

ראש | *rō'sh** I; ראשה | *ri'shâ*; ראשם | *rō'shâ*; מראשות | *m^era'^ašôt*

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I. Root and Occurrences. Heb. *rō'sh* is a primary noun deriving from a Common Semitic root generally identified as **ra'sh*. Friedrich, however, postulates **ru'shu*, which developed into the segholate *rō'eš* with a relatively late audible *aleph*.

The noun is attested in many Semitic languages. It appears already in Old Akkadian as *rāšum*, with the meanings “head, beginning, peak.” This became Bab. *rēšu(m)* as a term for the part of the body as well as prominent geographical or architectural features (ridge, peak, pinnacle; bridgehead); it was also used as a temporal term (the beginning of a time period, the first appearance of the new moon, the beginning of a reign or activity) and to denote qualitative features (quality, excellence). Already at Mari we find *rēšu* as a title of high officials (*ša rēši*; cf. Heb. *sārîs*) and military commanders, but also with the meaning “slave, servant”—perhaps because here (as in Arabic) it functioned as a numeral.

The semantic range of Ugar. *r'sh* (pl. *r'shm*) is similarly broad. One text speaks of bowing one's head to one's knees as a sign of mourning;⁴ cf. 1 K. 18:42.

The Amarna tablets contain the Canaanite gloss *ru-šu-nu* (glossing Akk. *rēšu-nu*). Syr. *rēšā'* and Aram. *rēš* (Jewish Aram. *ē'shā*) extend the semantic range of this root to the notion of money as the principal form of capital, a development attested already in Egyptian Aramaic.⁸ The use of *r'sh* as a title is particularly extensive in Aramaic: *r'sh hbr*, “leader of the (Jewish) congregation”; *r'sh 'dt/r'sh šyr*, “leader of the caravan”; etc. Palmyrene exhibits similar usage. The meaning of the word in Moabite is disputed: “leader, elite,” or derived from *rāš*, “poor.”

The semantic ranges of Mand. *riš*, OSA *r's*, Arab. *ra's* (also meaning “head” of cattle) and *ra'îs*, “chief,” and finally Eth. *rē'ēs* with its dialectal variants¹⁴ are basically similar. Finally, the root made its way into Egyptian as the loanword *ru-'u-š*, where it appears as *p'.rš*, “mountain peak.”

According to *HAL*, the word occurs 599 times in the MT (*BHK*); there are 14 additional occurrences of Aram. *rēš*. In three instances the word may represent the name of a region (Ezk. 38:2–3 LXX; 39:1). Even-Shoshan arrives at a total of 600 occurrences by including Ps. 140:10 (Eng. 9), where many others interpret *rō'sh* as “poison,” and Prov. 13:23. The word is distributed evenly throughout almost all the books of the OT.

Among the derivatives of *rō'sh* we will single out three nouns: *m^era'^ašôt*, “region of the head, under someone's head” (Gen. 28:11, 18; 1 S. 19:13, 16; 26:7, 11–12, 16; 1 K. 19:6) and “head covering” (Jer. 13:18); *rišâ*, “former times” (Ezk. 36:11); (*hā'eḇen hā*)*rō'shâ*, “the top (stone)” (Zec. 4:7: “capstone” or “first stone?”).

II. Lexical Field

1. *Synonyms*. The lexical field of *rōš* in literal usage includes, first, words denoting a portion of head, which can sometimes appear as synonyms of *rōš*:

a. → **קדקד** *qodqōd*, “top of the head,” in parallelism with *rōš* (Gen. 49:26; Dt. 33:16; Ps. 7:17[16]; 68:22[21]), interchangeable with *rōš* in the expression *mikkap-regel w^e‘ad-rōš*, “from the sole of the foot to the head” (Isa. 1:6; cf. Dt. 28:35; 2 S. 14:25; Job 2:7) and also standing for *rōš* by synecdoche.

b. The noun *gulgōlet*, “skull,” in parallelism with *rōš* (Jgs. 9:53), interchangeable with *rōš* in the expression “per person” (*laggulgōlet*, Ex. 16:16; 38:26; Nu. 1:2, 18, 20, 22; 3:47; 1 Ch. 23:3, 24; cf. *l^rrōš*, Jgs. 5:30; 1 Ch. 24:4) and standing for *rōš* by synecdoche (2 K. 9:35; 1 Ch. 10:10 [cf. v. 9]).

c. Of course we find *rōš* in parallelism or collocation with words for parts of the head or nearby parts of the body: → **עין** *‘ayin*, “eye” (2 K. 9:30; Isa. 29:10; Jer. 8:23[9:1]; Job 2:12); → **פנים** *pānîm*, “face” (Josh. 7:6); → **אף** *‘ap*, “nose,” and *‘oznayim*, “ears” (Ezk. 16:12) → **פה** *peh*, “mouth” (Prov. 10:6); *raqqâ*, “temple” (Jgs. 5:26); *maḥlāpôt*, “locks of hair” (Jgs. 16:13, 19); *šîšîṭ*, “hair of the brow” (Ezk. 8:3); *taltallîm*, “locks” (Cant. 5:11); *dallâ*, “hair of the head” (Cant. 7:6[5]); *šē‘ār*, “hair” (2 S. 14:26); *zāqān*, “beard” (Lev. 13:29; Isa. 15:2; Jer. 48:37; Ezk. 5:1; Ps. 133:2; Ezr. 9:3); → **קרן** *qeren*, “horn” (the topmost part of some animal species, Zec. 2:4[1:21]; Dnl. 7:20); *garg^erôt*, “neck” (Prov. 1:9); *kātēp*, “shoulder” (Ezk. 29:18).

2. *Metonyms*. Second, *rōš* itself occasionally stands by metonymy for the hair of the head in the context of (ritual) hairdressing (Lev. 13:29–30; 14:29; 19:27; 21:10; Nu. 6:9; Dt. 21:12; 32:42; Jgs. 13:5; 2 S. 2:16; 2 K. 9:30; Isa. 7:20; Ezk. 5:1; 29:18; 44:20; Am. 8:10; Ps. 141:5; Job 1:20).

3. *Antonyms*. Third, many occurrences of *rōš* refer to the upper part of the body, in conjunction with antonyms referring to the lower or another part of the body. Examples include → **רגל** (*kap-*) *regel*, “foot” (Isa. 1:6; Ezk. 24:23); → **עקב** *‘aqēb*, “heel” (Gen. 3:15); *raglayim*, “legs” (1 S. 17:5–6; Isa. 7:20); *zānāb*, “tail” (Dt. 28:13, 44; Isa. 9:13[14]; 19:15); *gēw* (?), “trunk” (1 S. 5:4 cj.²¹); *‘ôr*, “skin” (Job 40:31); *‘ašāmîm*, “bones” (Ezk. 32:27; → **עצם** *šaq*, “side” (2 S. 2:16); *moṭnayim*, “hips” (1 K. 20:31–32; Jer. 48:37; Ezk. 23:15; 44:18; Am. 8:10); → *z^erôa’*, “arm” (2 S. 1:10); *‘aššîlê-yādayîm*, “wrists” (Ezk. 13:18).

4. *Other Associations*. Finally, *rōš* occurs in the context of → **בגד** *begeḏ*, “clothing,” when both are the object of similar actions, usually symbolic (cleansing, anointing, etc.) (Josh. 7:6; 1 S. 4:12; 17:5, 38; 2 S. 1:2; 13:19; 15:32; 1 K. 20:31–32; Isa. 15:2–3; 58:5; 59:17; Jer. 48:37; Ezk. 7:18; 23:15; 27:30–31; 44:18; Am. 8:10; Zec. 3:5; Ps. 133:2; Eccl. 9:8; Lam. 2:10). It also appears in the context of → **נזר** *nēzer*, “crown,” and *mišnepet*, “turban” (Ex. 29:6; Lev. 8:9; 2 S. 1:10; 12:30; Ezk. 16:12; 23:15; Zec. 3:5; 6:11; Ps. 21:4[3]; Job 19:9; Lam. 5:16; Est. 2:17; 6:8; 1 Ch. 20:2), as well as → **שמן** *šemen*, “oil” (Ex. 29:7; Lev. 8:12; 21:10; 1 S. 10:1; 2 K. 9:6; Ps. 23:5; 141:5; Eccl. 9:8).

5. *Spatiotemporal Usage*. When *rōš* has spatial meaning—i.e., when it denotes one end of an object in contrast to the other—it appears in conjunction with several terms: (a) in the geographical sense with *gê*, “valley,” and → קמץ *ēmeq*, “plain” (Josh. 15:8); *gay*, “valley,” and *śādeh*, “field” (Nu. 21:20; cf. 23:14, 28; Dt. 3:27; 34:1); *nāweh*, “pasture” (Am. 1:2); → עי *ayin*, “spring” (Josh. 15:9); *qarqaʿ hayyām*, “bottom of the sea” (Am. 9:3); → דרך *derek*, “way” (Jgs. 9:25); (b) in the architectural sense with → יסוד *yēśōd*, “foundation (of a house)” (Hab. 3:13); *yarkâ*, “bottom (of the tabernacle)” (Ex. 26:23–24; 36:27–30); *ʿeden*, “base” (Ex. 36:38; 38:17). When *rōš* has a temporal meaning, denoting the beginning of a period of time, mention of the end is very uncommon (Eccl. 3:11; also Isa. 48:16: “at the time it comes to be”).

III. Verbal Idioms. There are many verbal idioms with *rōš* in which the word is used literally but the action itself has anthropological significance. In such expressions *rōš* is rarely the subject: only with *ngʿ* hiphil in Job 20:6, *nwʿ* hiphil in Ps. 141:5 (if the text is not corrupt), *ʿamad* in 2 K. 6:31, and *rûm* in Ps. 27:6. It is almost always the object, so that the head serves as a medium of human expression and relationship for the person in question and others. Such expressions include “shaving” the head as a sign of mourning (*gāzaz*, Job 1:20) or as a ritual of ambiguous significance (*gillah*, Nu. 6:9, 18; Dt. 21:12; Isa. 7:20); “anointing” (*diššēn*) as a token of honor and cheer (Ps. 23:5); “endangering” (*hîēb* Dnl. 1:10; Sir. 11:18); “covering” (*hāpâ*) as a sign of impending death (2 S. 15:30; Jer. 14:3–4; Est. 6:12); “covering” (*kissâ*) as a gesture of disfavor (Isa. 29:10); “shortening” (*kāsam*) as an element of priestly ministry (Ezk. 44:20); “tossing” (*nûaʿ* hiphil) as a gesture of scorn (2 K. 19:21 = Isa. 37:22; Ps. 22:8[7]; 109:25; Job 16:4; Lam. 2:15; Sir. 12:18; 13:7); “shaking” (*nûd*), which most consider a gesture of sympathy but some consider an expression of hostile mockery (Jer. 18:16; Ps. 44:15[14]); “raising” one’s own head as an act of pride and independence (Jgs. 8:28; Zec. 2:4[1:21]; Job 10:15; Ps. 83:3[2]) or “lifting up” the head of another in the sense of restoration to rank or office (Gen. 40:13, 19–20; 2 K. 25:27 = Jer. 52:31); “raising” (*rûm* hiphil) in the same sense (Ps. 3:4[3]; 110:7; 140:9[8] cj.;²⁶ Sir. 38:3); “lowering” to the earth (*yārād* hiphil + *lāʿāreš*, Lam. 2:10) and “letting hang” (*kāpap*, Isa. 58:5) as a sign of self-abasement; “going over” (*ābar*) in the sense of “covering” (Ps. 38:5[4]); “disheveling” (*pāraʿ*) the hair of one’s head as a mourning ritual (Lev. 10:6; 13:45; 21:10; Nu. 5:18).

The head plays an equally important role in mourning rites and rites of self-abasement because ultimately to the Israelite both forms of ritual behavior have the same meaning. “Abasement” may be carried out by the person abased or by others; it can also be the result of an external event. As the most prominent part of the body from an anthropological perspective, the head was probably the most appropriate object of such ritual actions. This also explains why the head plays a central role in rituals that can be considered the opposite of “rites of abasement” (exaltation, appointment to office, etc.).²⁸

The word plays a similar role in verbal expressions with a preposition; here the anthropological significance is based on metonymy: the “head” stands as *pars pro toto* for the morally responsible individual. First is the realm of liability and restitution: human deeds “turn back” on the head of the doers (*šûb* qal or hiphil; with *bē*, Nu. 5:7; 1 S. 25:39; 1 K. 2:33, 44; Joel 4:4, 7[3:4, 7]; Ob. 15; Ps. 7:17[16]; with *ʿal*, 1 K. 2:32; Est. 9:25; with *ʿel*, Neh. 3:36) or the doers

“bring” it on their own heads (*nāṭan b^e*, 1 K. 8:32; Ezk. 9:10; 11:21; 16:43; 17:19; 22:31; 2 Ch. 6:23); blood that has been shed weighs on the head of the murderer (with *b^e*, Josh. 2:19; 1 K. 2:37; Ezk. 33:4; with *‘al*, 2 S. 1:16; cf. Lev. 13:44). Second is the realms of blessing and cursing: a blessing may “come” (*hāyâ l^e*, Gen. 49:26; *bô’ l^e*, Dt. 33:16) or “rest” (nominal clause with *‘al*, Prov. 10:6; 11:26; Sir. 44:23; cf. Gen. 48:14, 17–18), and wrath “falls upon” the head of someone who is cursed (*ḥûl ‘al*, 2 S. 3:29; Jer. 23:19; 30:23). Third, in the realm of mourning and penance, the head is strewn with “dust” (→ עפר *‘āpār*) and “ashes” (*‘ēper*) (Josh. 7:6; 2 S. 13:19; Ezk. 27:30; Job 2:12).

IV. Literal Usage

1. *Humans*. In literal usage most of the occurrences of *rō’š* refer to the human head. Only rarely is the word used purely descriptively (Dt. 28:23; 2 K. 2:3, 5; Eccl. 2:14); almost always the text involves areas in which the “head” is the object (rarely subj.) of actions or functions evoking fundamental human experiences. We may distinguish the following contexts: (a) war and violence: Dt. 32:42; Jgs. 5:26; 7:25; 9:53; 1 S. 17:46, 51, 54, 57; 29:4; 31:9; 2 S. 2:16; 4:7–8, 12; 16:9; 20:21–22; 2 K. 6:31–32; 10:6ff.; Am. 9:1 (unless the word is from *rō’š* “poison,” or should be read as *ra’āš*, “earthquake”); Hab. 3:14; Ps. 68:22[21]; 110:6; 1 Ch. 10:9; (b) peril and security: Gen. 40:16–17, 19–20; 2 K. 4:19; Isa. 1:5–6; Jon. 2:6(5); 4:6, 8; Ps. 66:12; Job 20:6; 29:3; (c) rites of self-abasement and degradation: Dt. 21:12; Josh. 7:6; 1 S. 4:12; 2 S. 1:2; 13:19; 15:30, 32; 1 K. 20:31–32; Isa. 15:2; 58:5; Jer. 8:23(9:1); 14:3–4; 48:37; Ezk. 7:18; 9:10; 27:30; Job 1:20; 2:12; Lam. 2:10; Ezr. 9:3; (d) garments (protective): 1 S. 17:5, 38; Isa. 59:17; (official): Ex. 29:6; 2 S. 1:10; 12:30; Ezk. 44:18; Zec. 3:5; 6:11; Ps. 21:4[3]; Est. 2:17; 6:8; (decorative): 2 K. 9:30; Ezk. 16:12; 23:15, 42; 24:23; 32:27; Job 19:9; Prov. 1:9; 4:9; Lam. 5:16; (e) anointing (for various purposes): Lev. 8:9, 12; 21:10; 1 S. 10:1; 2 K. 9:3, 6; Ps. 23:5; 133:2; 141:5; Eccl. 9:8; (f) diagnosis, purification, and declaration of guilt: Lev. 13:12, 29, 40–41; 14:9, 18, 29; 24:14; (g) blessing and retribution: Gen. 48:14, 17–18; 49:26; Dt. 33:16; Prov. 10:6; 11:26 and 1 K. 2:32–33; Ezk. 16:43; Prov. 25:22; 1 Ch. 12:20(19); (h) sacral and secular hairdressing: Nu. 6:5, 7, 9, 11; Jgs. 13:5; 16:13, 17, 19, 22; 1 S. 1:11; 2 S. 14:26; 18:9; Isa. 7:20; Ezk. 5:1; 8:3; 44:20; Ps. 40:13[12]; Cant. 5:2; (i) erotic description: Cant. 2:6; 5:11; 7:6(5); 8:3; (j) magic: Ezk. 13:18; (k) oaths: 1 Ch. 12:20(19) (Rogers: “By our heads! He might desert to his master Saul!”).

2. *Animals*. When used with reference to animals, *rō’š* usually occurs in a sacrificial context (Ex. 12:9; 29:10, 15, 17, 19; Lev. 1:4, 8, 12, 15; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:11, 15, 24, 29, 33; 8:14, 18, 20, 22; 9:13; 16:21). Although general Semitic usage singles out the head (like the heart) of the sacrificial animal as a precious gift to the deity, reflecting the recognized importance of the human head, in Israel there is no emphasis on either the head or the heart in sacrificial legislation or in accounts of sacrifice; the sacrificial portions are identified instead as the blood, the kidneys, and the fat. The head is mentioned only in lists of the portions burned upon the altar or outside the camp, without being singled out for special treatment as a preferred sacrificial object (Ex. 12:9; Lev. 1:8–9, 12–13; 4:11–12). Even in the ritual act of laying hands on the head of the sacrificial animal, the head merely represents the whole animal (Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4; 8:18).

In other contexts the head of an animal is mentioned purely objectively (Gen. 3:15; Job 40:31[41:7]) or derogatorily (2 S. 3:8; 2 K. 6:25). In the mythological and supernatural domain, the text speaks of the “heads” of the dragon and Leviathan (Ps. 74:13–14), of the third beast (Dnl. 7:6), of the living creatures (Ezk. 1:22, 25–26), and the cherubim (Ezk. 10:1). Here again the word possesses its usual valence, deriving from the perspective of anthropology.

3. *God*. Only one text (Dnl. 7:9) speaks of the head of God, but several mention the heads of idols. In 1 S. 5:3–4 Dagon, the god of the Philistines, is first forced to acknowledge Yahweh’s superiority by falling down before the ark, the symbol of the apparently defeated God of Israel (v. 3); the second time, however, he loses his head and hands and is thus proved incapable of thought or action (v. 4). On the one hand, we see here an example of the bitter religious polemic found also in other narratives and in prophecy (Jgs. 17–18; 1 K. 18:19–40; 2 K. 1:1–8; Isa. 44:9–20; 46:1–7), as well as in the language of prayer (Ps. 97:7; 115:5–8), which seeks to represent the intellectual and physical inability of the gods to save. On the other hand, this narrative also uses military motifs, for Dagon’s second fall is like that of a slain warrior, whose head and hands have been cut off by an unidentified opponent to prove that he is actually dead (cf. 1 S. 17:49–54; 2 S. 4:7–8).

The head of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Dnl. 2 (vv. 32, 38) also suggests a polemic against other gods, although the great statue that appears to Nebuchadnezzar does not represent a deity but a succession of historical eras. The materials—gold, silver, iron, and clay—of which the statue is made represent the declining trajectory of the successive empires, effectively symbolizing a rationalistic attack on the deification of rulers (cf. Dnl. 5:4). The real power of history is embodied in the cut-out rock, a symbol of Yahweh (Dt. 32:4, 15), that destroys the statue and becomes a mountain filling the whole earth (Dnl. 2:35). The head of gold, symbolizing the Babylonian Empire (v. 38), receives its power from the God of heaven alone, to whose everlasting kingdom it must give way (v. 44).

V. Figurative Usage with Persons

1. *Chief*. The noun *rōš* is frequently used figuratively to designate a person who is the “chief” or “leader” of a social group. Such an “office” appears to be rooted originally in tribal structures, within which it denotes someone who exercises military and juridical authority. Most important, however, is its integrative function: the chief is responsible for the well-being and common life of the community; Jgs. 11:4–11 even distinguishes the chief from the military commander (*qāšîn*). With the disappearance of tribal structures, somehow the title together with its functions—the juridical more than the military—gradually penetrated other social organizations.³⁸ We find the following specific applications:

a. Tribal chief, in combination with words meaning “tribe” or “clan” (*rāšê hammaṭṭôt*, Nu. 30:2[1]; 1 K. 8:1; 2 Ch. 5:2; *rāšê šibtêkem*, Dt. 1:13, 15; 5:23; 29:9; *rāšê ‘alpê yisrā’el*, Nu. 1:16; 10:4; Josh. 22:21, 30), or with the name of the tribe or its eponymous ancestor (Jgs. 10:18; 11:8–11; Mic. 3:1, 9; 1 Ch. 11:42; 2 Ch. 28:12).

b. Family head, usually in combination with words meaning “ancestral house” (*bêt ‘abôt*, Ex. 6:14, 25; Nu. 1:4; 7:2; 17:18[3]; Josh. 22:14; 1–2 Chronicles passim; or simply *hā’ābôt*, Ezr. 2:68; 3:12; 4:2–3; 8:1; 10:16; Neh. 7:70; 8:13; 11:13; 12:12, 22–23), occasionally with additional

qualification (Nu. 25:15; 31:26; 32:28; 36:1; Josh. 14:1; 19:51; 21:1; Ezr. 1:5; 2 Ch. 19:8), or in combination with words denoting hereditary professions (priests, Neh. 12:7; Levites, Neh. 12:24), or with the name(s) of the individual(s) in question (Ezr. 8:16–17; 1 Ch. 5:7, 12; 7:3; 9:17; 12:3, 19[18]; 16:5; 23:8, 11, 16, 20, 24; 26:10, 31; 2 Ch. 24:6).

c. Head(s) of the people as a whole (*'ām*, Ex. 18:25; Nu. 25:4; Dt. 33:5, 21; Job 12:24; Neh. 10:15[14]; according to Bartlett also 1 K. 21:9, 12; Job 29:25; [*b^enê*] *yisrā'ēl*, Nu. 13:3; Josh. 23:2; 24:1).

d. Unique expressions are “heads of the province” (*m^edînâ*, Neh. 11:3) and “heads of the men” (*g^ebārîm*, 1 Ch. 24:4).

When we examine the historical development of official titles, we see that the Chronicler comes to identify *śar* and *rōš*, using *śar* in titles that normally require *rōš* and vice versa. The result is an irregular choice of words (cf. 1 Ch. 27:22 with 1 S. 15:17; 1 Ch. 21:2 with Nu. 25:4 and Dt. 33:5, 21; 2 Ch. 36:14 with Neh. 12:7; vice versa in 1 Ch. 12:15, 19, 21; irregular: 1 Ch. 11:6).

2. *King*. The embryonic monarchy understood the new office of king as a continuation of the ancient office of tribal chief, using the title *rōš* in parallel with *meleḵ* (1 S. 15:17; cf. Job 29:25), but also in a more restricted sense as a functional term for an office of military or forensic leadership (cf. Jgs. 9:7ff. with 10:18; 11:8) and finally in new combinations such as “head of the nations” (2 S. 22:44). This understanding of the royal office continued to shape later thought (1 Ch. 29:11; 2 Ch. 11:22), perhaps as an implicit attack on the division of the kingdom (Hos. 2:2[1:11]). The title is also used in reference to alien structures of hegemony (*n^eśî' rōš*, Ezk. 38:2–3; 39:1).

Isa. 7:8–9 involves a play on two semantic aspects of the word *rōš*: “capital” and “prince,” corresponding to Damascus and Samaria, Rezin and Pekah, in cynical contrast to God’s own characterization of these kings as “tails” (*zanbôt hā'ûḏîm*, usually translated “stumps”) in v. 4, presumably an allusion to a proverb (cf. Isa. 9:13–14[14–15]; 19:15; Dt. 28:13, 44: “They shall be the head and you shall be the tail”). The functional peculiarity of *rōš* may explain why it exhibits no diachronic development in combination with either *meleḵ* or *nāgîd*.

3. *Commander*. The meaning “military commander” also has its roots in the meaning “tribal chief” (Nu. 14:4; Neh. 9:17). Used in this sense, *rōš* can stand by itself (also Ezr. 7:28; 1 Ch. 12:3, 33[2, 32]), be specified in a military sense as “chief” and “commander” (*śar*, 1 Ch. 11:6; cf. 27:3), or be linked with words for military units such as “chief of the three” or “of the thirty” (2 S. 23:8, 13, 18; 1 Ch. 11:11, 20; 12:19), “chiefs of the thousands” (1 Ch. 12:21[20]), “chiefs of David’s warriors (*gibbôrîm*)” (1 Ch. 11:10), and “officers of the army (*śābā*)” (1 Ch. 12:15[14]).

4. *Other*. Later, *rōš* loses the sociological overtones of “tribal chief” and comes to signify the highest-ranking functionary of an official group, above all the “chief priest.” This term is always applied to preexilic figures and may retain overtones of juristic authority, as in the ancient tribal office: *kōhēn hārōš* (2 K. 25:18; Jer. 52:24 [cf. in these texts also the “second priest,” *kōhēn hammišneh*]; 1 Ch. 27:5; 2 Ch. 19:11; 24:11; 26:20) and *hakkōhēn hārōš* (2 Ch. 31:10; Ezr. 7:5), or simply *hārōš* (2 Ch. 24:6). Other examples of this usage occur sporadically: “leader of praise” (Neh. 11:17, reading *t^ehillâ* with LXX), “leader of the singers” (*m^ešōr^erîm*: Neh. 12:46). In Isa. 29:10 “your heads, the seers,” par. “your eyes, the prophets,” is not an instance of technical

professional terminology but the explanation of a metaphor. Finally, in Jer. 13:21 and Lam. 1:5, *rōš* has the general sense of “lord” or “master.”

VI. Figurative Usage with Objects

1. *Spatial*. In figurative usage with respect to objects, the spatial meaning of *rōš* is very common, especially in the geographical sense. The word is used in the following contexts: (a) tops of mountains (Gen. 8:5; Ex. 17:9–10; 19:20; 24:17; Nu. 14:40, 44; 20:28; 21:20; 23:9, 14, 28; Dt. 3:27; 34:1; Josh. 15:8–9; Jgs. 9:7, 25, 36–37; 1 S. 26:13; 2 S. 2:25; 15:32; 16:1; 1 K. 18:42; 2 K. 1:9; Isa. 2:2; 28:1, 4; 30:17; 42:11; Jer. 22:6; Ezk. 6:13; Hos. 4:13; Joel 2:5; Am. 1:2; 9:3; Mic. 4:1; Ps. 72:16; Cant. 4:8; 2 Ch. 25:12); (b) ends or corners of roads or paths (Isa. 51:20; Ezk. 16:25, 31; 21:26[21]; Prov. 1:21; Lam. 2:19; 4:1); (c) overflow of a river (Gen. 2:10); (d) tops of trees and other vegetation (2 S. 5:24; Isa. 17:6; Ezk. 17:4, 22; Job 24:24; 1 Ch. 14:15); (e) tops of structures (Gen. 11:4; Jgs. 6:26; Ps. 24:7, 9; Prov. 8:2; (f) the head or top of an object (Gen. 28:12; 47:31; Ex. 26:24; 28:32; 36:29, 38; 38:17, 19; 1 K. 7:16–22, 35, 41; 8:8; 10:19; Ezk. 10:11; Zec. 4:2; Job 22:12; Prov. 23:34; Est. 5:2; Dnl. 7:1; 2 Ch. 3:15–16; 4:12; 5:9; (g) the head of a group of persons (Dt. 20:9; 1 S. 9:22; 1 K. 21:9, 12; Am. 6:7; Mic. 2:13; Job 29:25; 1 Ch. 4:42; 2 Ch. 13:12; 20:27; Ezr. 5:10; likewise in Isa. 35:10; 51:11; (h) in the plural for units of an army (Jgs. 7:16, 20; 9:34, 43; 1 S. 11:11; 13:17–18; Job 1:17; 1 Ch. 12:24).

2. *Temporal*. Used temporally, *rōš* can denote the beginning of various periods of time. It appears in combination with “year” (*rōš haššānā*) only once in the OT, in Ezk. 40:1, which together with Lev. 25:9 suggests a more ancient Israelite new year, associated with an autumnal date. It also appears in combination with “months,” in the sense of the sequence of months (Ex. 12:2: “the beginning of months,” i.e., the month of Abib, later called Nisan) as well as in the sense of each individual month, i.e., denoting the “new moon” (presented favorably in Nu. 10:10; 28:11), and with “night watch” (Jgs. 7:19: the time when the watch has just left the illuminated tent, so that their eyes are not yet accustomed to the dark; Lam. 2:19: Zion is to wail aloud, like the sentry crying out at the beginning of every watch). Finally, *rōš* denotes the beginning of a series of repeated events (Neh. 12:46; 1 Ch. 16:7), as well as the remote time thought of as the beginning of Israel’s existence (Isa. 40:21; 41:4, 26; 48:16), and perhaps also time in an absolute sense (Prov. 8:23; Eccl. 3:11); in Prov. 8:26 *rōš aprôt tēbēl* means “the first clods of soil” or “the mass of the clods of the earth.”

3. *Excellence*. The meaning “peak, top,” can also be used in the evaluative sense of “finest, best, supreme,” with reference to (a) natural products (Ex. 30:23; Dt. 33:15; Ezk. 27:22; Ps. 118:22 [“chief cornerstone”]; Cant. 4:14), (b) political powers (Josh. 11:10; Isa. 7:8–9; 1 Ch. 7:40), and (c) human emotions (Ps. 137:6). From the sense of “value” has developed the meaning “sum, amount” (Lev. 5:24[6:5]; Nu. 1:49; 4:22; 31:49; Ps. 119:160; 139:17); *nāšā’ rōš* means “sum up” (Ex. 30:12; Nu. 1:2; 4:2; 26:2; 31:26).

VII. Anthropology and Theology

1. *Literal Usage*. To the extent that the theological meaning of a noun depends on whether and how it is used in connection with God, there is little to say about the literal usage of *rōš* in

the OT, in contrast to such other anthropological terms as → פָּנִים *pānîm*, “face”; → עֵין *‘ayin*, “eye”; ’ōzen, “ear”; → פֶּה *peh*, “mouth”; and ’appayim, “nose”; and also in contrast to other religions, in which the head of the deity is endowed with numerous attributes (aureole, halo, crown, horns) or the deity is depicted with several heads (Phoenician idols) or even with an animal head (Egypt). Only in the concluding vision of the Aramaic section of Daniel does the text speak of the “hair of the head” of an “Ancient One” (Dnl. 7:9); in the interpretation (v. 22), the interest focuses not on this physical feature of the heavenly being (the “Ancient One” is not actually interpreted, but is simply understood as the eternal, immutable God of heaven) but on the figure’s function of giving judgment for the holy ones of the Most High. Later apocalyptic literature, drawing on this image, calls the “Ancient One” also the “Head of Days” (1 En. 46:1; 60:2; 71:20). Although the image of white head and hair as a symbol of judicial authority recurs in Rev. 1:14 (here characterizing the Son of Man), there is no evidence for its use in the intertestamental period.

2. *Figurative Usage.* Used figuratively, *rōš* denotes God’s position as ruler of the universe (1 Ch. 29:11), as commander of Israel’s armies (2 Ch. 13:12), and as the royal leader of those returning from exile (Mic. 2:13). But this theological function of the word is also marginal.

3. *Anthropological Usage.* The primary theological significance of *rōš* lies in its anthropological function. The head is the preeminent part of the body, containing the organs of sight, hearing, taste, and smell; it is the locus of thought (albeit the heart also plays a role). From time immemorial it has been valued as the central place where the vital principle is crystallized. It is therefore surrounded by numerous rituals to preserve the requisites of life and seal fundamental human experiences. This is also true in Israel; this anthropological given finds expression in the language of the OT. For example, Achish says to David: “I will make you protector of my head [*šōmēr l’rōšî*, NRSV ‘bodyguard’]” (1 S. 28:2; cf. Ps. 140:8[7]). The vital significance of the head also lies behind treating the heads of enemies as trophies (Gen. 3:15; 40:19; Dt. 32:42; Jgs. 7:25; 1 S. 5:4; 17:54, 57; 31:9; 2 S. 4:7, 12; 20:21–22; 2 K. 10:7–8; Ps. 66:12; 2 Mc. 15:30; Jdt. 13:10). The following theological views are grounded in this anthropology:

a. The head suffers when God admonishes and judges (Dt. 32:42; Jgs. 9:53–56; 1 S. 17:46; 2 S. 4:7–8; 1 K. 2:32; Isa. 1:5–6; 7:20; 29:10; Jer. 23:19; Ezk. 16:43; Am. 8:10; 9:1; Jon. 4:8; Ps. 38:5[4]; 66:12; Job 19:9; Lam. 5:16). Conversely, the head benefits when God bestows reconciliation and salvation, blessing and election (Gen. 49:26; Lev. 14:18; 1 S. 10:1; 2 K. 9:6; Ezk. 16:12; Jon. 2:6[5]; 4:6; Zec. 3:5; 6:11; Ps. 3:4[3]; 21:4[3]; 23:5; 133:2; 140:8[7]; Job 29:3; Prov. 10:6; Eccl. 9:8).

b. The enemy’s head is a target when Israel or the faithful believer receives God’s help (Jer. 48:37–38; Hab. 3:14; Ps. 68:22[21]; 110:6).

c. The head can be used in a gesture to communicate something related to God: arrogance (Job 20:6), remorse (Josh. 7:6; Job 1:20; Ezr. 9:3), consecration (Lev. 21:10; Nu. 6:5; Jgs. 13:5; 16:17; 1 S. 1:11), a prayer for blessing (Gen. 48:14).

d. In the Semitic view people bear moral responsibility “on their heads”; therefore they find themselves constantly confronted with the God of Israel, who guarantees the ontological correlation of actions and consequences, thus ensuring justice as the principle ordering the world

(Lev. 24:14; Nu. 5:7; Jgs. 9:57; 1 S. 25:39; 2 S. 1:16; 1 K. 2:33, 44; 8:32; Ezk. 9:10; 11:21; 17:19; 22:31; Ob. 15; Neh. 3:36[4:4]).

4. *Spatial and Temporal Usage.* The word *rōš* also takes on theological significance in its spatial and temporal functions:

a. The top (*rōš*) of a hill or mountain is a favorite place for Yahweh to reveal himself, hear prayers, make known his will, and receive worship (Ex. 17:9–10; 19:20; 24:17; Dt. 34:1; Jgs. 6:26; 2 S. 15:32; 1 K. 18:42). There too worshipers of idols practice their abominations (Hos. 4:13). A noise in the treetops indicates Yahweh's presence (2 S. 5:24); the Lord goes at the head of a group of people (Mic. 2:13; 2 Ch. 13:12); from the top of a ladder that reaches heaven, the angels of God ascend and descend (Gen. 28:12, in contrast to 11:4); Wisdom speaks "at the terminus of the city walls [or 'upon the walls'; or 'high above the noisy squares']" (Prov. 1:21).

b. In temporal usage *rōš* qualifies theologically significant points in time such as the first month (Ex. 12:2), the first singing of praise (1 Ch. 16:7), and creation (Prov. 8:23; Eccl. 3:11). In Deutero-Isaiah the word takes on particular theological significance in the expression *mērōš* (Isa. 40:21; 41:4, 26; 42:11; 48:16). Although the semantic content of this expression is closely associated with other temporal expressions, some of which belong to the next lemma, we note here its relative importance.⁶⁴ Although in each text where it occurs it denotes the distant past, the particular point in time differs in each case, depending on the retrospective moment at which something new or yet to come is proclaimed in extended perspective in contrast to what has gone before: in 40:21 the beginning of a long history, extending back to creation, during which Israel came to know Yahweh's sovereignty; in 41:4 the beginning of humankind; in 41:26 previous acts of God on behalf of Israel, which serve as prophecies of Cyrus's appearance; in 48:16 the earlier prophecy of Cyrus together with the present victory over Babylon. In these texts Deutero-Isaiah has explicated the theological principle that every new experience of Yahweh's power and salvific will joins a history extending back to Israel's earliest memories.

Beuken

VIII

1. *LXX.* The LXX recognized the semantic breadth of *rōš* and documented it through differentiated translations. The usual equivalent is *kephalē* (291 times), denoting the head as part of the body; it can also stand for *gulgōleṭ* and (once) for *nepes* (Isa. 43:4). Aquila uses *kephalē* consistently for *rōš*, including *rōš* II, "poison." The second most frequent translation of *rōš* is *archōn* (104 times). The use of *archē* (55 times) and *archēgós* (15 times) is also common; less frequent is the use of *prōtos* (9 times). There are 36 occurrences of *koryphē*. The spatial use of *rōš* is reflected in *ákros* (16 times).

2. *Dead Sea Scrolls.* There are some 130 occurrences of the word in the Dead Sea Scrolls. All possible orthographic variants appear (*r's, rw's, r'wš, rwš, rš*), but their distribution does not permit any literary conclusions. It is noteworthy that *rōš* does not appear at all in 1QH and CD (although the latter does use → *רַאשׁ* *rōš* II, "poison"). There is a concentration of occurrences

in 11QT (19), 1QM (28, plus 6 in the 4QM parallels), and 4Q400–407 (ShirShabb) (40). The fragmentary state of many texts precludes defining the semantic spectrum precisely.

a. *Verbal Idioms*. Verbal expressions are quite rare. Someone who does (material) damage to the community must make personal compensation (*šlm piel b^erôšô*, 1QS 7:6–7). In a blessing formula Yahweh places the crown on the head of the high priest (*nś' b*, 1QSb 3:3). In 4Q318 fr. 31, 4–9 (a lament?) the psalmist says: “They have plaited (*šrg*) a crown for my head” (1. 7). Yahweh carries out justice on the head of the wicked (*šwb hiphil b*, 1QM 11:14).

b. *Human Body*. The *rôš* also appears as a part of the human body in 1QSb 4:3 (a priestly blessing), 1QM 6:15 (helmet armor for cavalry divisions) and 7:11 (garments of war for the priests, which are not to be brought into the sanctuary), as well as 11QT 63:12 (cf. Dt. 21:12).

c. *Animals*. The head of a (sacrificial) animal is mentioned only in the Temple Scroll: in connection with the sacrifices on the festival of dedication (16:1, 12), the sacrifices prescribed for the Day of Atonement (26:11, 12; cf. Lev. 16:21), and the area where animals are slaughtered in the temple precincts (34:6; no biblical parallel). In contrast to Dt. 21:6, in the *eglâ* ritual the elders of the city explicitly wash their hands over the head of the heifer (*'l r'wš h'gh*, 63:5).

d. *Leader*. The most common use of *rôš* is in the sense of “chief, leader.” On the level of tribe and clan, the texts speak of *ršy 'lpy ysr'l* (1QSa 1:14; 2:14; 11QT 19:16), *ršy šbty ysr'l* (4Qpls^d 1:7), *ršy byt y'qwb* (3Q5 fr. 3, 3), and *ršym wšrym* (4QpPs37 3:5). In addition, the War Scroll speaks of the heads of the four camps, each of which accommodates three tribes (1QM 3:14).

Transitional figures are the “heads of the tribes and families of the community” (*ršy hšbtyym w'bwt h'dh*, 1QM 2:3; 4QM^d 2, 6).

In the hierarchy of the Qumran community, the texts speak frequently of the “family heads of the community” (*ršy 'bwt h'dh*, 1QSa 1:16, 23–24, 25; 2:16; 1QM 2:7; 3:4). In 1QSa, as above, the expression probably refers to administrative rather than cultic duties. We also find *ršy 'bwt llwyym* (1Q22 fr. 1, 3) and *ršy bty h'bwt lbny ysr'l* (11QT 42:14).

Other usages include the twelve heads of the priests and Levites (1QM 2:1, 2) and “chiefs of the divisions” (*ršy [h]mšmrwt*: 1QM 2:2, 3, 4) associated with them and the family heads.

e. *Kingship*. Only once is *rôš* associated with kingship. Whoever is appointed king (*mlk hiphil*) becomes the head (*'t r'wš*) of the Israelites (11QT 57:2, an addition to the Dtn law of the king).

f. *Military Contexts*. Apart from the letter Mur 42:2 (*rwš hmhnyh*), only the War Scroll uses *rôš* in military contexts; here it denotes the leaders of the divisions and formations (1QM 15:4; 16:4, 5; 17:10; 18:6; 19:12 par. 4QM^b 11.2, 11); in 1QM 9:11 it denotes a segment of a specific military formation.

g. *High Priest*. The *kôhēn hārôš*, the chief priestly functionary, is mentioned 8 times. He addresses the troops before battle (1QM 8:6; 16:4, 5; 17:10; 18:6; 19:12 par. 4QM^a 11.2, 11) and recites the prayer of thanksgiving after victory is achieved (1QM 18:5; 19:11?). Finally, 4Q401 fr. 13, 3 speaks of a “third (*hšlyšy*) among the high priests (*bkwahny rwš*).”

h. *Heavenly Beings*. In the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400–407), the hierarchical structure of the heavenly beings is expressed in part by titles containing the element *rš*. It appears as *nomen rectum* only in the phrase *nšy'y rwš* (4Q403 fr. 1, 1:10, 17, 21, 23; 4Q404 2:2, 5; 4Q405 fr. 3, 1:12a; 2:6); in the other titles (11 in all), it is *nomen regens*: *ršy dbyrw* (403 fr. 1, 2:11), *ršy lbwšy pl'* (405 fr. 23, 2:10), *ršy mmlkw* (403 fr. 1, 2:3), *ršy mmšlwt* (401 fr. 14, 1:6; cf. 4Q511 fr. 2, 1:3), *ršy mrwym* (403 fr. 1, 1:34; 405 frs. 4–5, 2; 405 fr. 6, 4), *ršy nšy'ym* (403 fr. 1, 2:20) and *ršy nšy'y kwahnt* (403 fr. 1, 2:21; 405 frs. 8–9, 5), *ršy 'dt hmlk* (403 fr. 1, 2:24), *ršy*

tbnyt 'lwhym (403 fr. 1, 2:16), *r'šy trwmwt* (405 fr. 23, 2:12), and *r'šy twšbhwt* (403 fr. 1, 1:31). The use of *rōš* with reference to angels or heavenly beings is otherwise unknown in the OT and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A special significance attaches to the number seven: seven deputies (*nšy'y mšnh*) are associated with the seven *nšy'y rwš* mentioned in the first and especially the sixth and eighth Songs. As in the case of *r'šy nšy'ym* and *r'šy nšy'y kwhnwt*, Newsom sees in these titles a certain dependence on texts in Numbers, albeit in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice the angelic beings—unlike the titled figures in Numbers—perform priestly functions (e.g., blessing in the name of God).

Finally, the *r'šy lbwšy pl'* wear high priestly garments. Taken as a whole, this evidence suggests that in the *r'šym* (and *nšy'ym*) we are dealing with “angelic high priests.”

i. *Spatial Usage.* In spatial usage *rōš* denotes the head of a group in 1QS 6:14; 1QSb 4:23; 1QM 3:13 par. 4QM^f 10:3; 11QT 57:4; 62:5. The “highest heaven” and the “greatest height” are mentioned in 4Q403 fr. 1, 1:43; 2:10. Intricately decorated lance heads and sword blades are the subject of 1QM 5:11, 12.

j. *Temporal Usage.* Used temporally, *rōš* in combination with *hwdš* denotes the first day of the month or the new moon (4Q503 fr. 32, 2; 512 frs. 33+35, 3; 11QT 11:9; 14:2, 7, 9; 11QPs^a 27:7), as well as the first days of the year or the seasons (1QS 10:4–5, 6, 8). The emphasis is not so much on a chronological beginning as on the “primary and fundamental role played by these days in determining the cultic calendar.” The fundamental importance of these days is underlined by “the coincidence of the quarterly cycle with the basic cosmic constitution of time.”

k. *Excellence.* Two passages, finally, use *rōš* as a term for excellence (4Q403 fr. 1, 1:40; 2:34).

Dahmen¹

¹ W. A. M. Beuken and U. Dahmen, “אֵלֹהִים,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 248–261.