The Deity in the Definite Article: laššāw' and related terms for Baʻal in Jeremiah

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ABSTRACT

The general consensus is that the abstract noun šāw' (שָׁוא) in the HB/OT, with the basic meaning of worthlessness, inefficacy, deceit, emptiness, falsehood, lie, could refer either to these qualities in general (typically translated in the English as "in vain"), or could refer to anti-Yahweh idolatry. The choice has been rather arbitrary and inconsistent, relying on the reader's view of what the text would want to convey. This study builds on the assumption that the definiteness of the noun determines its semantic value, and should be a major factor in determining the general versus polemic meaning of šāw' (שָׁוא), although this grammatico-semantic distinction is unaccounted for in standard lexicons and most commentaries. The study limits itself to the book of Jeremiah, where šāw' only appears in its definite form, as laššāw'. Remarkably three other similarly defined nouns are located in the same text blocks in Jeremiah, namely haššeqer, habbošet and hahebel (mostly with prefixed prepositions). The fact that they all have indefinite counterparts in Jeremiah, strengthens the argument that the presence or absence of the definite article is not arbitrary, but noteworthy and meaningful. The fact that these four determined nouns (haššāw', haššeqer, habbošet and hahebel) all function in the same broader text in Jeremiah, with the deity Baʻal also mentioned consistently and exclusively in the definite form (mostly singular habbaʻal, rarely plural habbeʻalîm) leads to the hypothesis that the defined nouns under discussion are all references to Baʻal, with a suggested rhetorical function of disparagement of the deity. The plausibility of the hypothesis is tested in this particular study by means of an exegetical exercise which zooms in on the interface of the nouns under discussion in a selected range of texts. The exegetical approach is obviously launched from the mentioned theoretical stance, seeking to discover features of the text that support interpretation in line with the hypothesis.

KEYWORDS: Jeremiah; Baal; exegesis.

A   INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

This study originates from two curiosities: firstly the well-known wording of the third commandment as "You shall not take the Name of the LORD *in vain*",

while it is literally a prohibition to "lift up (the name of yhwh) *to the vanity*", *laššāw'* (the definite article merged with the preposition ־ל preceding *šāw'*), consequently begging the question what or whom *"the vanity"* might be. The second curiosity following from this observation is the fourfold appearance of *laššāw'* in Jeremiah, once (18:15) for sure in the form of an idol, maybe Ba'al himself. The reading of *laššāw'* in the Jeremiah text with the consideration that the Masoretic orthographic signs transformed *šāw'* into the definite form by design, is confirmed by the discovery of three similar nouns in the surrounding text, namely *haššeqer, habbošet,* and *hahebel* (mostly with prefixed prepositions) who are all intentionally written in their definite forms, as is evident from the fact that all of them happen to have indefinite counterparts in MT Jeremiah.

The grammatical possibility that nouns in the definite form can be classified as proper nouns[1] (names), the insight that לַשָּׁוְא [2] in at least Jeremiah 18:5 refers to an idol[3], and the multiple occurrences of the name of the deity Ba'al in the definite form *habba'al* (הַבַּעַל)[4] in MT Jeremiah, beg the question whether all these references or allusions are not pointing to the same subject, namely Ba'al. In the light of the shared semantic fields of these nouns, the rhetorical function of these allusions seems to be 'naming and shaming,' disparaging the named candidate (and by implication his associates), typically in the vernacular of our day a 'disgraced fake'[5].

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[1]   Christo H. J. Van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar, Second Edition* (Reprint. London: T&T Clark / Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 219; Bill T. Arnold & John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (8th print. Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

[2]   In Jeremiah 2:30, 4:30, 6:29, 18:15 and 46:11.

[3]   Modern commentators are generally in agreement with this, for example John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 438; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly & Joel F. Drinkard (jr.), *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 26: Jeremiah 1-25* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 249; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, volume 21. New York: Doubleday, 1999), 822; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (edited by Paul D. Hanson. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 524.

[4]   Jeremiah 2:8, 7:9, 11:13, 17, 12:16, 19:5 (twice), 23:13, 27; 32:29, 35. See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 271.

[5]   The semantic fields of *šāw', šeqer* and *hebel* are overlapping in the notion of fallacy/deceit. See Friedrich V. Reiterer, "שָׁוְא *šāw'*," in volume 14 of *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 447. J. Shepherd, "שָׁוְא *šāw'* (#8736)," in volume 4 of *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (edited by Willem VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 53. Horst Seebass, Stefan Beyerle & Klaus Grünwaldt, "שקר *šqr;* שֶׁקֶר *šeqer.*" in volume 15 of

In this regard a quick glance at different translations and commentaries shows signs of recognition to unspecified deities. One example should suffice: Traditionally translations rendered לַשָּׁוְא with "in vain" or words to that effect in all five occurrences of the word in Jeremiah (2:30, 4:30, 6:29, 18:15 and 46:11). Its occurrence in Jeremiah 18:15, however, opened up the insight that it may refer to idols. Although most translations of this verse, up to the beginning of the 20th century, maintained forms of "in vain,"[6] for לַשָּׁוְא , since the end of the 19th century it became apparent that translators have been working with the premise that the proposition לְ in לַשָּׁוְא in the combination קטר לְ־ indicates the object of worship to which the incense offerings are offered, with the implication that לַשָּׁוְא cannot simply be describing the futility of the religious ceremony. In other words, הַשָּׁוְא is acknowledged to be the recipient of sacrifices, therefore a deity other than yhwh. In other words, a vain, worthless, idol[7]. It should be noted that

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Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 470. E. Carpenter & M.A. Grisame, "שׁקר šqr (#9213)," in volume 4 of *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (edited by Willem VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 247. M. A. Klopfenstein, "שֶׁקֶר šqr Täuschen," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band II* (edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag / Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 1010. D. C. Fredericks, "הֶבֶל hebel (#2039)," in volume 1 of *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (edited by Willem VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1005. Klaus Seybold, "הֶבֶל hebhel; הָבַל hābhal," in volume 3 of *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 314. Bōšet "expresses the idea that someone (..) underwent an experience in which his (or its) former respected position and importance were overthrown." See Horst Seebass, "בּוֹשׁ bósh, בּוּשָׁה búshāh, בֹּשֶׁת bōsheth, מְבוּשִׁים mᵉbhûshîm," in volume 2 of *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis. Revised and reprinted. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 52.

[6]   LXX: εἰς κενὸν ἐθυμίασαν, see https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/septuagint-lxx/read-the-bible-text; Targum Jonathan: אֲרֵי שְׁבָקוּ פּוּלְחָנִי עַמִי לָא לַהֲנָאָה אַסִיקוּ בּוּסְמִין, see Targum Jonathan on Jeremiah – Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org /Targum_Jonathan_on_Jeremiah.18.15-16?lang=bi. Targum translation: "For my people *have forsaken my worship*: they have offered up incense *for what cannot profit"*, see Robert Hayward, *The Aramaic Bible, volume 12, The Targum of Jeremiah, Translation with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes,* Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987, 101. Vulgata: "frustra libantes"; Geneva Bible 1599 "they... have burnt incense to vanity"; Douay-Rheims 1610 (1749): "they sacrificed in vain"; Kjv 1611 "they have burned incense to vanity"; Statenvertaling 1750 (1637): "zij roken der ijdelheid"; Jewish Publication Society Tanakh 1917 "They offer unto vanity".

[7]   Translations in this range: Afrikaans 1933 "hulle laat rook opgaan vir die nietige afgode"; Afrikaans 1983 "hulle bring reukoffers vir gode wat nie bestaan nie"; Herziene

long before the modern era, already by 1534, the translators of the Lutheran Bible showed this insight[8]. Although some interpreters of Jeremiah 18:15 connect the idol(s) to Baʻal[9], it does not seem to be grounded in the rhetorical implications of the grammatical definiteness of the noun[10]. Even in recent translations the noun is still rendered as indefinite[11].

As for the other occurrences of לַשָּׁוְא in Jeremiah (2:30, 4:30, 6:29, 46:11), only a few commentators[12], but no translations, have considered the possibility that they might be of the same order as Jeremiah 18:15. The obvious rationale is that some form of "in vain" makes translational sense in all the texts apart from 18:15. The latent semantic difference between the definite and indefinite forms of the word is apparently not considered, or the assumption is that the definiteness of the word bears no real semantic value. All or at least most of the lexicons and semantic and theological dictionaries reflect this stance by not distinguishing the indefinite from the definite forms of these nouns. The dictionary entry in Koehler and Baumgartner (KAHAL) of [13]שׁוא contains examples of the lexeme with the definite article haphazardly inserted in between the indefinite form[14]. The possibility that there may be a (collective) variation of meaning of the same noun in the definite form, is not perceived. The same applies

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Statenvertaling 2010 "Zij brengen reukoffers aan nutteloze afgoden"; Asv 1901 "For my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to false [gods]". Esv 2001 "they make offerings to false gods". Modern commentators are generally in agreement with this, for example John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 438; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly & Joel F. Drinkard (jr.), *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 26: Jeremiah 1-25* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 249; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, volume 21. New York: Doubleday, 1999), 822; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (edited by Paul D. Hanson. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 524. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press, 1986), 376 renders "in vain", but leave it open as a possible reference to the idols.

[8]   Luther 1545 (1534) "Sie räuchern den Göttern".

[9]   For example, John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 438; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 524.

[10]   Curiously, Jack Lundbom, with a keen eye for what he calls "a disparaging name for Baʻal", translates Jeremiah 18:15 with "they burn incense in vain", with the note that the reference here would be to the idols. See Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 822.

[11]   For example, The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh 1985 "They sacrifice to a delusion".

[12]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* and Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20.*

[13]   Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, "שָׁוְא" in *Konzise und actualisierte Ausgabe des Hebräischen und Aramäischen Lexicons des Alten Testament* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 589.

[14]   At inception, b. לַשָּׁוְא vergeblich, ohne Erfolg; later as group b: Trug/trügerisch, חֲלֹמוֹת הַשָּׁוְא and חֶבְלֵי הַשָּׁוְא together with indefinites חֲזוֹן שָׁוְא מַחֲזֵה־שָׁוְא and קֶסֶם שָׁוְא.

to the entries of the aforementioned related nouns[15]. At the time of this research the online *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* only has the name שָׁוְא[16], which is not helpful. The theological dictionary series at my disposal[17] is likewise of little avail regarding שָׁוְא *šaw'* [18], שֶׁקֶר *šeqer*[19,] הֶבֶל *heḇel*[20] and בֹּשֶׁת *bōšet*[21].

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15   See the entries in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *KAHAL,* of בֹּשֶׁת (page 85), הֶבֶל (page 123), שֶׁקֶר (page 640). הַהֶבֶל is mentioned in combination with הלך אחרי as "Götzen" (idols), as well as הַבְלֵי הַגּוֹיִם (Jeremiah 14:22), a definite plural genitive construct.

16   Reinier de Blois and Enio R. Mueller, eds., *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew: Working Project of United Bible Societies 2020.* No Pages. Cited 4 May 2020. Online: http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html.

17   NIDOTTE, TDOT, THAT (English: TLOT) and TWOT.

18   John F. A. Sawyer, "שָׁוְא šāw' Trug," in THAT II, 882-884. J. Shepherd, "שָׁוְא šāw' (#8736)," in NIDOTTE volume 4, 53-55. Friedrich V. Reiterer, "שָׁוְא šāw'," in TDOT volume 14, 447-460. In none of these works the difference between שָׁוְא and הַשָּׁוא is considered.

19   M. A. Klopfenstein, "שֶׁקֶר šqr Täuschen," in THAT II, 1010-1019. E. Carpenter & M.A. Grisame, "שׁקר šqr (#9213)," in NIDOTTE volume 4, 247-249. Horst Seebass, Stefan Beyerle & Klaus Grünwaldt, "שקר šqr; שֶׁקֶר šeqer." in TDOT volume 15, 470-477. None of these articles, when discussing the connotation of *šeqer* to the idols or false prophecy, consider the grammatical form of the word in terms of its definiteness.

20   Rainer Albertz, "הֶבֶל hæbæl Hauch," in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band I* (edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag / Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 467-469. Klaus Seybold, "הֶבֶל hebhel; הָבַל hābhal," in TDOT volume 3, 313-320. G H. Johnston, "הבל hbl (#2038)" and D. C. Fredericks, "הֶבֶל hebel (#2039)," in NIDOTTE volume 1, 1003-1006. None of these works show an explicit awareness that the definite article per se changes the connotation of the lexeme.

21   Philip J. Nel, "בושׁ bôš (#1017)," in volume 1 of *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (edited by Willem VanGemeren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 621-627. Horst Seebass, "בושׁ bósh, בוּשָׁה búshāh, בֹּשֶׁת bōsheth, מְבוּשִׁים mᵉbhûshîm," in TDOT volume 2, 50-60. Fritz Stolz, "בושׁ bōš zuschanden werden", in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, Band I* (edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag / Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), 269-272, and its English translation by Mark E. Biddle: "*bôš* to be ashamed," in volume 1 of *Theological Lexicon of The Old Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 204-207. Philip J. Nel ("בושׁ bôš #1017," in NIDOTTE volume I, 626) notes that "*bōšet* is also substituted as a name for Ba'al (Jer 3:24, 11:13)." Horst Seebass (TDOT vol 2) in his discussion on Jeremiah (p 54-56) ignores the determined form of these terms. Fritz Stolz (according to the English translation "*bôš* to be ashamed," in volume 1 of *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 206-7) draws a logical line to this specific name-giving of the deities, but gives no attention to the definite form of the word in the naming of the god (in Jeremiah).

B   BAʿAL AS CANDIDATE FOR NAMING AND SHAMING

Within the book of Jeremiah, the proper name Baʿal (in the singular) occurs eleven times[22], plus twice in the plural[23]. In all instances, as with the other occurrences of the name for the deity, it is written in the definite form, either as הַבַּעַל or in the construct form, as a combination name[24]. Remarkably שׁוא likewise it occurs in Jeremiah only in the preposition-prefixed definite form לַשָּׁוְא (Jeremiah 2:30, 4:30, 6:29, 18:15 and 46:11).

A quick reading of the same text blocks reveals three other abstract nouns in the same formal and semantic category as לַשָּׁוְא, namely שֶׁקֶר *šeqer*, הֶבֶל *hebel* and בֹּשֶׁת *bōšet*. All of them occur both with and without the article. In their definite forms שֶׁקֶר occurs 12 times[25], הַהֶבֶל only in 2:5[26], and הַבֹּשֶׁת twice, in 3:24 and as לַבֹּשֶׁת in 11:13[27].

Of significance is that all four these abstract nouns in their definite forms are possible allusions to Baʿal. The indefinite forms of שֶׁקֶר *šeqer*, הֶבֶל *hebel* and בֹּשֶׁת *bōšet* are mostly adjectives describing other nouns, and therefore not specifically references to Baʿal, but possibly to an idol or idols: שֶׁקֶר *šeqer* appears 23 times[28], הֶבֶל *hebel* five times[29] and 10:8 in the plural, and בֹּשֶׁת *bošet* four times[30].

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[22]   Jeremiah 2:8, 7:9, 11:13, 17, 12:16, 19:5 (twice), 23:13, 27; 32:29, 35. See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 271.

[23]   Jeremiah 2:23 and 9:13. In Jeremiah 37:13 בַּעַל פְּקִדֻת refers to Irijah son of Shelemiah son of Hananiah, the sentinel or head of the guard that arrested Jeremiah. See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 270-271.

[24]   בעל פעור (Numbers 25:3,5, Deuteronomy 4:3 (2x), Hosea 9:10, Psalm 106:28), בעל ברית (Judges 8:33, 9:4), בעל זבוב (in 2 Kings 1:2,3,6,16). See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 270-271.

[25]   In 7:4, 8 and 23:26 it occurs as הַשֶּׁקֶר without preposition, in 3:23, 5:2, 7:9; 8:8, and 27:15 as לַשֶּׁקֶר, an in 5:31, 13:25,20:6 and 23:14 as בַּשֶּׁקֶר.

[26]   Also, as הַבְלֵי נֵכָר in 8:19 and הַבְלֵי הַגּוֹיִם in 14:22 where they are recognised as idols.

[27]   בֹּשֶׁת in [בָּ]בָשְׁתֵּנוּ] in Jeremiah 3:25 is defined by the pronominal suffix and בֹּשֶׁת in Jeremiah 7:19 by the construct state בֹּשֶׁת פְּנֵיהֶם . These are syntactic and not morphologic indicators, presenting an ambiguity. See exegetical discussion on Jeremiah 3:21-25.

[28]   In 3:10, 6:13, 8:8, 10; 9:2, 4; 10:14, 14:14 (2x), 16:19, 23:25, 32; 27:10,14,16; 28:15, 29:9, 23, 31; 37:14, 40:16, 43:2 and 51:17.

[29]   In 10:3, 8, 15; 16:19, 51:18.

[30]   In 2:26, 3:25, 7:19 and 20:18.

Diagram of determined nouns versus undetermined counterparts in Jeremiah, alongside (The) Ba'al/Ba'alim

DEITY	DEFINITE NOUNS				INDEFINITE NOUNS		
הַבַּעַל	לַשָּׁוא ((הַשָּׁוא)	הַשֶּׁקֶר	הַהֶבֶל	הַבֹּשֶׁת	שֶׁקֶר	הֶבֶל	בֹּשֶׁת
2:8 [הבעלים 2:23] 7:9 [הבעלים 9:13] 11:13, 17 12:16 19:5 (twice) 23:13, 27 32:29, 35	2:30 4:30 6:29 18:15 46:11	לַשֶּׁקֶר 3:23 לַשֶּׁקֶר 5:2 בַּשֶּׁקֶר 5:31 7:4, 8 לַשֶּׁקֶר 7:9 לַשֶּׁקֶר 8:8 בַּשֶּׁקֶר 13:25 בַּשֶּׁקֶר 20:6 בַּשֶּׁקֶר 23:14 23:26 בַּשֶּׁקֶר 27:15	2:5 הַבְלֵי 8:19 [נֵכָר] הַבְלֵי 14:22 [הַגּוֹיִם]	3:24 לַבֹּשֶׁת 11:13	3:10 6:13 8:8, 10 9:2, 4 10:14 14:14 (2x) 16:19 23:25, 32 27:10,14,16 28:15 29:9,21,23,31 37:14 40:16 43:2 51:17	 10:3,8,15 16:19 51:18	2:26 3:25 7:19 20:18

Hypothesis

The above-mentioned observations and preliminary investigation suggest the following hypothesis:

1. The Masoretic punctuation and vocalisation system serves as an indicator of the Masoretes' interpretation of the unvocalized, unmarked Proto-Masoretic text[31]. It seems that one such indication in MT Jeremiah is an identification marker for the deity in opposition to the God of Israel,

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[31]   Page H. Kelly, Daniel S. Mynatt & Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Introduction and Annotated Glossary* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 31.

specifically by the vocalisation of לשוא. The MT vocalisation of לשוא as לַשָּׁוְא and not לְשָׁוְא marks it as a definite noun, formally in line with the definite nouns הַשֶּׁקֶר , הַהֶבֶל , הַבֹּשֶׁת (and their preposition-prefixed forms). This formally coincides with הַבַּעַל (and its preposition-prefixed forms) in MT Jeremiah. The interpretational implication of the Masoretic vocalisation of לשוא brings it into the orbit of the deity Ba'al, while at the same time distinguishing it from the indefinite forms of הַשֶּׁקֶר ,הַהֶבֶל and הַבֹּשֶׁת which are numerously presented in MT Jeremiah as descriptions of falseness and disgrace in general (without excluding the possibility that the indefinite forms might also function as indicators of idol worship).

2. The deity in opposition to yhwh mostly referred to in Jeremiah, is הַבַּעַל *habba'al* (twice in the plural הַבְּעָלִים *habbe'alîm*). The name of this deity is always written in MT Jeremiah with the article, formally on par with the definite nouns under discussion (שָׁוְא , שֶׁקֶר , הֶבֶל , בֹּשֶׁת). Quantitively the occurrence of הַבַּעַל together with multiple occurrences of one or more of the aforementioned terms (or the certainty that the term refers to an idol, e.g. *habbošet* in Jeremiah 11:13) in the co-text is a good indication that – apart from the formal similarities – these terms, understood as proper nouns, are references to the deity.

3. The shared rhetorical value of these nouns in terms of their overlapping semantic fields resorts to the category of denigration. If understood as proper nouns referring or alluding to the deity, they could serve the function of demeaning, derogatory, disparaging names for Ba'al, emphasizing the deity's lack of status, integrity, power, and reliability.

4. A small number of abstract nouns in this group is not grammatically determined by the definite article but by a pronominal suffix or in status constructus bound to a definite noun[32]. Formally they are not classified as proper nouns and can strictly speaking not function as pejorative nicknames (of the deity). If, however, they appear in tandem with their article defined counterparts, two possible functions could be ascribed to them: (1) referring or alluding to a deity or deities; (2) signifying the generally accepted lexical meaning of the noun. This assumption is based on the phenomenon within MT Jeremiah that *šeqer*, *bošet* and *he̲bel* occur in both their definite and indefinite forms. These two referential functions do not necessarily exclude each other. *Bošet* בֹּשֶׁת in בְּ[בָשְׁתֵּנוּ] in Jeremiah 3:25 comes to mind as an example[33].

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[32]   Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé & Jan Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 215-216; Bill T. Arnold & John H. Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 28.
[33]   See exegetical discussion on Jeremiah 3:21-25.

C   TESTING AND DEMONSTRATING THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE HYPOTHESIS EXEGETICALLY

The plausibility of the hypothesis is to be tested by means of an exegetical exercise which zooms in on the interface of the nouns under discussion, while at the same time demonstrating new interpretational possibilities of the text. The semantic connectivity of the relevant terms is to be established in text blocks where the interface of these terms is significant. For practical reasons this study has to be limited to a brief discussion of Jeremiah 2:4-13, 3:21-25, 5:30-31, 7:4-9, 11:9-13 and 18:13-17. The demarcations are partly determined by the logic of literary context. If perceived historical background, origin and use of the text is mentioned, it is simply meant as background information. The discussion starts out with Jeremiah 1:16 as basis, followed by the first part (v 4-9) of the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7, and then the rest of the passages in chapter order.

1   Introduction

The reason for God's judgement by word of Jeremiah (1:16) is the worship of "other gods", אלהים אחרים :

> וְדִבַּרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטַי אוֹתָם עַל כָּל־רָעָתָם אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּנִי וַיְקַטְּרוּ לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְמַעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיהֶם׃
> *And I will utter my judgements against them, for all their wickedness:*
> *they abandoned me and made incense offerings to other gods,*
> *and worshipped the works of their own hands.*

"Other gods", אלהים אחרים , is a key term in Jeremiah occurring throughout the book[34] as object of Israel's idolatrous worship[35], and noteworthy for our study, as it appears to be one of many allusions to the (non-Israelite) deities. The introduction of this term in 1:16 is explicated in the so-called temple sermon in Jeremiah 7 (in verses 6 and 9).

2   Jeremiah 7:4-9 (within 7:1-15)

The condition is set for Israel to be allowed by YHWH to remain in the land: they have to reform their ways, act justly with one another, and stop following "other gods" (7:6). The rhetorical question (in verse 9 and 10) makes it clear that Israel is indeed guilty of immorality, and did "follow other gods", הָלֹךְ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים

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[34]   Jeremiah 1:16, 7:6, 9, 18, 11:10, 13:10, 16:11, 13, 19:4, 13, 22:9, 25:6, 32:29, 35:15, 44:3, 5, 8, 15.

[35]   As object of קטר (burning incense to) in Jeremiah 1:16, 19:4, 44:3, 5, 8, 15; as object of נסך (outpouring of libation offerings to) in 7:18, 19:13, 32:29; as object of עבד (service to) in 16:13, 44:3; as object of worship (יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ) in 22:9.

אֲחֵרִים [36] -- and then feel safe in the house of yhwh! The reason and source for the self-deception is already repudiated in Jeremiah 7:4 (אַל־תִּבְטְחוּ לָכֶם אֶל־דִּבְרֵי הַשֶּׁקֶר), now stated in verse 8[37] as follows:

הִנֵּה אַתֶּם בֹּטְחִים לָכֶם עַל־דִּבְרֵי הַשֶּׁקֶר לְבִלְתִּי הוֹעִיל:

The standard translation of this phrase is:

"Look, you trusted in deceptive words which are of no avail"

However, grammatically הַשֶּׁקֶר does not qualify as an attributive adjective to דִּבְרֵי. Deceptive words = דברים שקרים [38] , while הַשֶּׁקֶר is a definite noun, one of the nouns possibly understood by the MT as a derogatory or disparaging name for Ba'al. In fact, the people's unwarranted trust is in "the words of הַשֶּׁקֶר, *The Deceptive One*". Instead of listening to and trusting in the Word(s) of Yahweh, they put their trust "in the words of The Lie"[39,] as John A. Thompson renders the expression, with the following remark: "One wonders whether Jeremiah may not have been making use here of the expression *The Lie* to describe some pagan deity like Ba'al... "[40.]

It is noteworthy that הַשֶּׁקֶר is repeated in the fourth of six charges against Israel, as the guarantor and (divine) witness of an oath (הִשָּׁבֵעַ לַשֶּׁקֶר). If this charge is understood as swearing by "The Deceptive One" (instead of by Yahweh), and

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[36]   The phrase הלך אחרי אלהים אחרים in different forms of the verb, occurs in Jeremiah 7:9, 11:10, 13:10, 16:11, 25:6, 35:15. The combination [הָלַךְ אַחֲרֵי + object=idol/s)] also occurs in Jeremiah 2:5 (וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל). It appears to be an identification marker for the subject under discussion. John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167 makes the remark "that in the secular treaties of the day a rebel vassal who 'went after' some other ruler was understood to have renounced allegiance to his overlord. Indeed, the expression 'go after' meant 'serve as a vassal'." (with reference to W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," CBQ 25 (1963), 77-87, for examples.).

[37]   William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 238, allocates it to the end of section two, verse 5-8 (his divisions 3-4, 5-8, 9-11 and 12). According to John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 274, the opening of the description of the nation's apostasy, verse 8-12. Peter C. Craigie et al, *Word Biblical Commentary,* 119, divides the text after the introduction (v 1) according to the elements of the so-called torah of entrance, namely proclamation of YHWH's word v 2-7, declaration of apostasy v 8-12, judgement v 13-15. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 455-7, marks three oracles by inclusio, v 3-7, 8-11, 12-14.

[38]   See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé & Jan H. Kroeze, *Reference Grammar*, 266-269; Bill T. Arnold & John H. Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Bill T. Arnold & John H. Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 25.

[39]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 277, 280.

[40]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 277. In footnote 21: for possible parallels see 5:31, 13:25.

not as perjury per se[41], it appears that the legal charges consist of two categories of three charges each: In the first category three sins against fellow-human beings are mentioned, namely stealing, murder and adultery. The second category is that of idolatrous practices, of whom three are mentioned: swearing by "The Deceptive One" (instead of by Yahweh), in the second instance קַטֵּר לַבַּעַל (offering incense to Baʿal) and finally הָלֹךְ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (following other gods, cf. 1:16).

The explicit mentioning of (The) Baʿal, הַבַּעַל , directly after a repetitive הַשֶּׁקֶר is noteworthy. Is this not a confirmation that "the other gods" are indeed understood to be הַבְּעָלִים (Jeremiah 2:23 and 9:13), with special reference (in most other places) to (The) Baʿal of Jerusalem, according to Jeremiah הַשֶּׁקֶר "The Deception/Lie"?

If הַשֶּׁקֶר is an allusion to Baʿal, as assumed, the adjectival phrase לְבִלְתִּי הוֹעִיל after דִּבְרֵי הַשֶּׁקֶר in Jeremiah 7:8 is a helpful link in the chain of Baʿal references. Indeed [הוֹעִיל + negator] already appeared in Jeremiah 2:8 in the plural form within the phrase וְהַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ בַבַּעַל וְאַחֲרֵי **לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ** הָלָכוּ (to be discussed below).

3   Jeremiah 2:4-13

Studies with diachronic interest tended to perceive this chapter as a collection of early prophecies of Jeremiah (2:4 – 4:2/4)[42] against Northern Israel from 627-609 b.c.e., re-applied to pre-exilic, and post-exilic Judah[43]. Recent

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[41]   Niv translates with "perjury", with the footnote "swear by false gods". Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* translates "swear to The Lie" (page 22 , footnote 453) with the comment "I.e. swear to Baʿal instead of to Yahweh. It also means swearing falsely" (page 465). He refers to his comment on Jeremiah 3:23 "Because *laššeqer* has the definite article, it is better translated as 'The Lie,' i.e. Baʿal. The term occurs with the definite article in 5:2, 31; 7:9; 8:8; 13:25; and 20:6, where in each case the meaning is probably the same. The confession then is a sober re-evaluation of the pious supplications to Baʿal in v21a..." (page 322).

[42]   Jeremiah 2:1-3 connects the introductory speeches in chapter 1 with this collection, while 4:3-4 serves the same function. The division is therefore made from 2:1 or 2:3 to 4:2 or 4:4. As Jeremiah 2:4-4:2 e.g. Joel S. Burnett, "Changing Gods: an Exposition of Jeremiah 2," *Review and Expositor* 101/2 (2004), 290. As Jeremiah 2:1-4:4 e.g. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 47ff. and Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 221ff – with the heading "People of a forgotten covenant", taking into account that thematically this collection stands in tension with the promise of "the new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31-34) within the so-called Book of Consolation (Jeremiah 30-31). See Joel S. Burnett, "Changing Gods", 289.

[43]   The elusiveness of "Israel" in the rhetoric of Jeremiah, directly links up with the question of text application later in Jeremiah's own life and the Jeremiah tradition after his time. The origin of at least this chapter is built on the assumption that Assyria refers to the former empire which conquered the Northern Kingdom, Israel. See Mary E.

(synchronically based) research on metaphors in the Jeremiah text, however, convincingly demarcates this passage as the second section of a unit that spans the whole of chapter two[44]. Israel, portrayed in the double images of family relationships (yhwh's faithful bride) and horticulture (yhwh's choicest fruit)[45], is rebuked for her religious disloyalty, trusting foreign deities. This triggers yhwh's lawsuit (*rîb*) against his covenant breaching people who are turning from a symbol of blessing into a symbol of curse, by metaphorically returning to the Egypt they were taken from (2:6, 36)[46]. Within this symbolically charged passage the divine name (The) Baʿal הַבַּעַל occurs for the first time in Jeremiah (2:8) in the phrase הַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ בַבַּעַל. Baʿal is the divine inspiration of the prophetic visions or words of the (false) prophets. The latter are mentioned in the same grouping as "the priests" and "shepherds" (kings, leaders) who broke their allegiance to yhwh by "going after" a new overlord that is of no avail, אַחֲרֵי לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ הָלָכוּ. Actually "the fathers" (ancestors, v 5-6) are early examples of those that "went after 'the vanity' (הַהֶבֶל)" resulting in becoming a copy of the same (וַיֶּהְבָּלוּ). The semantic affinity between הבל / הֶבֶל and לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ is of significance: both denote a state or action that result in failure[47]. Both subjects are pursuing (*hlk* הלך) this object that is bound to fail them. הַהֶבֶל (in the definite form) is literally "The worthless One" and refers to an idol (singular of הבלים "false gods", in Deuteronomy 32:21 // לֹא־אֵל)[48]. The expectation that *lōʾ-yôʿīlû* לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ and הַהֶבֶל are referring to the same object of futile invocation is not unrealistic. Lundbom renders the phrase *lōʾ-yôʿīlû* לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ rather literally with "After No Profits they went"[49], with the following remark relevant to this study[50]:

Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute: The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jeremiah 3.1-4.4* (JSOT Suppl 387. London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2004)*,* 8, with reference to J. G. McConville, *Judgment and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 31.

[44]   Mary E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 7; Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1–24* (HSMP/HSM 64. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 179.

[45]   Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered,* 181.

[46]   As illustrated by the cyclical structure of the chapter, see Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered,* 181-2.

[47]   De Blois & Mueller, "Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew," n.p. Cited 20 April 2020. Online: http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html הבל = action whereby humans are engaged in activities that do not serve any purpose, הֶבֶל = associated with something without substance, that quickly passes away;

[48]   Francis Brown, S.R. Driver & C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (7th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 211. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *KAHAL,* 123 הַהֶבֶל in combination with הלך אחרי = "Götzen" (idols), De Blois and Mueller, "Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew," n.p. Cited 20 April 2020. Online: http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html הֶבֶל = b. worthless idol.

[49]   Translation of Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 256.

[50]   Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 262.

lō'-yô'īlû, lit. "they do not profit," is a common summary judgement of idols (16:19; 1 Sam 12:21; in Isa 44:9 *bal-yô'îlû*). For the singular, see v 11. The term here is a disparagement of Ba'al or the Ba'als, repeating "The Nothing" of v 5 (cf. T). It also plays on the name *ba'al* (*'ayin* and *lamed*).

Note that לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ (plural) is followed up in v 11 in the singular, לוֹא יוֹעִל[51]. It is clear that these are allusions to the Ba'al/Ba'alim, assumedly another form of derogatory name for the deity. It is explicitly mentioned in the plural in Jeremiah 2:23 and 9:13, most probably defining "the other gods" אלהים אחרים[52]. The formula הלך אחרי / אחרי הלך + object (of new allegiance)[53], remains the same, with a nominal but not substantive change of object of allegiance.

The apparently concealed references to the deity in Jeremiah 2 (ההבל in 2:5 // לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ in 2:8) seem to be revealed in the temple sermon of Jeremiah 7 (אלהים אחרים in 7:9). The Jeremiah text progressively makes it clearer that Israel has renounced her allegiance to her Overlord, Yahweh, and started serving a new master who has decidedly shown himself to be "The Worthless", הַהֶבֶל, the "No-Profit", לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ[54].

It should therefore come as no surprise that the last colon of Jeremiah 2:5 וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיֶּהְבָּלוּ (MT) is rendered in Targum Jonathan[55] as וּטְעוֹ בָּתַר טָעֲוָתָא וַהֲווֹ לִלְמָא "and (they) went astray after the *idols* and became worthless"[56]. Bright[57] followed by Thompson[58], suggests that *hahebel* is a pun on *habba'al*. Once again Lundbom describes it as a disparaging name for Ba'al, as it occurs with the article[59]. Since the formula of new allegiance[60] appears here, as in other places referring to the *ba'al* (or *b^e'alîm*) as the object of reverence, it is

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[51]   In form similar to names like לא דבר in 2 Sam 17:27, Amos 6:13), לא עמי (Hosea 1:9, 2:25), לא רחמה (Hosea 1:6, 8). See Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 520.

[52]   Jeremiah 1:16; 7:6, 9, 18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:3, 5, 8, 15. See Gerhard Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 49.

[53]   According to John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 167, "in the secular treaties of the day a rebel vassal who 'went after' some other ruler was understood to have renounced allegiance to his overlord. Indeed, the expression 'go after' meant 'serve as a vassal'." See footnote 28.

[54]   Note the close resemblance to הבלים // לֹא־אֵל in Deuteronomy 32:21.

[55]   Sefaria Library, "Targum Jonathan on Jeremiah." n.p. Cited 23 September 2019. Online: *https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Jeremiah?lang=bi.*

[56]   Robert Hayward, *The Aramaic Bible,* 49.

[57]   John Bright, *Jeremiah, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible volume 21, Second edition, 13th print. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978), 15.

[58]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 167.

[59]   Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 259.

[60]   הלך אחרי / אחרי הלך + object (of new allegiance). See footnote 36.

reasonable to assume הַהֶבֶל to be a substitute for הַבַּעַל. In fact, Jeremiah 23:27 states that the fathers, אבותם, forgot the Name of Yahweh "through (the) Baʿal", בַּבַּעַל – which logically identifies הַהֶבֶל in 2:5 explicitly with הַבַּעַל (in 23:27).

It is clear that in this passage (2:4-13) the object of Baʿal worship is masked in names that ironically and unmistakably *reveal* the real identity and character of the deity as "The Nothing" הַהֶבֶל (v 5), "The No-Profit" לוֹא יוֹעִל (v 11), as well as in plural terms as the *bᵉʿalîm*, "the other gods" אלהים אחרים, "No-Profits" לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ (v 8) and "No-gods" לֹא אלהים (v 11). Eventually (in verse 13) they are depicted by the prophet as broken, leaking cisterns, hewn out by those who have left Yahweh, their original Source, good for nothing but to be ridiculed by disparaging names, all pointing to *habbaʿal*.

4   Jeremiah 3:21-25

In Jeremiah 3:24 הַבֹּשֶׁת occurs as the next definite noun that may form part of the name and shame arsenal against Baʿal. According to Jeremiah 3:24 "The Shame"[61] (הַבֹּשֶׁת), readily recognised as a name for Baʿal[62], is devouring "the product of the labour of your fathers from our youth, their flocks and their cattle, together with (אֶת) their sons and their daughters"[63]. In verse 25a the same noun, בֹּשֶׁת, resumes with a pronominal suffix (first person plural), which likewise marks it as definite[64]. Therefore it could be argued that if not naming the deity due to its definiteness, בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ at least indicates the reality of הַבֹּשֶׁת, and thus indirectly refers to the deity. The cohortative נִשְׁכְּבָה "Let us lie down" probably carries a sexual connotation in parallel with its (only other) occurrence in Genesis 19:32[65]. While the preposition *beth* before בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ is usually assumed to be a *beth locale*, "Let us lie down *in* our shame" (as an admission of guilt), the preposition could (also?) be a *beth comitantiae*[66]: "Let us lie down *in the company of* our shame". In this case בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ recalls or reiterates הַבֹּשֶׁת, in other words Baʿal. It could

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[61]   Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 322. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 61 renders "Shame"; John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah,* 204 and *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society, TANAKH Translation* (ed. Adele Berlin & Marc Zvi Brettler, Oxford: University Press, 2004), 929: "Shameful Thing".

[62]   Lundblom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 322, 625; *Jewish Study Bible,* 929; Niv, Afr83,

[63]   Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 322 mentions two interpretation possibilities: if the verse is taken from 5:17 it could mean that Baʿal worship is punished by YHWH by an enemy that has now consumed the labour of many generations. Otherwise it could refer to both animal and child sacrifices, the latter practised by Ahaz and Manasseh, and after them flourishing in the Ben Hinnom Valley (7:31, 9:5). The second possibility is preferred, since no agents of YHWH's wrath are involved, as in Jeremiah 5:17.

[64]   See Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 28. See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan Kroeze, *Reference Grammar,* 215-216.

[65]   William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 126.

[66]   Cf. Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé & Jan Kroeze, *Reference Grammar,* 342 (e). Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 105 (g).

then further be argued that כְּלִמָּה in the next colon (וּתְכַסֵּנוּ כְּלִמָּתֵנוּ "and let our scandal cover us") in its textual format is grammatically determined in the very same way as בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ and thus qualifies as another derogatory name for Ba'al, functioning as a metaphor of overt adultery.

This, however, might not be the case, for on the surface level בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ and כְּלִמָּתֵנוּ do not look like determined nouns, and the meaning would then be that of shame and scandal in the general sense of the word. In other words this line would be Israel's sincere, unadultared confession of their religious adultery[67]. Surely, does the subsequent admission of guilt not strongly support a penitential reading of verse 24a' as part and parcel of at least Jeremiah 3:21-25?[68]

> *For against Yahweh our God we have sinned,*
> *we and our fathers, from our youth unto this day.*
> *We have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God.*

On the other hand, not even deliberated by traditional interpreters, the rhetoric of allusion to Ba'al worship is constantly at work in Jeremiah. The name-term הַבֹּשֶׁת is not to be separated from בָּשְׁתֵּנוּ and כְּלִמָּתֵנוּ. In either case, whether the latter two are understood as determined or undetermined nouns, colon 1 and 2 of verse 25a are read as synonymous or complementary parallelisms. This means that in the reading of all these terms as determined nouns (alluding to Ba'al), the first colon

> *Let us lie down in the company of Our Shame (i.e. Ba'al)*

is complemented by the second colon

> *Let Our Scandal (i.e. Ba'al) cover us.*

A tentative conclusion seems in order at this point: What is on surface level assumed as a genuine confession of guilt verbalised through undetermined nouns denoting inherent and public shame, is actually a cover for a refusal to confess persistent idolatry, strategically marked as such by references to the scandalous Ba'al and an ongoing relationship with him, and that from the mouth of the adulteress-idolatress.

A brief exposition of the surrounding text, however, is necessary for a more nuanced understanding: This verse (25) is situated within the passage Jeremiah 3:21-25, where, according to our reading, another derogatory term for

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[67]   This confession, apparently of sin, is verbalised in Psalm 109:29, where the Psalmist prays that his accusers "be clothed in public shame / dishonour / scandal (כְּלִמָּה), wrapped in their shame (בָּשְׁתָּם) like a robe."

[68]   Cf. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 320: "Gunkel (1967:14) identified the 'we' portion as a community lament, which he said Jeremiah was imitating in anticipation of the day when Israel would see her waywardness and repent (similarly Rashi; Gordis 1949:176; Blank 1970:2-3; and others)."

Baʿal occurs, namely הַשֶּׁקֶר in the first colon of the previous verse (23a): אָכֵן לַשֶּׁקֶר מִגְּבָעוֹת הָמוֹן הָרִים. The interpretation of these words has been problematic, for three reasons: (1) אָכֵן is "surely" when occurring once in a clause. But here the term already occurred in verse 20[69], and is repeated in verse 23, with the function of overruling and correcting the previous statement[70]. When functioning in a repetitive sequence it could be translated as "however"[71], or even better "no"[72], rather than "surely"[73] or "truly"[74]. (2) ·לַ in לַשֶּׁקֶר is ignored, (3) and/or not correctly interpreted as defining *šeqer*, and as such referring to Baʿal.

The first two problem areas are correctly handled by Holladay[75] who translates the initial words of each phrase as "no", and realises that the preposition (ל־) before הַשֶּׁקֶר is the very same preposition in the previous line: "Look, we are coming *to you*" (לָךְ), for *you are* yhwh our God". The response is therefore a retort from (the mouth of) yhwh: "No, *to the Lie* (you are coming)...".

Contrary to the vocalisation of המון in the MT, multiple manuscripts take המון הרים to be a genitive construct, so that the logical literal translation would be "from the hills is the noise of the mountains"[76]. Therefore, on the surface this

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[69]   According to Garr, W Randall, "אָכֵן," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 33/2 (2007), 68, the term connects antithetical halves within an adversative context, and "signals that the following, contrasting member overrides what came prior." Mary Shields points out that this is the turning point in the narrative report where the negative female metaphor (up to verse 20a) turns into (the ultimately positive) male imagery (20b-25). See Mary E Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute: The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jeremiah 3.1-4.4* (JSOT Suppl 387, London/New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 123-124. Interestingly, this metaphorical "turning" from the idolatrous woman to the faithful son, corresponds to the theme of "turning" in verse 21-25, where the other two instances of אָכֵן follow one another (verse 23a, b). It therefore seems that אָכֵן is time and again the word around which the narrative report is turning.

[70]   Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar,* 390, note this as "the most typical use of אָכֵן ( ) to affirm the truth of the content of a statement that overrules implications to the contrary that were invoked by a previous statement." See W. Randall Garr, "אָכֵן, " *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 33/2 (2007), 65-78 for numerous illustrations.

[71]   Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé and Jan Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar,* 390.

[72]   William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 124.

[73]   Cf. Mary E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute,* 125; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 11, 316.

[74]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 204.

[75]   William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 124-5.

[76]   Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 322 writes the last two words in capital letters: *Noise of the Mountains*, noting that this is "(p)erhaps another disparaging name for Baʿal. The name given to Pharaoh in 46:17 is *šāʾôn heʿĕbîr hammôʿēd,* 'Loud Noise Who Lets the Deadline Pass'."

whole passage looks like Israel's confession of guilt, but there are enough indications that yhwh is still in dispute with his people who are actually refusing heartfelt penitence, using subversive language to convey their addiction to Ba'al.

Jeremiah 3:21-25 has been identified by Claus Westermann as a liturgy of penitence, on the form critical ground that verse 21, 22b-25 represents the people's voice, as "a confession of sins and an expression of trust," prompted by the call to repentance in verse 22a (God's response is in 4:1-2/4)[77]. The liturgical setting is an acceptable theory, but to label the entire passage as a liturgy of penitence does not do justice to the intention of the passage. Verse 22-25 rather seems to be an alternating dispute between yhwh and his people, a *rîb* within a liturgical setting. The call to repentance in 22a is not the last word from yhwh: verse 23a is his retort, taken up by a counter-retort from his people (v 23b), who are now reflecting on their dismal state, with an apparent willingness to finally repent (in terms of the theme: to *turn* to Yahweh, not Ba'al) and confess their sins (v 24-25) [as reflected on the surface level of the text]. On a sublime level, however, the confession is that of religious apostasy, a love for Ba'al – over against the facts that he has taken his high toll, "the fruit (product) of our fathers, from our youth, their sheep and their cattle, their sons and their daughters" (v 24).

My translation proposal of verses 22-25 takes the dialogue and poetic terseness into account, by its layout and slight paraphrasing of the text:

V 22	(Yahweh):	Return, o sons that are turning around; let me heal your turning-around.
	(Israel):	*Here we are, we have come **to you**, for **you are YHWH our God!***
V 23	(Yahweh):	No, **to The Lie** [you have come]! [listen!]: From the hills [sounds] "The Loud Noise of the Mountains*"*[78].
	(Israel):	*No, in YHWH our God is the salvation of Israel.*
V 24		*However (we have to confess):* *The Shame has devoured the fruit (product) of our fathers, from our youth,* *their sheep and their cattle, their sons and their daughters.*
V 25 *(Therefore):*		
[surface level:]		<u>*Let us lie down in our shame;*</u> <u>*let our scandal cover us.*</u>

[sublime level:]   *Let us lie down in the company of Our Shame; let Our Scandal[79] cover us.*

Indeed against Yahweh our God we have sinned,
we and our fathers, from our youth, until today;
and we did not listen to the voice of Yahweh our God.

The theme of the dispute-cum-penitence is the return/turning of Israel either to yhwh or הַשֶּׁקֶר / הַבֹּשֶׁת. Israel is turning this way and that, circling around, without reaching a decision. From verse 23b-25 reality starts dawning: in yhwh is salvation, while *habbošet* (=Baʻal) has claimed their livestock and children (by means of animal and child sacrifice). The gruesome reality is that generations have sinned against yhwh. At this point in the text confession of sin seems to be apparent on the surface. Language specifics prompt a deeper level reading, however, revealing Israel's ambiguity, her ongoing, subversive turning to Baʻal when pretending in liturgically correct language of penitence to turn to yhwh. The confession of sin against yhwh and realisation of harm done by Baʻal, is subverted by a confession of addicted adherence to Baʻal. What is obvious, is that the allusions to and derogatory naming of the *baʻal / beʻalîm* is most ironically placed in the mouth of the confessor, who confirms as truthful witness that Baʻal is "Our Shame" and "Our (Public) Scandal". Although this constitutes experiential truth, it does not constitute true repentance to Yahweh. Therefore, the subsequent response of Yahweh (Jeremiah 4:1ff) is not a word of forgiveness or promise, but a conditional sentence: "***If you return***, O Israel … ***return to Me***".

5   Jeremiah 5:30-31

Verse 30 reads as follows (MT):

שַׁמָּה וְשַׁעֲרוּרָה נִהְיְתָה בָּאָרֶץ׃
הַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ־בַשֶּׁקֶר   וְהַכֹּהֲנִים יִרְדּוּ עַל־יְדֵיהֶם
וְעַמִּי אָהֲבוּ כֵן
וּמַה־תַּעֲשׂוּ לְאַחֲרִיתָהּ

A horror, an outrage[80] happened in the land

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79   Depending on whether these forms of definite nouns (without explicit article) should be identified as names for Baʻal. This argument must still be settled. The ambiguity might be intentional.

80   De Blois and Mueller, "Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew," n.p. Cited 21 April 2020. Online: http://www.sdbh.org/vocabula/index.html שַׁעֲרוּר adj שער Wrong = state in which an event is so unacceptable that it inspires horror and outrage and calls for punishment -- horrible thing; outrage (also in Jeremiah 23:14). The second meaning of שַׁמָּה in HELOT (p 1031) "appalment, horror" suits best in combination with שַׁעֲרוּר as translated.

> *The prophets prophesy by The Lie, and the priests reject their consecration*[81]
>> *and my people love it that way.*
>> *But what will you do when she[82] comes to her end?[83]*

Our study has to focus on the event of הַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ־בַשֶּׁקֶר (line 2a above). This event with its sequel is identified as, and takes place within the setting of שַׁמָּה וְשַׁעֲרוּרָה נִהְיְתָה בָּאָרֶץ. The ultimate (added?) question at the end of the prophetic utterance, "What will you do לְאַחֲרִיתָהּ ?" (v 31), is linked to the introduction, in that it refers to a single feminine entity or person. Both שׁמה and שערורה as well as the pronominal suffix of אַחֲרִית are in the feminine forms. All of them seem to refer to the same entity. In the HB/OT the habitat, the land and cities, are feminine forms and metaphorically expressed in feminine persona. It seems evident that two metaphors are here at play, and that שערורה and שׁמה, and probably also אחריתה, are describing a state of curse of both the people and land of Israel[84]. The effects of the curse have their origin in the wrongful actions of the prophets and priests.

Most translators render הַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ־בַשֶּׁקֶר in Jeremiah 5:31a as "the prophets prophesy *falsely*"[85] or "*... falsehood*"[86] or "*... lies*"[87] or "*.... by a lie*"[88]. Some commentators believe to detect an allusion to Ba'al in בַשֶּׁקֶר "by The Lie"[89]. The same sentiment is reflected in a cautious way by some translations, for example "Prophets give their messages in the name of a false god" (Cev). The notion that *haššeqer* refers to an idol, another deity contrary to yhwh, is confirmed by a similar phrase earlier on: הַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ בַבַּעַל (Jeremiah 2:8c). In

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[81] Taking the second meaning of רדה = scrape, and following the argument of Holladay, *Jeremiah I,* 201.

[82] Note the feminine singular formations שערורה, שׁמה and אחריתה, as imagery of the land as well as Israel in feminine terms. See Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered,* 138. This imagery can hardly by represented in a translation. Translations like "But what will you do at the end?" (Niv), "But what will you do when the end comes?" (Rsv) are not reflecting the thrust of the hidden metaphors, of land and people.

[83] Alternative translation: "*What will you do to her posterity?*" אחרית has both meanings, of which the positive outcome is attested in Jeremiah 29:11 (תקוה// hope). See HALOT (p 31).

[84] See Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered,* 138.

[85] So Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 189; Peter C. Craigie et al, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 94; Esv, Kjv.

[86] John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 247.

[87] Niv.

[88] William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 200.

[89] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 410 with reference to Ehrlich 1912: 255, Rudolph, and Bright. According to Bright, *Jeremiah,* 41, followed by Holladay, *Jeremiah 1,* 201 the phrase may either be rendered "prophesy falsely" or refer to Ba'al.

Jeremiah 5:30 בַּבַּעַל (*babbaʿal*) is simply replaced by בַּשֶּׁקֶר (*baššeqer*). Both nouns are in the definite form. The text gives no indications that two different deities are intended; to the contrary. It can therefore be concluded that in the lectio continua of the MT, הַשֶּׁקֶר is indeed הַבַּעַל – here most probably a derogatory name for the deity.

6   Jeremiah 11:9-13

In 11:13 הַבֹּשֶׁת occurs in the phrase שַׂמְתֶּם מִזְבְּחוֹת לַבֹּשֶׁת מִזְבְּחוֹת לְקַטֵּר לַבַּעַל . The LXX omits מִזְבְּחוֹת לְקַטֵּר לַבַּעַל and translates with ἐτάξατε βωμοὺς θυμιᾶν τῇ Βααλ, a variant of מִזְבְּחוֹת לְקַטֵּר לַבַּעַל. A comparison of the MT and LXX versions of this text with that of Jeremiah 2:28 highlights the complication of the problem, which can be approached with a different *a priori* and outcomes[90]. The immediate context (verse 9-13) seems to support the occurrence of מִזְבְּחוֹת לַבֹּשֶׁת in the MT (with the specific Masoretic vocalisation of בשת) as a reference to idol worship. Verse 10a″ speaks of subservience to other gods (לְכוּ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) and verse 12 "the gods to whom they burn incense offerings," הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְקַטְּרִים לָהֶם. Apart from these indicators in the text, מִזְבְּחוֹת לְקַטֵּר לַבַּעַל can best be interpreted as an explanatory phrase of מִזְבְּחוֹת לַבֹּשֶׁת. "The Shameful Thing"[91] is nothing but Baʿal. This fact, explicitly expressed in many translations,[92] seems to be irrefutable.

7   Jeremiah 18:13-17

The obvious reason for choosing this passage is that it contains the term לַשָּׁוְא as its centrepiece (v 15) which is interpreted by a vast majority not as the futile act of sacrificing (*šawʾ* = in vain), but *haššawʾ* as the futile recipient of sacrifices, a worthless idol[93]. Even some commentators who maintain a translation like "they burn incense in vain" have to admit that לַשָּׁוְא refers to idols[94]. There are also those who connect the idol(s) to Baʿal[95], "the Fraud"[96]. The exegetical tradition

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[90]   For a summary of the arguments, see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20,* 625.

[91]   John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 340.

[92]   Afrikaans (1933, 1983), Cev, Jsb, Niv, Nbv.

[93]   Translations in this range: Luther 1545 (1534) "Sie räuchern den Göttern"; Afrikaans 1933 "hulle laat rook opgaan vir die nietige afgode"; Afrikaans 1983 "hulle bring reukoffers vir gode wat nie bestaan nie"; Herziene Statenvertaling 2010 "Zij brengen reukoffers aan nutteloze afgoden"; Asv 1901 "... they have burned incense to false [gods]". Esv 2001 "they make offerings to false gods". See also John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 438; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly & Joel F. Drinkard (jr.), *Word Biblical Commentary,* 249; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 524.

[94]   So Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 376; Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 822.

[95]   For example, John A. Thompson, *Jeremiah,* 438; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 524.

[96]   Bright, *Jeremiah,* 124. According to Thompson (438), Bright connects *laššāwʾ* to Baʿal.

has already paved the way for the conviction that לַשָּׁוְא in 18:15 refers to anti-Yahweh deities (as collective) or the anti-Yahweh deity par excellence. Our hypothesis provides a grammatical basis for this understanding. The reason for the people of Yahweh forgetting Him, is first and foremost (as syntactically foregrounded) הַשָּׁוְא, "The Worthless One" (Fraud), *i.e. Ba'al*, to whom they sacrificed incense. Additional textual support is given by the key word שׁכח that links this utterance to yhwh's judgement in the same vein in 14:25, שָׁכַחַתְּ אוֹתִי וַתִּבְטְחִי בַּשֶּׁקֶר, "You forgot Me and trusted *haššeqer*" - another perceived reference to Ba'al.

8   Conclusions

1. The inter-textual exegesis as a test of the semantic connectivity of the relevant terms from a network of texts where these terms occur, confirms that the working hypothesis is plausible. Numerous cross-references to Ba'al by means of the defined nouns *šaw'* (*laššaw'*), *šeqer* (*haššeqer*, *laššeqer*, *baššeqer*), *bošet* (*habbošet*) and *hebel* (*hahebel*) could be detected throughout the text in the chosen text blocks. The reading of the text from this perspective revealed text-immanent support in some cases, previously overlooked.

2. An observation on the sideline is that the texts under discussion also contain other references to Ba'al which could likewise be understood as derogatory names for the deity in the plural form הבעלים. These are לֹא־יוֹעִלוּ in 2:8 (also 12:13), לֹא אלֹהים in 2:11 (also 5:7, 16:20), and probably אלֹהים אחרים in 1:16, 7:6, 9 [97].

3. The case of nouns of which the definiteness is grammatically formed by pronominal suffixes or construct states bound to a definite noun, was practically illustrated in the discussion of Jeremiah 3:21-25. It seems that בָשְׁתֵּנוּ and כְּלִמָּתֵנוּ in verse 25, as grammatically typified definites, but formally not recognised as such (without definite articles), can be read on two levels: either as a non-coded reference to shame in general (in the passage a sign of Israel's repentance), or as coded language, alluding to (Israel's ongoing worship of) Ba'al. In this particular instance the rhetorical function of this double reading supports Israel's ethical ambiguity regarding repentance, the main theme in Jeremiah 2-3.

9   Suggested further studies in MT Jeremiah

1. The sampled texts, good indicators as they are, need to be supplemented by further exegetical study. The remaining texts where *laššaw'* and

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[97]   References outside of this study are Jeremiah 7:18; 11:10; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 19:4, 13; 22:9; 25:6; 32:29; 35:15; 44:3, 5, 8, 15.

laššeqer/*baššeqer* appear as well as excerpts from Jeremiah 23:9-40 should either strengthen the hypothesis, or show up its problematic side.

2. Of interest would be the discovery of additional examples of allusions or references to the deities/deity *in the plural*, as well as examples of nouns defined through pronominal suffixes or construct states bound to definite nouns, enabling references to idols apart from their general meaning.

3. The assumption that the terms under discussion that appear in Jeremiah in their indefinite forms (namely *bošet, hebel* and particularly *šeqer*) always denote shame/nothingness/deceit in general, should be revisited. If they (also) have a connotation of idolatry, i.e. alluding to the anti-YHWH deities, the perceived rhetorical function of their definite counterparts as disparagement in particular may have to be adjusted.

4. This study (and its sequel) could probably be one element of the phenomenon of coded language in Jeremiah[98].

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bible Translations

Asv	American Standard Version 1901
Cev	Contemporary English Version 2001, 2016
Jps17	Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation 1917
Jps85	Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation 1985
Nasb	New American Standard Bible 1971
Nbv	De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling 2004 (Dutch)
Niv	New International Version 2011

Reference Works

HELOT	Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
KAHAL	Konzise und actualisierte Ausgabe des Hebräischen und Aramäischen Lexicons des Alten Testament
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

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[98]   Coded language by means of 'atbash' in Jeremiah is a well-known phenomenon. See Scott B. Noegel, "Atbash in Jeremiah and its Literary Significance: Part 1–3". *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 24/2 (1996): 82–89; *JBQ* 24/3 (1996): 160–166; *JBQ* 24/4 (1996): 247–250.

Monographs

HSMP/HSM Harvard Semitic Museum Publications / Harvard Semitic
          Monographs
JSOT Suppl Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
STB   Studies in Biblical Theology

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