate would be to compare the book of Qoheleth with other wisdom books, particularly with Proverbs and the extant Hebrew portions of Ben-Sirach. Such a systematic comparison is, however, out of the scope of the present study and will be considered only in part.

The article in generic statements

Generic statements are utterances which convey general observations and conclusions about reality. An example of a generic statement is Qoh 5,9:

אִהָב לְכֶסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַע וְכֶסֶף וּמִי־אִהָב בְּהֶמְוֶן לֹא תִבּוֹאָה גְּסוּתָהּ הֶבֶל:

He that loves silver is never satisfied with silver; nor he that loves abundance with his income; this also is vanity.²⁷

Two preliminary remarks are in necessary. First, one should keep in mind that the interpretation of a generic statement as such arises not only from the formulation of the noun phrase but also from the meaning of a sentence as whole. It follows that the generic statements can be formulated both with arthrous and anarthrous subjects as well as with singular and plural subjects.²⁸ Second, by their nature generic statements contain the error of missing quantification, an example of an incomplete formulation.²⁹ In everyday use the generic statements are usually interpreted with universal quantification (“all,” “every”). It is, however, to be stressed, that generic statements should be interpreted in the sense of what is normal or typical for members of a class. Consequently, generic statements may employ a non-specific reference to a member of the class

a simple “rule”—that the article must occur both on the noun and on adjective? If so, why did they waive it?

²⁷ All translations are the author’s own.

²⁸ For example, in English: 1. A dog has four legs. 2. The dog has four legs. 3. Dogs have four legs. For a brief survey of generics see LYONS, *Definiteness*, 179-198, and CHESTERMAN, *On Definiteness*, 32-40.74-78.

²⁹ AJDUKIEWICZ, *Pragmatic Logic*, 56: “The error of an incomplete formulation is committed when an essential element of an expression is omitted. Thus, for instance, if we say that ‘Italians are hot-tempered,’ without indicating whether we mean all Italians, or some of them only, or a majority of them, then we commit an error of making an incomplete formulation, since we leave out an essential element of a formulation which is intended to be a statement. Without that element the formulation in question is neither true nor false, and hence is not a statement. It may become true, but it also may become false, according to the way in which we complete it. The error of incomplete formulation as described in the example given above is called missing quantification.”

with the article. These two remarks about the generic statement are useful to explain many occurrences of the article in the book of Qoheleth.

From my perusal it appears that the use or non-use of the article does not entail a generic or non-generic reading.³⁰ Indeed, one finds singular and plural, arthrous and anarthrous noun phrases in generic statements:

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל אשר לא ידע להזהר עוד:

Better is a poor but wise child than an old but foolish king who knows not to receive admonition any more. (Qoh 4,13)

אם-ישך הנחש בלוא-לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון:

If the snake bites without incantation, the charmer is of no avail. (Qoh 10,11)

הצדיקים והחכמים ועבודיהם ביד האלהים

The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God. (Qoh 9,1)

כי יש דברים הרבה מרבים הבל מה יתר לאדם:

Since there are many words that increase vanity, what is a benefit for the man? (Qoh 6,11)

The fact that the article may or may not be used in generic statements with great freedom accounts in a significant part for the apparent chaos in the use of the article in the book of Qoheleth. Indeed, in conformity with its genre, the book abounds with generic statements. The occurrence or the lack of the article in them must be interpreted case by case since the generic nature of the statement is not the reason for a particular use of the article.

One of the frequent reasons for the use and non-use of the article is the mental representation of the arthrous noun as specific, definite and seen in opposition to others. In this case the lack of the article signals a more hypothetical and general level of the statement (achieved with the English indefinite article, bare plural or quantifier “some”) whereas the appearance of the article focuses the attention on the distinctive characteristics of the referent of the noun. Qoh 8,14 illustrates this point:

יש-הבל אשר נעשה על-הארץ אשר יש צדיקים אשר מגיע אליהם כמעשה הרשעים ויש

רשעים שפגיע אליהם כמעשה הצדיקים אמרתי שגם-זה הבל:

There is a vanity that occurs in the world: that there are righteous men, unto whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men, to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous—I said that this also is vanity.

At the first sight it may seem puzzling why the author speaks in the same verse once about *רשעים* and *צדיקים* and the other time about *הצדיקים* and *הרשעים*. A closer look reveals that the articles with these groups are used symmetrically. Moreover, when the author does not prefix the article he refers to the casual

³⁰ A similar conclusion can be drawn from the examples of the generic use of the non-predicative participle collected in v. PEURSEN, *Verbal System*, 228-230.

existence of a certain group of wicked/righteous men or to an indefinite number of cases of single wicked/righteous men. This blurred picture of some wicked/righteous men is contrasted with the precise image of the wicked/righteous men to whom the author refers with the article. By prefixing the article he portrays them as a specific group that can be identified by their quality of being wicked/righteous and by their particular conduct (מעשה). Since the arthrous nouns הצדיקים and הרשעים occur in the construct chain, the bigger picture built by the author is the following: it may happen that some righteous men are requited as they are behaving in the way that is typical to the wicked and vice versa. In short, the article in this verse creates an opposition between a group seen as a few single members and a group seen as a collective. The author employs the article to build a perspective in which he sees the object of his discourse.

This idea of different perspective toward objects and thoughts illuminates the use and non-use of the article in generic statements in overall terms. I suggest the following distinctions:

1. An anarthrous singular noun portrays the referent as one random member of a class that exemplifies its members. This use is comparable to an English noun with the indefinite article.
2. An arthrous singular noun singles the referent out of the class, depicts the referent seen in its individuality and considers him as a study case valid for the entire class.
3. An anarthrous plural noun produces a mental representation of a certain numbers of members of a class seen as separate and individual referents. This used is comparable with the English “some” followed by a plural noun.
4. An arthrous plural noun portrays the class as one collectivity without highlighting the distinctiveness of each member.³¹

Since the article is used to present the subjects of generic statements in different perspectives, each verse must be examined first separately and then in a wider context. Only in this way may one discover how the author uses the article to convey the nuances of his thought. This point is illustrated by Qoh 2,21-22. In these verses, although the article with the noun אדם in Qoh 2,22 is non-consonantal and thus due to the *Naqdanim*, its use epitomizes the nuances of the article in generic statements. In Qoh 2,21 the noun אדם appears without the article:

³¹ A plural noun in generic statements does not refer *per se* to all members of a class since, as explained above, the universal quantification is missing.

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמְלוֹ בְּחָכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמְלָבוּ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הַבֵּל
וְרָעָה רַבָּה:

For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, and with knowledge, and with skill; yet to a man that has not labored therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

In the next verse, however, the noun אָדָם occurs with the article:

כִּי מֵה־הַזֶּה לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לְבוֹ שֶׁהוּא עָמַל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

For what does a man get for all his labor and the striving of his heart he labored under the sun?

The occurrence of the article in Qoh 2,22 can hardly be explained by anaphoric reference to the previous verse. Indeed, the author's thought develops with two dependent but clearly separated statements. In Qoh 2,21 he considers a study case of a certain, unidentified man. In this verse the anarthrous noun אָדָם is almost the equivalent of an indefinite pronoun. The picture that this verse generates can be paraphrased: "Look, sometimes somebody who ...". Qoh 2,22 provides a motivation for the judgment delivered in the previous verse by evoking a truth that is valid for all human beings. Thus Qoh 2,22 speaks not about the case of a man discussed one verse earlier but about every man or all men in general. It follows that the noun אָדָם refers to the class and not a particular individual. The reference to the members of the class is made with the arthrous noun in order to single out one member as an example of a typical fate of the members of the class. The use of the article with the noun אָדָם in these verses is sound and meaningful in spite of the first impression of being chaotic. Moreover, it contributes to deepening the thought, which considers a particular case (Qoh 2,21) in light of a general truth (Qoh 2,22).

Since the occurrence or the lack of the article does not encode the generic or non-generic reading of an utterance but is used to establish the perspective of the statement, it is not surprising to find the article also with abstract nouns and concepts. The general tendency in the case of concepts and abstract nouns is the lack of the article. Hence, when it appears it should be considered particularly meaningful and the reason for its occurrence should be diligently investigated. The use of the article with the noun "evil" can be taken as an example of the typical behavior of abstract nouns. This noun occurs without the article in its masculine form in Qoh 4,17; 6,2; 8,11.12; 9,3 and in its feminine form in Qoh 2,21; 5,12.15; 6,1; 7,14; 10,5; 11,2.10.³² However, in 8,11 and 12,1 arthrous feminine forms are found and need to be explained as also in these instances the nouns have the usual, abstract meaning. Qoh 8,11 is partic-

³² This list is not exhaustive. For a comprehensive list of the occurrences of the word "evil" see SCHOORS, Preacher, vol. II, 145. Note that some of the attestations can be considered adjectives and not nouns.

ularly interesting as the noun “evil” occurs in it twice, one time with the article and another time without it:

אֲשֶׁר אֵין-נֶעֱשֶׂה פִּתְגָם מֵעֲשֶׂה הָרָעָה מְהֵרָה עַל-כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי-הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע:

Because a sentence against an evil deed is not executed swiftly, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

The noun “evil” in the infinitival phrase *לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע* has a wide meaning “bad things” that can be paraphrased with an adverb (“to behave wrongly”) and thus the article is missing. Its occurrence in the construct chain *פִּתְגָם מֵעֲשֶׂה הָרָעָה* is due to the fact that the author builds a specific case and employs the article to delimit the situation to which he refers. The apparent contradiction becomes understandable when the context is accounted for. A similar interaction of the context explains the occurrence of the article with the noun “evil” in 12,1:

וְזָכַר אֶת-בְּוֹרְאֵיךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחוֹרְתֶיךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָבֹאוּ יָמֵי הָרָעָה וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵין-לִי בָהֶם חֶפְצִי:

Remember then your vigor in the days of your youth, before the days of evil come and the years arrive of which you will say: “I have no pleasure in them.”

This occurrence of the article may seem particularly problematic when one recalls that in 7,14 Qoheleth speaks simply about a day of fortune (*בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה*) and a day of evil (*וּבְיוֹם רָעָה*). Again, a look on the entire verse 12,1 reveals the reason for the occurrence of the article: the author wants to oppose the particular time-reference to the time of youth, which is grammatically definite because of the suffixed pronoun on the noun “youth”, with another specific time-reference, namely the reference to the period of misfortune. Thus, the use of the article in this case has little to do with the definiteness of the abstract noun itself.

Finally, it is interesting to confront the use of the article in generic statements as found in the book of Qoheleth with its similar use in other books of the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 12 of Proverbs is a good test sample for such a comparison as it contains a series of generic statements. It is noteworthy that in the entire chapter one finds only one occurrence of the article, which is non-consonantal and thus can be non-original (Prov 12,21). Although a larger study is needed, the non-use of the article in the generic statements in Prov 12 contrasted with the uses found in the book of Qoheleth shows the extent to which the languages of these two books are different.

As it was stressed previously, the impression of chaos with regard to the article in the book of Qoheleth is caused mostly by the author’s choice to build different perspectives on subjects in the statements that contain general observations. Because of this choice it is necessary to analyze each occurrence of the article in its context. The same is true for the use of the article with certain categories of words, although in these cases some patterns can be discovered.

The elements of nature

Since the elements of nature are an identifiable and familiar reference, it is expected that the article will occur with them. Indeed, this is the major pattern in the book of Qoheleth. The article is found regularly with rivers (1,7), sea (1,7), heavens (1,13; 2,3; 3,1; 5,1; 10,20), clouds (11,3-4; 12,2), stars (12,2), moon (12,2) and sun (1,3.5.9.14; 2,11.17.18.19.20.22; 3,16; 4.1.3.7.15; 5,12.17; 6,1.12; 7,11; 8,9.15.17; 9,3.6.9.13; 10,5; 11,7; 12,2). However, the fact that the elements of nature are known and generally identifiable does not exclude the possibility that the author may choose to portray them as non-specific and therefore not employ the article. In some cases the use or non-use of the article produces significant change in meaning and thus dictates the author's choices. Some examples illustrate this.

The word אָרֶץ is usually used with the article (1,4; 3,21; 5,1; 7,20; 8,14.16; 10,7; 11,2.3; 12,7) but in 5,8 and 10,16-17 it occurs without the article. One should, however, note the difference in the meaning of the word אָרֶץ when used with and without the article. Indeed, when the article is employed the word אָרֶץ means consistently "the planet Earth" or part of it. This usage is contrasted with the anarthrous occurrences of the word אָרֶץ, which refer to a country or state, a political entity, not the planet. It is impossible to know if the use of the article created this difference of meaning in the eyes of the author or if the lack of the article in 5,8 and 10,16-17 is due to the generic nature of these verses. In any case, this is one of the examples which show that the article is used not erratically but meaningfully. Similarly, a nice difference in meaning can be found with the word גֶּשֶׁם. In 12,2 when it designates an element of the world on par with other elements, it occurs with the article. On the other hand, in 11,3, when it refers simply to water that fills clouds, it is anarthrous. This difference could be also explained in terms of specificity or identifiability: rain seen as an element of the world is a specific meteorological phenomenon while rain in clouds is just an unidentifiable amount of water.

The use of the article with the word רוּחַ is somewhat more complicated as it shows the interaction of the semantics of the word and the role of the article. Indeed, the word רוּחַ has three basic semantic fields in the book of Qoheleth. It refers to an atmospheric phenomenon or spirit as a psychological dimension and a vital force. Moreover, it is used metaphorically, in parallel with הֶבֶל to portray a fugacious reality.³³ A choice of the unambiguous meaning is not always possible and maybe even not intended by the author who likes to play with words and their associations.³⁴ When רוּחַ is used metaphorically it has no

³³ The metaphorical use is, of course, based on the literal meaning "wind."

³⁴ SCHOORS distinguishes only two meanings, wind and spirit. See SCHOORS, Preacher, vol. II, 161-165.

article.³⁵ The lack of the article in this case is explained by the fact that the parallel term *הַבֶּל* also has no article and by the fact that the use of the article would make the image more specific and particular while the intended reference is a vague reality. When *רוּחַ* refers to the natural element or a vital force it has the article.³⁶ In three instances this regular usage is, however, overridden by other factors that influence the use of the article. In 7,8 and 11,4 the word *רוּחַ* is anarthrous because the author has chosen this particular perspective for his generic statement. Indeed, both verses have a quasi-proverbial flavor and it is possible that by the non-use of the article the author wanted to imitate the style of Proverbs. In 3,19 the article is not used with *רוּחַ* because it is followed by *אֶחָד*, another word that expresses a specific reference.³⁷

A problematic case of the lack of the article which involves an element of nature is 6,5. In this verse the article is lacking with the word “sun” which in all other occurrences in the book of Qoheleth (34 times) is arthrous. On the one hand, the omission of the article in Qoh 6,5 may simply be a *lapsus linguae* which happens even to the best writers. On the other hand, one may think that the lack of the article is intentional and intended to reinforce the negation. Indeed, if the article is employed, the meaning of the phrase is that the subject did not see the sun, the celestial body; but without the article the meaning is stronger: the subject did not see not only the sun known to everybody but any sun. The use of the article would delimit the scope of negation to one object while its lack contributes to its widening.

(The) God and (the) man

Out of 40 occurrences of the word *אֱלֹהִים*, 32 are with the prefixed article. Although the word *אֱלֹהִים* is attested in the Hebrew Bible widely with and without the article, its preponderant occurrence with *אֱלֹהִים* in the book of Qoheleth requires an interpretation. Some scholars hold that in this case the article is used to depersonalize God and to speak about him in the sense of “divinity.”³⁸ I cannot agree with such an opinion because this would mean that the article has a particular use with nouns which renders them abstract. This is obviously not true as the article can appear with abstract nouns and concepts but generally does not. Hence, it is impossible that the author would employ the article in order to elevate the concept of God to a higher level of abstractness (“divinity”). It is, however, true that the use of the article with *אֱלֹהִים* is in fact a part of the

³⁵ 1,14.17; 2,11.17.26; 4,4.6.16; 6,9. The regularity of this usage indicates that the article in the prepositional phrase *לְרוּחַ* in 5,15 is a Masoretic addition and should be removed.

³⁶ 1,6; 8,8; 11,5; 12,7.

³⁷ LYONS, *Definiteness*, 98.

³⁸ SCHOORS, *Preacher*, vol. II, 110-111.

author's communication strategy and rhetoric. On the one hand, he never speaks about the God of Israel or uses the proper name of the God of Israel in order to make his book sound universalistic. On the other hand, since he is a pious Jew, when he speaks about God, he has certainly the God of Israel in mind. The use of the article with the word אֱלֹהִים reflects a compromise between the need for speaking about the unique God and for remaining universalistic. With the vast use of the article the author signals that he refers to one, particular God while by omitting the article in certain instances he remains sufficiently vague to admit a more universal idea of God.³⁹ In any case, the article with the word אֱלֹהִים is used because of the uniqueness of the reference and not in order to create an abstract image of God.

The occurrences of the article with the word אָדָם are a good example of regular and meaningful use of the article by the author of the book Qoheleth. In fact, this word with the article has the general meaning of "humankind"; when used without the article it refers to an individual, and in the latter usage it acquires almost an indefinite meaning akin to the English indeterminate pronoun "some, any."⁴⁰ The meaning "humankind" is particularly evident in the construct chain בְּנֵי הָאָדָם employed 10 times in Qoheleth. The indefinite use is nicely illustrated by Qoh 2,21, which was discussed above.

The article in expressions of time

Expressions of time offer another occasion to see how a particular perspective on a subject is reflected in the use of the article. Indeed, time can be seen both as a specific and identifiable moment and as an unspecified period. Correspondingly, the article may or may not be used in expressions of time. The difference between a non-specific and specific reference to time can be exemplified by use of the article with the word עַתָּה. This word is usually anarthrous since the reference is to time in general, without indicating a particular moment. In some verses the non-specificity of the reference seems to be difficult to comprehend at first sight but a closer look reveals its logic. For instance, in 3,1-8 Qoheleth speaks about time in reference to a number of activities. At first sight it may seem that the article is erroneously lacking since the author wants to affirm that there is a specific moment in which a particular activity should be undertaken and therefore the article should be used. The lack of the article indicates, however, that his point is different. Indeed, he wants to affirm the mere existence of occasions in which it is appropriate to do certain things and not to

³⁹ The instances in which the article is used or not are arbitrary; therefore the impression that the word אֱלֹהִים "stands with or without article seemingly indiscriminately" (ISAKSSON, *Studies*, 145).

⁴⁰ SCHOORS, *Preacher*, vol. II, 46-49.

indicate that there is only one, specific moment in which a particular activity can be performed. The latter kind of reference is found with the word *עַתָּה* in 10,17:

אַשְׁרֵי־דָ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֵלֶכֶד בְּיַחְזוּרִים וְשָׂרֵי־דָ בְּעֵת יֵאָכְלוּ בְּגִבּוֹרָה וְלֹא בְּשֵׁתִי:

Happy are you, o land whose king is a free man and whose ministers eat at the proper time, in strength, and not in drunkenness.

Here the time reference is to a specific moment during the day; hence the word *עַתָּה* is properly accompanied by the article.

There is a tendency to use the article with expressions of time because the moment to which they refer is seen as specific or because the time of their reference is naturally identifiable. The first explanation is valid for the article with *הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים* in 2,16 or in the prepositional phrase *בַּיּוֹם* in 12,3. The second justification accounts for the frequent use of the article with words such as day and night, morning and evening.

The article and the organization of information

Throughout our analysis it has become clear that the use and non-use of the article is motivated largely by the perspective that the author wants to convey. The article is therefore a means of organizing information. It may mark the topic of the sentence in opposition to a comment which contains a new piece of information. It may also be used with an element that is in the focused position of the sentence.⁴¹ Qoh 10,19 illustrates very well the use of the article as means of focusing and organizing information:

לְשׂוֹזֵק עֲשִׂים לָחֵם וַיִּזֶן יִשְׂמַח חַיִּים וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת־הַכֹּל:

A banquet is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry: but money answers every need.

The verse lists three positive objects with the emphasis on the last one since it presents a radical and global solution to all needs. The focus on the last phrase is increased with the article, which otherwise seems unexpected. A similar explanation can be accepted for Qoh 6,7:

⁴¹ LYONS, *Definiteness*, 227-236. The use of the article in these instances may produce the impression that the article functions also as an emphatic particle. See CROATTO, L' *article*. It must be then stressed that "focus" or "emphasis" are not independent usages of the article but are the effects obtained at the level of the text and that they are due to the basic grammatical meaning of the article as a means of expressing definiteness. In this context one may wish to recollect that in the language of medieval Spanish Hebrew poetry the letter ה with a *šwa* could be added at the beginning of a word for emphasis (for example הלי, "indeed to me"). See GOLDENBERG, *Hebrew*, 656.

כָּל־עֲמַל הָאָדָם לְפִיָּהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלָא:

All the labor of man is for the sake of his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.

Here the focus is on the appetite which is never satisfied in spite of all human efforts. The opposition between two noun phrases is explicit and strong thanks to וְגַם. Masterful use of opposition can be seen also in the formulation of a pro-verb in 9.4:

לְכֶלֶב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת:

A living dog is better than a dead lion.

The use of the article (with its individualizing and demonstrative force) contributes to build the following picture: any dog that is living is better than this lion which is dead. The article on “lion” reinforces the opposition between one and many which is implied by the lack of the article with “dog.”

Qoheleth’s discourse is frequently organized in what may be called “pictures” and “case studies.” Each of these can be seen as a small and separate world of references which serves to deliver a specific statement or a particular piece of information. The use and non-use of the article is one of the means of constructing these “pictures” and “case studies.” It follows that the use of the article with any word may differ because the world of the references in that “picture” is different. In other words, the fact that the article appears with a certain word in chapter 3 does not necessarily mean that the same word will have the article in chapter 7. Therefore one should expect logic and regularity of the use of the article within the boundaries of a “picture” or “case study” rather than throughout the entire book. Indeed, this is the case, as can be seen in the following examples.

In 2.4-9 Qoheleth speaks about his enterprise and his amassing riches. Although the single components of Qoheleth’s wealth are specific from a semantic point of view (as they belong to a particular person), they are presented in a generic perspective without the article. It is noteworthy that, with two exceptions, the article is never used:

⁴הִגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנֵיתִי לִי בָתִּים נִטְעַתִּי לִי כַרְמִים: ⁵עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִזְזוֹת וּפְרָדִסִּים וְנִטְעַתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־פְּרִי: ⁶עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרֵכּוֹת מַיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יָעַר צוֹמֵחַ עֵצִים: ⁷קָנִיתִי עֲבָדִים וּשְׂפָחוֹת וּבְנֵי־בַיִת הָיָה לִי גַם מִקְנֶה בָקָר וְצֹאן הַרְבֵּה הָיָה לִי מִכֹּל שְׂהָיוּ לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלַם: ⁸כָּנַסְתִּי לִי גַם־כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּסְגָלַת מְלָכִים וְהַמְדִּינֹת עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׂרִים וְשָׂרוֹת וְתַעֲנֻנֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם שָׂדֶה וְשָׂדוֹת: ⁹וְגִדַּלְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכֹּל שְׂהָיוּ לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלַם אֶף חֲכֻמָּתִי עָמְדָה לִי:

I multiplied my possessions. I built myself houses; I planted vineyards. I made myself gardens and groves and I planted every kind of fruit tree in them. I made myself pools of water, to irrigate with them a forest springing up with trees. I bought male and female slaves and stewards; also I had cattle, a lot of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem. I further amassed for myself silver and gold and treasures of kings and of the provinces; and I got myself male and female singers and the luxuries of the sons of men, coffers and coffers

of them. Thus I became great and I gained more wealth than anyone before me in Jerusalem. In addition, my wisdom stood by me.

Two occurrences of the article in this passage are by no means erratic. The article with אדם appears in conformity to its use when the word refers to mankind. The article with the word מדינות is used because the reference is not to some provinces but the provinces par excellence, the provinces of the Persian Empire. Besides these two instances in which the article is used in a meaningful manner, the article is never used, giving the impression of coherency and regularity of its non-use within the “picture” built by the author in Qoh 2,4-9.

Another case of a consistent and methodical use of the article is found in the famous poem on the darkness of death in chapter 12:

בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיָּזְעוּ שְׁמַרְי הַבַּיִת וְהִתְעוּתוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי הַחַיִל וּבִטְלוּ הַטַּחְנוֹת כִּי מַעֲטוֹ וַחֲשֻׁכוֹ הָרְאוּת
בְּאַרְבּוֹת: ³ וְסִגְרוּ דְלֹתַיִם בְּשׁוֹק בְּשֹׁפֶל קוֹל הַטַּחְנָה וַיְקוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר וַיִּשְׁחוּ כְּלִבְנוֹת הַשִּׁיר:
⁴ גַּם מִגְבֵּה יֵרְאוּ וַחֲתַחְתִּים בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּנְאַץ הַשֶּׁקֶד וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֲנֹב וַתִּפֹּר הָאֲבִינָה כִּי־הִלֵּךְ הָאָדָם
⁵ אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמוֹ וְסִבְבוּ בְּשׁוֹק הַסַּפְדִּים: ⁶ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְתַּק חֲבֵל הַפֶּסֶף וַתִּרְץ גִּלְת הַזֹּהָב
וַתִּשְׁבֶּר כַּד עַל־הַמְּבֹוע וְנָרַץ הַגִּלְגַּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר:

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the men of valor shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and the ladies that peer through the windows shall grow dim, and the doors shall be shut in the street, when the sound of the mill is low and one shall start up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of the song shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and terrors shall be in the way; and the almond-tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be burdened, and the caper berry shall fail because the man sets out for his eternal abode; and the mourners shall go about in the street; before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is shattered, and the jar is broken at the spring and the wheel is shattered into the pit; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

The frequent occurrence of the article in this passage is noteworthy.⁴² Moreover, it is not immediately clear why the article should occur with some words, for instance with “mill,” “bird” or “grasshopper.” Should one think that the author had in mind a specific mill that is known to the reader or that there is a certain species of birds which sing on ominous days and they are referred to as “the bird”? It seems that a separate explanation of each article would not be convincing. Indeed, the context larger than the sentence must be taken into account. In Qoh 12,3-7 the author transfers the reader into an imaginary world

⁴² The article is not used only with four nouns, דְלֹתַיִם, גְבֵה, חַתַּחְתִּים, and כַּד. However, the lack of the article with these words does not nullify the general effect of the occurrence of the article. Moreover, the occurrence of the article with all the words would seem not natural to the reader as in the normal language pattern arthrous and anarthrous words alternate. The author, who was conscious of the natural language uses, chose to omit the article in a few instances.

and builds a precise picture of it. The frequent occurrence of the article signals to the reader that he should be familiar with the references in this world and that he should be able to identify them.⁴³ The use of the article helps to portray this specific world and time as a unified and tangible reality.

In conclusion, the author of the book of Qoheleth is aware of the textual effects of the article. He uses it appropriately to organize his discourse into single parts of information and to build and convey his own perspective.

Non-use of the article before the *nota accusativi*

In seven instances Qoheleth uses the *nota accusativi* אַח before an anarthrous word. In four of them (4,4; 8,9; 9,1; 12,14) the article is not used with a word that follows the syntagma אַח־כֵּן. These occurrences are not as problematic as they may seem since this syntactic option is well attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1,21.29.30; 8,21; 39,23; 41,48; Lev 4,35; 11,15; Num 3,42; Deut 2,34; Josh 10,39; 2 Sam 6,1; 2 Kgs 25,9; Jer 25,23; 47,4; Ezek 27,5; Job 41,26; Est 2,3; 8,11; 9,29). Moreover, the word כֵּן implies determination when the article does not occur because of its semantics. Indeed, the word כֵּן expresses inclusiveness and in this function it overlaps with the article.⁴⁴ This is why the noun כֵּן implies a certain determination and is treated like a determinate noun.⁴⁵ In 7,14 the *nota accusativi* occurs before the demonstrative pronoun הַזֶּה. This case also poses no great difficulty since demonstratives are inherently definite and hence the “rule” (or rather our expectation) of the use of the *nota accusativi* before a determinate object is not violated.⁴⁶ One should observe that in three of the seven problematic cases (8,9; 9,1; 12,14) the *nota accusativi* is employed before the syntagma הַזֶּה כֵּן. Therefore, the two explanations provided above concur in these cases to account for the use of the *nota accusativi*.

The use of אַח with an indeterminate noun in 3,15 and 7,7 does not pose an insurmountable difficulty, as the *nota accusativi* may be used in the Hebrew Bible to indicate clearly the object also with indeterminate nouns (Ex 21,28; Lev 26,5; Num 21,9; Is 10,2; 41,7; 50,4; 64,4).⁴⁷ One wonders, of course, why in these two instances the author did not use the article. The reason is the generic nature of the statements in which these direct objects occur. In 3,15 אַח־גִּרְדֵי

⁴³ LYONS, *Definiteness*, 5-6: “The idea is that the use of the definite article directs the hearer to the referent of the noun phrase by signaling that he is in a position to identify it.”

⁴⁴ LYONS, *Definiteness*, 32.148.

⁴⁵ JOÜON-MURAOKA, § 125 h.

⁴⁶ LYONS, *Definiteness*, 107; JOÜON-MURAOKA, § 125 g.

⁴⁷ JOÜON-MURAOKA, § 125 h. For a possible occurrence of אַח before an indeterminate noun in Epigraphic Hebrew see DAVIES, *Use*, 19-20.

refers to “whatever is pursued” in contrast to the arthrous אֶת־הַנִּדְרָה “the one who is pursued.” Similarly, in 7,7 the article and the *nota accusativi* are used in order to disambiguate the syntactic roles of the nouns in the generic statement. In the first stych the article clearly marks the subject while in the second stych the *nota accusativi* indicates the direct object. It is clear that in both cases the author wants to maintain the broad scope of his statement, and this explains apparent inconsistencies.

In conclusion, the non-use of the article with the words that follow the *nota accusativi* poses no problems, if other similar examples in the Hebrew Bible are considered. The use of אֶת before an indeterminate noun is an example of how Qoheleth explores all syntactic possibilities available in Biblical Hebrew and cannot be considered erroneous.

Conclusions

It is true that the use and non-use of the article in the book of Qoheleth may be perplexing at first sight. It was not my goal to treat exhaustively all possible exceptions and discrepancies. My intent was rather to show that careful consideration of these cases leads to discovery of possible explanations that are valid for single instances. This method of investigating the article is necessary because its use is highly contextual. Moreover, the article is a powerful tool in advancing discourse and thought. Indeed, it serves as a means of organizing information and it contributes to building a specific perspective in which the author perceives reality. All these suggest that one should try to understand the nuances of the meaning that the use or non-use of the article may produce and judge problematic cases in the light of these nuances. In this way one finds that the article in the book of Qoheleth is used not in a chaotic or erratic manner but is employed meaningfully in order to convey the intricacies of the author’s message. The use of the article is only a small detail of the peculiar style and vocabulary characteristic of the author of this formidable book. Nevertheless, these details confirm the characterization of Qoheleth as one of the first great Jewish thinkers made by Robert GORDIS⁴⁸ already a half century ago:

In any age Qoheleth would be an outstanding figure and his style would naturally mirror this characteristic difference. Moreover, his task was further complicated by the fact that he was a pioneer in the use of the Hebrew for quasi-philosophic purposes, a use to which the language had not been previously applied. A thousand years later, medieval translators like the Tibbonides, who rendered Saadiah, Maimonides, Judah Halevi and other Jewish philosophers into Hebrew,

⁴⁸ GORDIS, Qoheleth and Qumran, 407.

still found that the language had not yet fully developed the flexibility, precision and vocabulary necessary for the treatment of philosophic themes. As a linguistic pioneer in this use of the language, Qoheleth found no models in Hebrew literature to imitate, no earlier texts that would lead him to classicize or archaize his style. He wrote as he thought.

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