

Proto-Slavic *čbŕta* and Semitic *ś-r-ṭ*: Semantic Convergence

Željko Stanojević

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Center for Hebrew Language and Literature, Institute for Hebrew Language and Literature

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0717-6184>

Corresponding Author: Željko Stanojević

E-mail: stanojevic@hebrew.edu.rs

Abstract

The Proto-Slavic noun *čbŕta* is traditionally derived from the lexical family *čersti* / *čbŕtq* / *čbŕtati* and is ultimately connected with the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)ker-* ‘to cut, carve’. At the same time, the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ* is attested in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian, and Arabic with meanings related to cutting, incising, scratching, and leaving a visible mark. Of particular significance is the Aramaic-Syriac semantic development in which meanings associated with incision gradually expanded into the domains of line, stroke, text line, graphic mark, and written sign.

This study examines the degree of formal, semantic, chronological, and historical correspondence between the Proto-Slavic lexical family *čbŕta* / *čbŕtati* and the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ*. The analysis combines comparative philology, historical semantics, and the critical evaluation of linguistic evidence. In addition to Slavic and Semitic material, Iranian evidence is employed as a control corpus in order to assess whether comparable semantic developments may arise independently in different linguistic traditions.

The results demonstrate that both lexical families exhibit a documented semantic trajectory extending from cutting and incision to line, mark, and graphic representation. However, the available evidence does not establish either a direct etymological relationship or a demonstrable

borrowing process between the Semitic and Proto-Slavic forms. Instead, the data support the existence of a noteworthy pattern of semantic convergence whose broader historical significance warrants further comparative investigation.

Keywords: Proto-Slavic, *črta*, Semitic languages, *ś-r-ṭ*, historical semantics, comparative philology, semantic convergence, etymology, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac

1. Introduction and Methodology

The word “*črta*” belongs to a group of seemingly simple lexical units whose history, upon closer philological examination, proves to be considerably more complex than its everyday usage would suggest. In the modern Slavic languages, the concept of a line encompasses a wide range of meanings, from a physical line and boundary to a sign, graphic stroke, script, and symbolic marking. However, the historical semantics and etymology of this word point to a much older semantic core associated with cutting, incision, scoring, and the leaving of a visible trace on a surface. Modern Slavic scholarship generally accepts that the Proto-Slavic noun **črta* belongs to the family **čersti* / **črtq* / **črtati* and may ultimately be connected with the Proto-Indo-European root **(s)ker-* “to cut, carve.” This explanation represents the dominant etymological model in Slavic linguistics.

At the same time, the Semitic linguistic sphere contains the root *ś-r-ṭ*, documented in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian, and Arabic material, whose earliest meaning is likewise associated with incision, cutting, and the leaving of a physical trace. Of particular importance is the fact that the Aramaic-Syriac tradition exhibits a further development of this root toward meanings such as line, text line, graphic stroke, and sign. This raises a question that goes beyond classical etymology: does the Slavic and Semitic lexical material exhibit merely a coincidental overlap of individual meanings, or is it possible to identify a broader pattern of semantic convergence that emerged through similar processes of semantic development?

This study does not proceed from the assumption that Proto-Slavic **črta* was borrowed from Semitic languages, nor does it attempt to demonstrate a direct genetic or contact-mediated etymological relationship between the forms under analysis. On the contrary, the primary objective of the research is a critical assessment of the degree of phonetic, semantic, chronological, and historical correspondence between the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ* and the Proto-Slavic family **črta* / **črtati*. Within this framework, particular attention is devoted to the reconstruction of semantic chains leading from acts of cutting and incision to the concepts of line, mark, sign, and graphic character.

The methodological approach combines comparative philology, historical semantics, and critical source analysis. In addition to Slavic and Semitic material, an Iranian corpus is included as a control dataset, since Iranian languages provide important examples of semantic developments from incision and marking to sign and graphic representation. This makes it possible to assess whether the observed semantic processes reflect universal patterns of linguistic development or represent a specific historical phenomenon. The aim of the study is therefore not to deliver a final etymological verdict, but rather to define as precisely as possible the limits of what the

available philological evidence actually allows us to conclude concerning the relationship between Semitic שרט and Proto-Slavic *čьrta.

1.2 Methodology

This study is based on a comparative-philological, historical-semantic, and etymological-critical methodology. The object of analysis is the relationship between the Semitic root שרט and the Proto-Slavic lexical family *čьrta / *čьrtati, with particular attention to the development of meanings associated with incision, line, sign, and graphic marking.

The aim of the study is to determine the degree of formal phonetic similarity, semantic correspondence, chronological compatibility, and historical correspondence between the two lexical families on the basis of the available philological and linguistic evidence.

1.3 Corpus

The corpus analyzed in this study comprises primary and secondary sources from the Semitic, Slavic, and Iranian linguistic traditions.

The Semitic corpus includes the Biblical Hebrew root שרט, its attestations in biblical texts (Lev. 19:28; 21:5), the pre-exilic epigraphic attestation הטרט from the seventh century BCE, the Aramaic form טרט, the Syriac forms ܫܪܬ and ܫܪܬܐ, as well as related forms in Akkadian (šarātu) and Arabic (شَرَطَ).

The Slavic corpus includes the reconstructed Proto-Slavic form *čьrta, the verb *čьrtati, the Old Church Slavonic formula чръты і рѣзы, and the reflexes of this lexical family in the Slavic languages.

An Iranian corpus relevant to the semantic field “to cut,” “to incise,” “to draw a line,” “sign,” and “to write” is included as a control corpus. This corpus includes Proto-Iranian *kart-, Avestan kart-, Proto-Iranian *Hraz, Avestan rəz-, Sogdian skn-, Sogdian 'sk'n, Middle Persian nibištān, and related forms.

The Semitic corpus was selected because of the documented formal phonetic and semantic correspondence between the root שרט and the Proto-Slavic base *čьrt-, whereas other linguistic traditions fall outside the scope of the present study and may constitute the subject of separate comparative investigations.

1.4 Analytical Procedure

The investigation is conducted in four analytical stages.

In the first stage, the phonological structure of comparable forms is analyzed. The aim of this stage is not to establish phonetic identity, but rather to assess the degree of formal phonetic similarity and the possibility of comparative analysis.

In the second stage, the semantic history of each lexical family is reconstructed independently. Primary meanings, secondary semantic extensions, and documented directions of semantic development are analyzed. Particular attention is devoted to the possible sequence:

“to cut → to incise → to leave a trace → line → stroke → sign → graphic character.”

The central object of analysis is the reconstruction and comparison of this semantic chain within each linguistic tradition separately.

In the third stage, the chronology of attestations is examined. Early and late sources are analyzed separately in order to avoid the retrojection of later attested meanings into earlier linguistic stages. Accordingly, the later Syriac meanings “line,” “stroke,” and “character” are not automatically projected onto the Biblical Hebrew material without independent evidence.

In the fourth stage, the historical context of possible contact zones is examined. Consideration is given to contacts between the Semitic world and the Scythians during the seventh century BCE, as well as contacts between Proto-Slavic populations and Scytho-Sarmatian and Alan groups in the North Pontic region. The historical possibility of contact is treated as a separate analytical category and is not equated with evidence of linguistic transmission.

Criteria of Evaluation

The comparative analysis is based on five criteria:

1. formal phonetic similarity;
2. semantic correspondence;
3. direction and structure of semantic development;
4. chronological compatibility;
5. historical plausibility of contact.

No single criterion is regarded as sufficient in itself. Conclusions are drawn exclusively on the basis of an overall assessment of all available evidence.

1.5 Methodological Limitations

This study proceeds from the premise that semantic similarity alone does not demonstrate common origin. Similar semantic developments may arise independently in different linguistic traditions.

Likewise, the existence of historically documented contact zones does not constitute evidence of borrowing. The absence of an attested intermediary form between Semitic שָׂרַט and Proto-Slavic *čьrta prevents any definitive conclusion regarding direct linguistic transmission.

Negative results are also included in the analysis. Particular attention is given to the fact that no secure attestation of the meanings “commodity mark,” “ownership mark,” “counting tally,” or

“administrative sign” has been identified for the root שרט in the available Northwest Semitic epigraphic material from the seventh to the second century BCE.

Negative results are treated as legitimate research data, since the absence of attestation in relevant epigraphic corpora constitutes an important element in evaluating the explanatory power of particular hypotheses.

The study is conceived as a test of a comparative hypothesis. The possibility of semantic convergence is regarded as unconfirmed if the analysis demonstrates that the semantic development of the two lexical families proceeded along different and unrelated paths, or if the semantic parallel is found to be limited to isolated meanings lacking a systematic developmental structure.

1.6 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to determine whether the Semitic root שרט and the Proto-Slavic lexical family *čьrta / *čьrtati exhibit a documented pattern of semantic convergence from incision and physical marking to line, stroke, sign, and graphic character, and to assess the extent to which such convergence justifies further comparative investigation.

1.7 Note on Transcription and Transliteration

The study consistently employs internationally accepted scholarly systems of transliteration for all languages under analysis. Wherever possible, each relevant form is presented both in its original script and in scholarly transliteration. This principle is applied to Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Akkadian, Avestan, Sogdian, Middle Persian, Old Church Slavonic, and other languages included in the investigation.

Original orthography is provided whenever it is preserved in the sources or in standard scholarly literature. Where the original orthography is unknown or unattested, standard scholarly reconstructions are used and marked in accordance with established linguistic practice.

For the sake of terminological consistency, the transliteration of individual languages remains unchanged throughout the study and is not adapted to the phonetic or orthographic conventions of modern Serbian.

2. Previous Interpretations of Proto-Slavic *čьrta

The Proto-Slavic noun *čьrta represents one of the most interesting lexical units of the Slavic etymological lexicon because of its wide distribution across the Slavic languages, its rich derivational family, and the complex questions surrounding its origin. Over more than a century of etymological research, a relatively stable scholarly tradition has developed that connects this word with the verbal family *čersti, *čьrtq, and *čьrtati, and ultimately with the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)ker- / *(s)kert- “to cut, carve.”¹

Although individual scholars differ in certain details of reconstruction, the basic direction of interpretation has remained remarkably stable from the earliest etymological dictionaries to modern comparative studies.² In most cases, it is assumed that the original meaning of the *čьrt-family was associated with cutting, incision, scoring, or leaving a visible trace on a surface, whereas the meanings “line,” “stroke,” or “graphic sign” are regarded as secondary semantic developments.³

2.1. Connection with the Verbal Family *čersti / *čьrtǫ

One of the oldest and most influential etymological interpretations connects the noun *čьrta with the verbal bases *čersti and *čьrtǫ. This connection has been accepted in the Russian, Czech, Slovenian, and Western European Slavic traditions.⁴

In the *Etimologičeskij slovar' slavyanskijh jazykov* (Этимологический словарь славянских языков; hereafter ESSJa), the entry *čersti, *čьrtǫ is treated as part of a broader etymological nest whose basic meaning relates to acts of cutting, incision, and leaving traces on a surface.⁵ Within the same family, the dictionary also discusses the verbal forms *čьrtati and the noun *čьrta, indicating that the authors regarded them as interconnected elements of a unified Proto-Slavic system.⁶

This interpretation is not confined to the Russian etymological school. Rick Derksen reconstructs Proto-Slavic *čersti with the meanings “carve, slash,” comparing it with Lithuanian *kiřsti*, *kertù* and Latvian *cīrst*, and derives the entire group from the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)kert- “cut.”⁷ Derksen’s analysis represents one of the most influential modern syntheses of Slavic etymology and largely confirms the earlier conclusions of Vasmer and Trubačov.⁸

It is particularly significant that modern scholarship does not treat the connection between *čьrta and *čersti as an isolated hypothesis proposed by a single author, but rather as part of a broader consensus shared across several national etymological traditions.⁹

2.2. Connection with the Verb *čьrtati

A second important element in the etymological chain is the verb *čьrtati. In the modern Slavic languages, its reflexes often mean “to draw,” “to mark,” or “to draw a line,” yet the etymological literature indicates that these meanings represent a later development.¹⁰

ESSJa records the Old Church Slavonic form *čьrtati* and compares it with Greek *χαράσσειν* (“to incise,” “to engrave”) and Latin *incidere* (“to cut into,” “to incise”), thereby confirming that the original meaning of the verb was associated with the physical act of cutting or scratching a surface.¹¹

A similar approach is found in the work of the Czech etymologist Václav Machek, who connects the *čьrtati* family with acts of incision, scoring, and leaving traces.¹² Although the details of individual reconstructions differ, the fundamental semantic axis remains the same: a physical trace produced by cutting precedes the more abstract meanings of line or graphic marking.¹³

Such a development is not unusual in historical semantics. In many languages, words denoting “line,” “letter,” or “sign” derive from verbs meaning “to cut,” “to engrave,” or “to incise.”¹⁴ Consequently, the transition from the meaning “to incise” to the meaning “to draw a line” is semantically natural and well documented.¹⁵

2.3. The Semantic Field of Cutting, Incision, and Scoring

The most important characteristic of previous etymological interpretations is the fact that almost all authors begin from the same semantic core. This core includes notions such as:

- cutting;
- incision;
- engraving;
- scratching;
- scoring;
- leaving a trace.

From this semantic field, secondary meanings associated with line and graphic marking gradually developed.¹⁶

In the third edition of the *Slovenski etimološki slovar*, Marko Snoj derives Proto-Slavic *črta from the Proto-Indo-European base *(s)ker-t- “to cut, carve,” explicitly stating that its original meaning was “that which has been incised” or “that which has been cut into.”¹⁷ This formulation represents one of the clearest and most concrete definitions of the original meaning of the word in modern Slovenian etymology.

Snoj further refers to *Słownik prasłowiański* (SP II, 252) and Bezlaj’s *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika* (I, 89), demonstrating that his interpretation is not isolated but grounded in an earlier Slavic scholarly tradition.¹⁸

It is highly significant that neither Snoj, nor Derksen, nor ESSJa treats “line” as the primary meaning. On the contrary, a line is interpreted as the result of a preceding act of incision or the leaving of a trace.¹⁹

In this sense, the following general semantic development may be reconstructed:

cut → incise → leave a trace → groove → line → stroke → sign.²⁰

Although this reconstruction is not identical in every author, it represents the common denominator of most etymological explanations.²¹

Particularly noteworthy is the testimony traditionally attributed to Chernorizets Hrabar. In *On Letters* (*O pismenekh*), he states that before the adoption of Christianity and the introduction of Slavic literacy, the Slavs “črūtami i rězami čitěhu i gatahu” (“read and divined by means of lines and cuts”). Although scholarly literature does not fully agree on the precise meaning of this expression, most interpretations assume that it refers to some form of incised or drawn signs used

for recording information or for divination. For the purposes of the present study, the exact nature of these signs is not decisive. What is important is the fact that the concepts of “line” and “cut” are directly associated within the expression itself. This testimony indicates that notions related to incision, cutting, and graphic marking were already closely connected in the Slavic tradition in the earliest surviving texts. In this respect, the formula “črūtami i řezami” provides additional support for the semantic chain reconstructed in Slavic etymological scholarship as:

cut → incise → leave a trace → line → sign.³⁵

2.4. Connection with Proto-Indo-European **(s)ker-* / **(s)kert-*

Virtually all modern etymologists who have studied this lexical family connect it with the Proto-Indo-European root **(s)ker-*, or its extended form **(s)kert-*.²²

This root is traditionally reconstructed with meanings such as:

- “to cut”;
- “to separate”;
- “to split”;
- “to incise.”²³

Its reflexes are documented in a large number of Indo-European branches, including the Baltic, Germanic, Indo-Iranian, and Slavic languages.²⁴

Derksen explicitly derives **čersti* from **(s)kert-*.²⁵ Snoj connects **čьrtà* with **(s)ker-t-*.²⁶ ESSJa places the **čьrt-* family within the same etymological framework.²⁷ Vasmer likewise accepts a connection with verbs denoting cutting and incision.²⁸

Although scholars differ in certain details of phonological reconstruction, the connection with PIE **(s)ker-* remains one of the most stable elements of the existing etymological literature.²⁹

2.5. The Modern Etymological Consensus

A review of the literature from Vasmer through ESSJa to Derksen, Snoj, and more recent studies demonstrates a high degree of agreement regarding the basic etymology of Proto-Slavic **čьrtà*.³⁰

None of the authors reviewed begins from the original meaning “graphic sign” or “letter.” Instead, nearly all reconstruct an original meaning connected with the physical act of cutting or incision.³¹

Only in later stages of semantic development do the meanings “line,” “stroke,” “mark,” and eventually broader graphic meanings emerge.³²

It is particularly significant that modern scholarship shows no serious disagreement regarding the inclusion of **čьrtà* within the family **čersti* / **čьrtō* / **čьrtati*. Differences among authors

concern primarily details of reconstruction and the extent of individual semantic stages, whereas the basic etymological framework remains stable.³³

It may therefore be concluded that modern Slavic etymology largely accepts a model according to which Proto-Slavic *čьrta originated within the native Slavic-Indo-European lexical system, with its earliest meaning associated with the act of cutting, incision, and leaving a visible trace on a surface.³⁴

Table 1. The Proto-Slavic Lexical Family čьrt- in Slavic Etymological Scholarship

Author	Reconstructed Form	Primary Meaning	Etymological Connection
Vasmer (1987)	čьrta	cut, incision, trace	(s)ker-
ESSJa (1977)	*čьrta, *čьrtati, čersti	cutting, incision	(s)kert-
Derksen (2008)	čersti	carve, slash	(s)kert-
Machek (1968)	čьrtati	incision, leaving a trace	PIE root meaning “to cut”
Bezljaj (1977)	čьrta	that which has been incised	(s)ker-t-
Snoj (2016)	čьrta	that which has been cut into	(s)ker-t-

3. The Semitic Root שָׂרַט in Hebrew and the Broader Semitic Context

The Semitic root שָׂרַט (*ś-r-ṭ*) constitutes the central Semitic element in the present study. Its significance does not derive from any prior assumption of an etymological relationship with Proto-Slavic čьrta, but rather from the fact that it is documented in several Semitic languages within a semantic field encompassing cutting, incision, scratching, the leaving of traces, and, in the later Aramaic-Syriac development, the drawing of lines and graphic marking.¹ This development makes the root particularly relevant for the study of the semantic transition from physical incision to the more abstract concepts of line and sign.

In Biblical Hebrew, the verb שָׂרַט (*śāraṭ*) is attested with the meanings “to cut,” “to incise,” “to make a cut,” or “to make an incision in the body.” The best-known attestations occur in Lev. 19:28 and Lev. 21:5, where the root appears in the context of the prohibition against making ritual cuts on the body.² In both cases the meaning is entirely concrete and physical: the reference is to cutting the skin, not to writing, lines, or graphic signs. A similar usage is found in Jer. 49:3, where the root is associated with self-inflicted wounds performed as an expression of mourning.³

Brown, Driver, and Briggs define שָׂרַט as “incise, scratch,” while also noting the important remark “hence write (= inscribe).”⁴ This formulation does not imply that Biblical Hebrew uses שָׂרַט in the sense “to write,” but rather that the lexicographers recognize a broader semantic development from physical incision toward the inscription of a sign. The connection between cutting and inscription is also known from other ancient cultures in which the original act of writing involved physically cutting into or incising a surface.

HALOT confirms the same basic meaning. For the root שָׂרַט, it lists the meanings “incise,” “scratch,” “tear,” “rip the skin,” and “make gashes,” with references to Lev. 19:28, Lev. 21:5, and Jer. 49:3.⁵ Of particular significance is the noun שָׂרֶט (*śereṭ*), which HALOT translates as “rip” or “slash,” while at the same time referring to the Syriac form *serṭā* in the meanings “pen-

stroke,” “mark,” and “like a punctuation mark.”⁶ HALOT thus documents a later development of the same root toward graphic marking, while clearly distinguishing the early Hebrew layer from the later Syriac development.

Klein likewise defines שרט as “to scratch, scrape; to tattoo.”⁷ In his treatment, the root is connected with the Judaeo-Aramaic and Syriac שרַט, the Arabic شَرَطَ (*šaraṭa*), and the Akkadian *šarāṭu*. Klein’s analysis confirms that the root is not an isolated Hebrew phenomenon but part of a broader Semitic lexical family.

Additional confirmation is provided by Davidson’s *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. On p. 740, the root שרט is defined as “to cut, make incisions in the body,” while the derived noun שרטת is glossed as “incision in the body.”⁸ Davidson’s definition is fully consistent with the evidence presented in BDB and HALOT and constitutes independent confirmation that the primary meaning of the root is associated with incision and bodily injury.

A particularly important epigraphic attestation is the form השרט from an occupational ostrakon discovered in the City of David. Yigal Bloch interprets this form as the occupational designation “the shredder (of rags),” that is, a person engaged in tearing or cutting rags.⁹ Bloch further connects this form with Akkadian *šarāṭu*, Arabic *šaraṭa*, and Biblical Hebrew שרט.¹⁰ This finding is significant because it confirms the existence of the root in pre-exilic Hebrew epigraphic material, probably dating to the seventh century BCE. Its meaning, however, remains within the semantic sphere of cutting, tearing, and ripping, without any clear connection to lines, writing, or graphic signs.

The Akkadian verb *šarāṭu* is cited as a Semitic parallel with meanings such as “to tear,” “to rip,” and “to split,” especially in the context of tearing garments as an expression of mourning.¹¹ Although it does not constitute evidence for the meanings “line” or “graphic sign,” the Akkadian material confirms that the semantic field of cutting and tearing was present in several branches of the Semitic language family.

A similar situation is found in Arabic. The verb شَرَطَ (*šaraṭa*) denotes cutting, slitting, and making incisions.¹² As in Akkadian, the primary meaning remains physical, but it demonstrates that the concept of leaving a trace through cutting was deeply rooted in the Semitic lexicon.

A particularly significant development appears in the Aramaic and Syriac material. The *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* records Aramaic *srṭ* with the meanings “to scratch,” “to incise,” and “to draw.”¹³ In reflexive and passive forms, the meanings “to be inscribed” and “to be drawn” are also attested.¹⁴ Even more importantly, the Syriac material exhibits a further development toward the graphic sphere. CAL records *srṭṭ* “to draw lines,” *serṭā* “scratch” and “line of text,” *serṭōn* “short line over a word,” *serṭōnōn* “tiny line,” and *sūrṭā* “line.”¹⁵ In this way, a clear semantic chain is documented:

incision → trace → drawn line → line of text → graphic sign

This development must not be retroactively projected onto the earliest Hebrew layer, but it demonstrates that within the Aramaic-Syriac cultural and linguistic sphere the root acquired meanings directly associated with writing, the graphic organization of text, and graphic signs.

Modern Hebrew preserves the same root in the verb שרט “to scratch” or “to scrape,” while the noun סרטוט (*sirtūt*) denotes a “line,” “drawing,” “draft,” or “sketch.”¹⁶ Although the modern language cannot be used as evidence for the Biblical period, it demonstrates that the semantic transition from physical incision to graphic line remained productive over the centuries.

A particular problem is posed by Northwest Semitic epigraphy outside Hebrew. During the course of this study, the available Phoenician-Punic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite evidence was examined. The only secure attestation of the form SRT was found in Krahmalkov’s *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*. However, there S-R-T is not connected with Hebrew שרט “to incise,” but rather with Hebrew שרת “to serve.”¹⁷ Krahmalkov records S-R-T I “serve” and SRT II “service,” as well as the derivative MSRT “public service.”¹⁸

This finding is of considerable methodological importance. It demonstrates that the existence of the same consonantal sequence SRT in another language is not sufficient evidence of an etymological relationship. Phoenician-Punic SRT belongs to a different Semitic root and carries no meaning associated with cutting, incision, line, or sign.¹⁹

For the Phoenician, Punic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite material, no secure attestation of the root *srt/šrt* has currently been identified with the meanings “to incise,” “to draw a line,” “mark,” or “graphic sign.”²⁰ Owing to the inaccessibility of certain specialized epigraphic sources, especially the complete *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (DNWSI), this result should be formulated as an absence of attestation in the currently verifiable material rather than as definitive proof that such a root never existed in those languages.²¹

On the basis of the available evidence, it may be concluded that the root שרט is most clearly and most securely attested in Hebrew with the meanings of cutting, incision, and the making of wounds. Hebrew epigraphic material confirms the same semantic sphere. Akkadian and Arabic parallels exhibit related meanings of cutting and tearing, whereas Aramaic and Syriac document a later development toward drawing, line, line of text, and graphic sign. By contrast, Phoenician-Punic SRT belongs to a different root and cannot be employed as evidence for the semantic development examined in this study. The currently available evidence therefore indicates that the primary semantic core of the root שרט is associated with the act of incision and the leaving of a physical trace, whereas meanings connected with line and graphic marking emerge only in the later Aramaic-Syriac traditions.

FOOTNOTES

1. Klein, E. (1987) *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*. Jerusalem: Carta, s.v. שרט.
2. Leviticus 19:28; 21:5.
3. Jeremiah 49:3.

4. Brown, F., Driver, S.R. and Briggs, C.A. (1907) *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 976.
5. Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W. and Stamm, J.J. (1994–2000) *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol. IV. Leiden: Brill, pp. 2738–2739.
6. Ibid., p. 2739.
7. Klein (1987), s.v. שָׂרַט.
8. Davidson, B. (1981) *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 740.
9. Bloch, Y. (2022) ‘A List of Occupations from the City of David’, *Israel Exploration Journal*, 72(2), pp. 189–191.
10. Bloch (2022), p. 190.
11. Klein (1987), s.v. שָׂרַט; cf. Bloch (2022), p. 190.
12. Lane, E.W. (1863–1893) *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. London: Williams & Norgate, s.v. شَرَطَ.
13. *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (CAL), lemma *srt*.
14. Ibid.
15. *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (CAL), lemmata *srt*, *srtt*, *sertā*, *sūrtā*, *sertōn*, *sertōnōn*.
16. Even-Shoshan, A. (2003) *Ha-Milon He-Hadash*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, s.v. שָׂרַט; שָׂרָטָה.
17. Krahmalkov, C.R. (2000) *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*. Leuven: Peeters, p. 472.
18. Krahmalkov (2000), pp. 472–473.
19. Ibid.
20. Based on the corpus and scholarly literature examined in the present study.
21. Hoftijzer, J. and Jongeling, K. (1995) *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. Leiden: Brill.

Table 1. Attested Forms of the Root ś-r-ṭ / srt and Related Forms in the Semitic Languages

Language	Original Script	Transliteration	Meaning	Source
Biblical Hebrew	שָׂרַט	śāraṭ	to cut, to incise, to make a cut in the body	BDB, p. 976; HALOT, pp. 2738–2739
Biblical Hebrew	שָׂרָטָה	śeret	cut, incision, slash	HALOT, pp. 2738–2739
Biblical Hebrew	שָׂרַט	śāraṭ	to cut, to make incisions in the body	Davidson, p. 740
Biblical Hebrew	שָׂרָטָה	śāreṭet	incision in the body	Davidson, p. 740
Epigraphic Hebrew	הסרט	h-s-r-t (vocalization uncertain)	“shredder of rags” (a person engaged in cutting or tearing rags)	Bloch (2022)
Judaeo-Aramaic	סָרַט	srt	to scratch, to cut, to incise	CAL
Aramaic	סָרַט	srt	to draw, to draw a line	CAL

Language	Original Script	Transliteration	Meaning	Source
Syriac	ܫܪܬ	srṭ	to scratch, to cut, to draw	CAL
Syriac	ܫܪܬܐ	serṭā	scratch; line of text	CAL; HALOT
Syriac	ܫܪܬܝ	srtṭ	to draw lines	CAL
Syriac	ܫܪܬܐ	sūrṭā	line	CAL
Syriac	ܫܪܬܢ	serṭōn	short line above a word	CAL
Syriac	ܫܪܬܢܢ	serṭōnōn	very short line	CAL
Akkadian	—	šarātu	to tear, to rip, to split; especially in the context of tearing garments	Klein (1987); Bloch (2022)
Arabic	شَرَطَ	šaraṭa	to cut, to make an incision	Klein (1987); Lane; Wehr
Modern Hebrew	שרט	šāraṭ	to scratch, to scrape	Even-Shoshan
Modern Hebrew	סרטוט	sirtūt	line, sketch, draft	Even-Shoshan
Phoenician-Punic	S-R-T	S-R-T	to serve	Krahmalkov (2000)
Phoenician-Punic	SRT	SRT	service	Krahmalkov (2000)
Phoenician-Punic	MSRT	MSRT	public service	Krahmalkov (2000)
Phoenician	—	—	no confirmed attestation of the root ś-r-ṭ with the meanings “to incise,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified	available verified sources
Punic	—	—	no confirmed attestation of the root ś-r-ṭ with the meanings “to incise,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified	available verified sources
Moabite	—	—	no confirmed attestation of the root ś-r-ṭ with the meanings “to incise,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified	available verified sources
Ammonite	—	—	no confirmed attestation of the root ś-r-ṭ with the meanings “to incise,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified	available verified sources
Edomite	—	—	no confirmed attestation of the root ś-r-ṭ with the meanings “to	available verified sources

Language	Original Script	Transliteration	Meaning	Source
			incise,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified	

Note: Transliteration follows standard Semitic scholarly practice. Phoenician-Punic S-R-T, SRT, and MSRT in Krahmalkov do not constitute attestations of the Hebrew root שרט (*ś-r-t*) “to incise, to cut,” but rather of a different Semitic root related to Hebrew שרת (*š-r-t*) “to serve.” For this reason, they are included as a methodologically important negative-control finding. In the currently verifiable corpus employed in the present study, no secure attestation of the root *ś-r-t* / *srt* with the meanings “to incise,” “to cut,” “line,” or “mark” has been identified in Phoenician, Punic, Moabite, Ammonite, or Edomite.

4. The Aramaic-Syriac Development of the Root *srt*: From Incision to Line and Graphic Sign

If the Biblical Hebrew material demonstrates that the primary meaning of the root שרט is associated with cutting, incision, and the leaving of a physical trace on the body, the Aramaic and especially the Syriac sources attest a further and considerably more developed semantic process. It is precisely within the Aramaic-Syriac tradition that the root *srt* moves beyond the narrow domain of physical incision and enters the sphere of line, stroke, writing, and graphic marking.¹

This development is of particular importance for the subject of the present study because Proto-Slavic *čbrta* denotes not only a cut or incision, but also a line, mark, and sign. Consequently, in order to understand the semantic parallel between Semitic *srt* and Proto-Slavic *čbrta*, it is essential to examine precisely that stage of development in which the root begins to acquire meanings associated with writing and graphic representation.²

The earliest Aramaic attestations still remain close to the original meaning. The *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* (CAL) records the Aramaic form:

סרט (*srt*)

with the meanings:

- to scratch,
- to cut,
- to incise,
- to make an incision.³

However, the same lexicographical source also records secondary meanings such as “to draw” or “to draw a line,” representing an important semantic step between physical incision and graphic sign.⁴ Unlike Biblical Hebrew, where such a meaning is not directly attested, the Aramaic material demonstrates that the connection between scratching and drawing had already been established.

An even more significant development is visible in Syriac. CAL, Payne Smith, Brockelmann, and later Syriac lexicographers record an entire family of forms derived from the root *srṭ*.⁵ These forms demonstrate how the original meaning “to incise” gradually expanded to encompass various kinds of lines, strokes, and written signs.

Table 2. The Aramaic-Syriac Family of Forms Derived from the Root *srṭ*

Language	Original Script	Transliteration	Meaning
Aramaic	סרט	<i>srṭ</i>	to scratch, to cut, to incise
Aramaic	סרט	<i>srṭ</i>	to draw, to draw a line
Syriac	ܣܪܬ	<i>srṭ</i>	to scratch, to cut, to draw
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>srṭā</i>	to draw lines
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>serṭā</i>	scratch, line, line of text
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>sūrṭā</i>	line
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>serṭōn</i>	short line above a word
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>serṭōnōn</i>	very short line
Syriac	ܣܪܬܐ	<i>serṭā</i>	sign, character

Sources: CAL; Payne Smith; Brockelmann; SAHD.

Of particular significance is the noun:

ܣܪܬܐ (*serṭā*)

which in Syriac dictionaries acquires the meanings:

- scratch,
- incision,
- line,
- line of text,
- sign,
- character.⁶

Here, for the first time, a direct connection appears between a physical trace and a graphic unit of text. Whereas Hebrew שרט is primarily associated with the act of incision, Syriac *serṭā* already denotes the result of that process in a graphic sense—a line or a sign.

A similar development is visible in the verbal form:

𐤌𐤓𐤕 (srṭt)

which means “to draw lines” or “to make strokes.”⁷ The root thus definitively moves away from the bodily and ritual context known from Leviticus and enters the sphere of scribal and graphic practice.

Particularly important evidence is provided by the expression:

𐤌𐤓𐤕 ܣܕܐ

literally:

“one line”

or

“one stroke.”⁸

This expression occurs in the Syriac exegetical tradition and demonstrates that *serṭā* could denote the smallest graphic unit of a text. At this stage, the reference is no longer to a wound, incision, or scratch, but to a line as an independent element of written communication.

Even more significant evidence is provided by the Syriac reception of Matthew 5:18. In the Peshitta and the later Syriac exegetical tradition, the expression:

ܣܕܐ (serṭā)

is interpreted as:

- apex,
- serif,
- the smallest graphic extension of a letter,
- the smallest scribal stroke.⁹

In this way, the root *srṭ* reaches the furthest point of its semantic development. The initial act of incision is no longer central; what becomes important is the graphic result—the minimal element of a written sign.

In this context it is particularly significant that the Syriac lexicon also contains the derivatives:

ܣܕܐܢ (serṭōn)

and

ܣܪܬܢܐ (*serṭōnōn*),

which denote a short line and a very short line respectively.¹⁰ Such forms demonstrate that the concept of the line had become the central semantic element of the entire lexical family.

Additional confirmation is provided by recent research on Aramaic languages. In a study published in the *Journal of Language Relationship* (2025), the East Aramaic dialects record the verb:

srṭ

with the meanings:

- to scratch,
- to prick,
- to write.¹¹

Among the examples cited is the meaning “score a board,” that is, to make an incision or trace on a board.¹² This evidence is of particular importance because it demonstrates that the semantic transition from scratching to writing was not restricted to a single historical period or a single dictionary, but rather represents a broader developmental pattern within the Aramaic linguistic sphere.

An important link is also provided by the Rabbinic Hebrew term:

שרטוט (*sirṭūt*)

which denotes:

- a ruled line,
- a scribal line,
- a guideline for text,
- the preparation of parchment for writing.¹³

In Jewish scribal tradition, *sirṭūt* refers precisely to the process of drawing guiding lines before writing a sacred text. Thus, within the Hebrew tradition itself, a development appears that is very similar to the one clearly documented in Syriac.

If all available evidence is considered together, the following semantic sequence may be reconstructed:

to cut → to incise → to leave a trace → to draw a line → to make a stroke → to write a sign → graphic character.¹⁴

This sequence does not demonstrate any etymological relationship with Proto-Slavic *čbrta*. It does, however, show that within the Semitic linguistic sphere there existed a fully documented

development from physical incision to graphic sign. For this reason, the parallel with the Slavic semantic chain:

incision → mark → line → sign

cannot be dismissed as a merely accidental surface similarity.¹⁵

At the same time, it must be emphasized that nearly all evidence for the meanings “line,” “stroke,” “character,” and “graphic sign” is later than the Biblical Hebrew material. The majority of the Syriac attestations derive from the literary tradition of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹⁶ Consequently, it would be methodologically incorrect to project these meanings back into the seventh or sixth centuries BCE. The Syriac material therefore cannot serve as evidence that Hebrew שרט already denoted a line or a letter in its earliest period.

Nevertheless, the Syriac and Aramaic sources provide the clearest evidence that the root *srt* was capable of developing meanings extending from physical incision to the more abstract concepts of line, stroke, and sign. In this respect, they constitute a crucial link in understanding the broader Semitic history of the root and the most important comparative material for comparison with Proto-Slavic *črta*.

Footnotes

1. Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (CAL), lemma *srt*.
2. Cf. the conclusions of Chapter 3 concerning Hebrew שרט.
3. CAL, lemma *srt*.
4. CAL, lemma *srt*; BDB, p. 976 (“scratch, hence write”).
5. Payne Smith, J. (1903) *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*; Brockelmann, C. (1928) *Lexicon Syriacum*; CAL.
6. Payne Smith (1903), s.v. ܣܪܬܐ; CAL.
7. CAL, lemma *srt*.
8. *Commentarii in Lucae Evangelium quae supersunt Syriace*.
9. Peshitta, Matthew 5:18; Payne Smith (1903), s.v. ܣܪܬܐ.
10. CAL, lemmata *serṭōn* and *serṭōnōn*.
11. *Journal of Language Relationship* (2025), Middle Eastern Aramaic lexical material.
12. Ibid.
13. Jastrow, M. (1903) *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*, s.v. שרטוט.
14. Synthesis based on CAL, Payne Smith, and the Rabbinic material.
15. Cf. Old Church Slavonic *črty i rězy* and Proto-Slavic *črta*.
16. Payne Smith (1903); the Syriac exegetical tradition.

5. Iranian Material as a Control Corpus: Cut, Incision, Mark, and Sign

The Iranian material occupies a special place in the present study because it constitutes a natural control corpus situated between the Slavic and Semitic evidence. Unlike the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ*, which belongs to an entirely different language family, the Iranian languages share a common

Indo-European origin with Slavic. The analysis of Iranian forms therefore makes it possible to assess whether the semantic development from “cutting” to “line,” “mark,” and “sign” can be explained through internal Indo-European processes or requires additional explanations.¹

The oldest and most securely documented Iranian evidence derives from the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)ker-*, or its extended form *(s)kert-*, whose primary meaning is “to cut,” “to separate by cutting,” or “to make an incision.”² In the Iranian languages, this root yields Proto-Iranian *kart-*, attested in Avestan as *karət-* with the meaning “to cut.”³ Cheung connects this group with Old Indic *kart-* “to cut (off),” thereby confirming the continuity of the semantic field from the Proto-Indo-European to the Iranian period.⁴

Unlike the Semitic root שָׂרַט, which in its earliest layers is primarily associated with incision of the body, Iranian *kart-* represents a general verb of cutting. Its importance for the present discussion does not lie in any possible phonetic similarity to Proto-Slavic *čьrta*, but in the fact that it documents the same fundamental semantic core: the act of creating a trace through cutting.⁵

Particularly important evidence is provided by the Ossetic material. In his historical-etymological dictionary, Abaev records the Ossetic form *ugard* with the meanings “notch,” “cut,” and “incision.”⁶ He also notes the traditional use of such incisions as marks of memory, oath, or mutual agreement.⁷ In one example, individuals make an incision as a sign that no one will violate an agreement, while another refers to incisions made on a sacred tower.⁸

This evidence is of exceptional importance because it demonstrates the development:

cut → incision → mark

Unlike ordinary physical cutting, the incision here acquires a communicative function. It is no longer merely a trace produced by cutting, but a carrier of information. In this respect, Ossetic *ugard* constitutes one of the most striking Iranian parallels to Slavic semantics.⁹

Abaev further derives *ugard* from the form *vi-karta* and connects it with Avestan *karət-* “cut,” Old Indic *kart-* “cut,” and *vikart-* “slice, incise, cut.”¹⁰ The Ossetic material thus provides a direct link between the Proto-Indo-European root of cutting and later meanings involving incision and mark.

In addition to the *kart-* group, the Iranian languages also display a second important semantic development. Cheung reconstructs the Proto-Iranian root *drau(H)š-* with the basic meaning “to make a mark, brand.”¹¹ Unlike *kart-*, the emphasis here is not on the act of cutting itself but on the result of that act: marking and the creation of a recognizable sign. The reconstruction itself demonstrates that the Iranian world possessed a distinct lexical field associated with marks, brands, and identifying signs.

From this root is derived Middle Persian *drōš-* (BMP *dlwš-*), meaning “to brand.”¹² The semantic development is straightforward: a physical trace made on an object or animal becomes a means of identification.

Even more significant are the later Iranian reflexes. Cheung records New Persian *dirōš*, which denotes both a “mark” and a “sign.”¹³ He explicitly states that the word functions as a synonym of *mark*.¹⁴

Similar meanings occur in other Iranian languages. Baluchi *drōš* denotes an “earmark,” that is, a cut made in the ear of an animal to indicate ownership.¹⁵ In Pashto, the form *darwaš* appears with the meanings “earmark” and “distinguishing mark.”¹⁶ In both cases, the reference is to a physical incision serving as a sign of identification. The semantic chain may therefore be reconstructed as:

incision → brand → mark → sign

This phenomenon is particularly interesting because it demonstrates a development very similar to that already identified in the Aramaic-Syriac material. Unlike the Semitic root *srṭ*, however, this represents an entirely independent Iranian development.¹⁷

In addition, the Iranian corpus contains a group of forms associated with the concept of the line. Cheung reconstructs Proto-Iranian *Hraz*, whose Avestan reflex is *rəz-*.¹⁸ This root is associated with meanings such as:

- to draw a line,
- to mark with a line,
- to trace.¹⁹

Although the reconstruction is less secure than that of the *kart-* group, it remains important because it suggests that the concept of the line could be lexicalized independently of the concept of cutting within the Iranian linguistic sphere.²⁰

Even more significant is the Sogdian material. Sogdian attests *skn-* with the meanings “incise” and “engrave,”²¹ while the form *’sk’*’*n* denotes a “line.”²² Here the semantic development is almost transparent:

to incise → to engrave → line

This constitutes one of the closest Iranian parallels to the process documented in Syriac through the development *srṭ* → *serṭā* → *line of text*.²³

For the sake of clarity, the principal Iranian evidence may be presented in the following table.

Table 3. Principal Iranian Forms Relevant to the Semantic Field of Cut, Line, and Sign

Language	Form	Meaning	Source
Proto-Iranian	<i>kart-</i>	to cut	Cheung
Avestan	<i>karət-</i>	to cut, to slice	Cheung

Language	Form	Meaning	Source
Ossetic	<i>ugard</i>	notch, incision, cut	Abaev
Proto-Iranian	<i>drau(H)š-</i>	to make a mark, brand	Cheung
Middle Persian	<i>drōš-</i>	to brand, to mark	Cheung
New Persian	<i>dirōš</i>	mark, sign	Cheung
Baluchi	<i>drōš</i>	ownership mark cut into an animal's ear	Cheung
Pashto	<i>darwaš</i>	distinguishing mark, identifying sign	Cheung
Proto-Iranian	<i>Hraz</i>	to draw a line	Cheung
Avestan	<i>rəz-</i>	to mark with a line	Cheung
Sogdian	<i>skn-</i>	to incise, to engrave	Cheung
Sogdian	<i>'sk''n</i>	line	Cheung

The Iranian evidence demonstrates two independent semantic trajectories. The first leads from cutting to incision and mark (*kart* → *ugard*), while the second leads from marking to sign (*drau(H)š* → *dirōš*).²⁴ A third, less securely documented trajectory is associated with the concept of the line (*Hraz* → *rəz-*; *skn-* → *'sk''n*).²⁵

The principal conclusion of this chapter is that the Iranian languages provide numerous attestations of semantic transitions between cut, incision, mark, line, and sign. At the same time, none of these forms exhibits a sufficiently close formal relationship to Proto-Slavic *čbŕta* to explain its origin directly. The Iranian material therefore does not provide a direct solution to the etymological problem, but it demonstrates that the development from a physical cut to a graphic or symbolic mark was a widespread phenomenon within the Indo-European linguistic sphere.²⁶

1. Cf. the methodological framework of the present study and the definition of the control corpus.
2. Pokorny, J. (1959) *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. (s)ker-.
3. Cheung, J. (2007) *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb*, pp. 244–245.
4. Ibid., pp. 244–245.
5. Cf. Proto-Slavic *čbŕta* and Semitic שָׂרַט as analyzed in the preceding chapters.
6. Abaev, V.I. *Historical-Etymological Dictionary of the Ossetian Language*, s.v. *ugard*.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Abaev, s.v. *ugard*.
11. Cheung (2007), p. 80.
12. Cheung (2007), p. 80.

13. Cheung (2007), p. 80.
14. Ibid.
15. Cheung (2007), p. 80.
16. Cheung (2007), p. 80.
17. Cf. Chapter 4 on the Aramaic-Syriac development of the root *srt*.
18. Cheung, J. (2007) *Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb*. Leiden–Boston: Brill, pp. 196–198, s.v. *Hraz*.
19. Ibid.
20. Cf. the remarks concerning the degree of certainty of the reconstruction in the preceding analysis.
21. Cheung (2007), Sogdian material.
22. Ibid.
23. Cf. CAL, Payne Smith, and the Syriac material analyzed in Chapter 4.
24. Based on Cheung (2007) and Abaev’s material.
25. Ibid.
26. Synthetic conclusion based on the evidence presented in the present chapter.
27. Discussion: Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Explanations

7.1. Strengths of the PIE Explanation

Traditional etymological scholarship almost unanimously connects Proto-Slavic *čьrta with the Indo-European root *(s)ker- and its extended forms *(s)kert-. This interpretation is accepted by leading etymologists and Slavists, including Vasmer, Trubačov, Derksen, and Snoj. The principal advantage of this model lies in the fact that the Slavic forms under consideration can be explained within the Indo-European system without the need to assume borrowing from other language families.

Additional support for this explanation is provided by the Iranian material analyzed in the previous chapter. Proto-Iranian *kart-, Avestan karət-, and Ossetic ugard document a semantic field associated with cutting, incision, and notching. Particularly significant is Ossetic ugard “notch, cut, incision,” which demonstrates that the basic meaning of cutting may develop into the meaning of a mark or mnemonic sign. The Iranian sequence *drau(H)š → drōš → dirōš likewise exhibits development toward the meanings “mark,” “sign,” and “earmark.” All of this confirms that semantic transitions between cut, incision, and mark are possible within the Indo-European world. The Iranian group *Hraz possesses less evidential strength than the *kart and *drau(H)š groups because its reconstruction is based on a more limited corpus of attestations.

Another important advantage of the PIE model is its methodological economy. Since Proto-Slavic *čьrta belongs to an Indo-European language, deriving it from an Indo-European root requires fewer additional assumptions than a model involving contact, mediation, and borrowing from a Semitic environment.

7.2. Weaknesses of the PIE Explanation

Although the Indo-European explanation is well established in the etymological literature, it is not without problems. Most scholars discuss in detail the initial phase of development associated

with cutting, incision, and the creation of a physical trace, but much less frequently explain the later development toward the meanings “line,” “graphic sign,” “character,” or “writing.”

It is precisely at this point that differences among scholars emerge. Some etymologists continue to emphasize meanings associated with incision or trace, whereas others assume that the transition toward line and sign occurred secondarily. In most cases, however, this process is not documented step by step.

In other words, the PIE model explains the initial stages of development very successfully but documents much less convincingly the final stages of the semantic chain involving the graphic sign and the function of writing. It is precisely here that comparison with the Semitic material becomes relevant.

7.3. Strengths of the Semitic Hypothesis

The principal strength of the Semitic material does not lie in the claim that Proto-Slavic *čьrta is of Semitic origin, but rather in the fact that the Semitic sources document an exceptionally similar semantic development.

From a phonetic perspective, there is a certain similarity between Semitic ś-r-ṭ and Slavic č-r-t. Such similarity does not in itself constitute evidence of an etymological relationship, but it is sufficiently striking to justify comparison.

Even more significant is the semantic aspect. Hebrew שרט, epigraphic Hebrew הסרט, Akkadian šarāṭu, and Arabic šaraṭa belong to a semantic field involving cutting, tearing, and incision. The Aramaic and especially the Syriac material, however, exhibit a much more advanced development.

Particularly significant are the Syriac forms:

serṭā,

sūrṭā,

serṭōn.

These forms document meanings such as:

line,

line of text,

pen stroke,

sign,

short mark above a word.

On the basis of this evidence, it is possible to reconstruct an almost complete semantic chain:

cut → incision → trace → line → sign.

This constitutes the strongest aspect of the Semitic material. Unlike many other etymological models, nearly all stages of development are documented here by concrete lexical forms.

7.4. Weaknesses of the Semitic Hypothesis

Despite these advantages, the Semitic hypothesis faces serious difficulties.

First, no demonstrated intermediary between the Semitic world and Proto-Slavic has been identified. No source documents a transition of the type:

sr̥t → intermediary form → *čьrta.

Nor has any evidence been found that the specific word was ever borrowed into Slavic.

A particular problem is presented by the Northwest Semitic material. During the course of this research, no secure attestations of the root ś-r-ṭ in the relevant sense were found in:

Phoenician,

Punic,

Moabite,

Ammonite,

Edomite.

The only Phoenician-Punic form identified, SRT, proved to be a reflex of a different root associated with the meaning “to serve” rather than “to incise.”

Likewise, no attested Scythian form sr̥t has been identified that could represent the expected link between the Semitic world and the North Pontic region.

Consequently, the Semitic hypothesis currently possesses a strong semantic parallel but lacks a demonstrated mechanism of transmission.

7.5. Methodological Limitations

When evaluating all of the evidence presented above, several methodological limitations must be kept in mind.

First, semantic parallelism is not the same as etymology. Two languages may develop very similar meanings without common origin or direct contact.

Second, historical contact is not the same as borrowing. The fact that the Scythians were present in the Near East, and the fact that Iranian populations were in contact with the North Pontic region, does not constitute evidence that a particular word was transferred from one language to another.

Third, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The lack of an attested intermediary does not mean that contact could not have existed. However, the converse principle is equally valid: the mere possibility of contact is not evidence of transmission. Historical plausibility cannot replace linguistic proof. For this reason, all conclusions of the present study must be formulated cautiously and within the limits imposed by the available evidence.

7.6. Why Semantic Parallelism Is Not Sufficient for Etymology

One of the fundamental methodological principles of historical linguistics is that semantic similarity alone does not constitute evidence of common origin. Similar or even identical paths of semantic development may arise independently in different language families as a result of universal cognitive and cultural processes. The material analyzed in the present study provides several examples of this phenomenon.

In the Slavic, Semitic, and Iranian corpora, developmental sequences linking cutting, incision, trace, mark, line, and sign are documented, yet they occur in genetically unrelated or very distantly related linguistic traditions. Consequently, the fact that Semitic *ś-r-ṭ* and Proto-Slavic **čьrta* display partially corresponding semantic trajectories cannot be regarded as evidence of an etymological relationship.

An etymological conclusion requires satisfactory phonological, chronological, and historical argumentation in addition to semantic correspondence. For this reason, the present study does not proceed from the assumption of common origin but rather investigates the degree of semantic convergence between the two lexical families. The results demonstrate that a semantic parallel exists and is documented, but that it does not by itself permit a definitive etymological conclusion.

7.7. Why the Absence of an Intermediary Form Does Not Automatically Refute the Contact Hypothesis

On the other hand, the absence of a directly attested intermediary form cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence against the possibility of contact. Historical linguistics provides numerous examples in which the existence of contacts or borrowings has been accepted even before all expected links in the documentation were discovered. The reason lies in the fact that the greater part of linguistic history remains unattested, while the surviving corpus of ancient and early medieval languages is fragmentary.

In the case examined in the present study, no form is currently known that would unequivocally connect Semitic $\acute{s}$ -r-ṭ with Proto-Slavic *čьrta. This constitutes a serious methodological limitation and prevents any claim of demonstrated linguistic transmission. At the same time, however, it does not permit the definitive rejection of the possibility of contact, especially in view of the historically attested zones of interaction between the Semitic world, Iranian steppe populations, and the North Pontic region.

For this reason, the absence of an intermediary form is treated in the present study as a negative result that reduces the evidential strength of the contact hypothesis but does not render it a priori impossible. The final assessment must be based on the totality of phonological, semantic, chronological, and historical evidence rather than on a single isolated criterion.

7.8. Principal Result of the Study

On the basis of the analysis conducted above, the principal result of the present study may be formulated as follows. This study does not demonstrate that Proto-Slavic *čьrta derives from the Semitic root srṭ. Such a conclusion would require a demonstrated historical mechanism of transmission, an attested intermediary form, and clear documentation of the borrowing process, and such evidence is currently unavailable.

The analysis does show, however, that Semitic srṭ and Proto-Slavic *čьrta exhibit an exceptionally close phonetic-semantic parallel and a highly similar development from incision to line and sign.

The most important contribution of the present study therefore lies not in demonstrating a Semitic origin for the Proto-Slavic word, but in documenting the fact that Semitic, Iranian, and Slavic material display remarkably similar patterns of development from a physical trace to a graphic mark. Such correspondence constitutes a relevant result of historical semantics and provides a basis for future research into possible contacts between the Semitic, Iranian, and Slavic worlds.

8. Conclusion

The question of the origin of the Proto-Slavic noun *čьrta and its verbal family has long occupied an important place in Slavic etymological scholarship. Contemporary etymological dictionaries generally connect it with the Proto-Slavic verbs *čersti, *čьrtō, and *čьrtati, and ultimately with the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)ker- / *(s)kert- “to cut,” “to incise,” “to make a notch.” Such an interpretation constitutes the dominant model in contemporary Slavic etymology and remains the most stable explanation for the origin of this lexical family. At the same time, however, the semantic history of Proto-Slavic *čьrta raises the question of whether the development from physical incision to line, mark, and sign may also be viewed within a broader comparative framework.

Proceeding from this question, the present study was not designed to demonstrate an etymological relationship between the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ* and Proto-Slavic **črta*, nor to prove a specific case of linguistic borrowing. Its objective was considerably narrower and methodologically more cautious: to determine whether the two lexical families exhibit documented phonetic, semantic, chronological, and historical correspondences sufficient to justify comparative analysis.

The analysis of the Slavic material demonstrated that virtually all relevant etymological sources begin with meanings associated with cutting, incision, carving, and the creation of a trace. Only from such a semantic nucleus do the secondary meanings of line, stroke, and sign develop. Particularly significant is the fact that the Slavic tradition already displays, in its earliest preserved testimony, a close association between the concepts of “line” and “cut,” confirming that physical marking and graphic marking belonged to the same semantic field.

The Semitic material revealed a similar initial stage of development. In the earliest Hebrew sources, the root *טרת* denotes cutting, making incisions, and leaving a physical mark on the body. The epigraphic Hebrew material confirms the same semantic nucleus. Akkadian and Arabic parallels further demonstrate that meanings associated with cutting, tearing, and incision were widespread across several branches of the Semitic language family. A particularly important result of the present study is the analysis of the Aramaic and Syriac material, in which a further development from incision toward line, line of text, graphic stroke, and sign is documented. Within the Semitic sphere, it is therefore possible to trace an almost complete semantic sequence extending from physical incision to graphic character.

The Iranian material served as a control corpus. Its analysis demonstrated that Iranian languages likewise attest developmental paths linking cut, incision, mark, brand, line, and sign. Ossetic *ugard* illustrates a transition from incision to mark, whereas the group of forms associated with **drau(H)š* documents development toward the meanings “mark” and “sign.” The Sogdian material further confirms the possibility of development from incision and engraving to the concept of a line. These data indicate that the semantic process under consideration is neither confined to the Slavic nor to the Semitic tradition, but rather represents a broader historical-linguistic pattern.

The historical-geographical analysis demonstrated that contact between the Semitic world and Iranian steppe populations was not impossible. The presence of the Scythians in the Near East during the seventh century BCE, as well as later Iranian-Slavic contacts in the North Pontic region, create a framework within which the possibility of cultural and linguistic interaction cannot be dismissed a priori. Nevertheless, the historical possibility of contact does not constitute evidence of linguistic transmission. No intermediary form has been identified in the available material that would permit reconstruction of a specific path of transmission between the Semitic and Slavic evidence.

The most important result of the present study, therefore, is not the demonstration of an etymological relationship but the documentation of an exceptionally close phonetic-semantic parallel between the Semitic root *ś-r-ṭ* and the Proto-Slavic family **črt-*. In both traditions, one

finds a development linking cutting, incision, trace, mark, line, and sign. Such a parallel cannot be ignored, yet it is not sufficient in itself to support an etymological conclusion.

For this reason, the present study does not demonstrate that Proto-Slavic *čьrta derives from the Semitic root ś-r-ṭ. It does show, however, that an unusually close phonetic-semantic correspondence exists between them, together with a highly similar development from incision to line and sign. Whether this correspondence is best explained by independent semantic development, indirect contacts, or some other historical process remains an open question. Future research should include a systematic analysis of the entire Northwest Semitic epigraphic corpus, a more detailed examination of Iranian-Slavic contact models, and a broader typological study of developments from physical incision to graphic sign. Only such investigations will be able to determine more precisely the place occupied by Semitic srt within the wider discussion of the origin of Proto-Slavic *čьrta.

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