

The Anti-Yahweh Label *laššāw*’ in Jeremiah (Part 2)

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ABSTRACT

The traditional stance is that לַשׁוֹן in Jeremiah (2:30; 4:30; 6:29; 18:15 and 46:11) denotes futility, mostly translated as “in vain.” This study, the second of a sequel, scrutinises the last two texts (Jer 18:15 and 46:11) in an effort to substantiate and modify a recent hypothesis that the term is instead a reference to the god Baal, “The Vain/Worthless One.” Jeremiah 18:15 has an interpretative tradition that acknowledges לַשׁוֹן as a referent to the (worthless) idols. The present study offers a basis for this interpretation. As Egypt (in Jer 46) can hardly be connected to Baal worship, 46:11 modifies the notion that לַשׁוֹן functions as an identifier of the god Baal per se and confirms the wisdom of ancient translators of Jer 18:15 who labelled לַשׁוֹן as unspecified deities. The traditional stance that לַשׁוֹן denotes futility, could only be refuted in 46:11 by a search for intertextual clues, alertness to connecting metaphors and accompanying gender switches. These are the very same rhetorical devices illustrated in Mary Shields’ study of Jer 3:1–4:4. The title of her work harbours the insight that לַשׁוֹן in 46:11, and by implication in all MT Jeremiah texts, serves as a dense metaphor circumscribing the prostitute-in-covenant-relationship with her (collective or individual) overlord/s (ba‘al/b^e‘alîm).

KEYWORDS: Jeremiah, exegesis, Baal, deities, worthless

A INTRODUCTION

My seminal study concluded that *laššāw*’ in Jeremiah (2:30, 4:30, 6:29, 18:15 and 46:11), together with the definite forms of *šeqer*, *bošet* and *hebel* (in combination with different prepositions), refers to the god Ba‘al, as alternative proper names of the deity, most probably intended as pejoratives.¹ At the end of that study, further investigation into related MT Jeremiah texts is suggested,²

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¹ C. Wynand Retief, “The Deity in the Definite Article: *laššāw*’ and related terms for Ba‘al in Jeremiah,” *OTE* 33/2 (2020), 323–347.

² “The remaining texts where *laššāw*’ and *laššeqer/baššeqer* appear as well as excerpts from Jeremiah 23:9–40 should either strengthen the hypothesis or show up its

which is partly taken up in the present study, published in two parts. This study (part 2) is an effort to support the interpretation of the term *laššaw*’ in Jeremiah as “in (covenantal) relation to” or “for the sake of” *The Vain One* (i.e. “The Worthless/Futile One” or “The Deception/Deceptive One”),³ as a possible reference to Ba‘al, over against the traditional popular interpretation “in vain.” The texts under discussion are Jer 18:15 and 46:11.⁴

B JER 18:15

Until the beginning of the 20th century, most translations maintained different forms of “in vain”⁵ for the Hebrew expression, לְשׁוֹא. However, a second line of interpretation, connecting לְשׁוֹא to idolatry, is vaguely discernible in Targum Jonathan, “For my people *have forsaken my worship: they have offered up incense for what cannot profit*,”⁶ that is, if it is assumed that the last clause (לְהִנְאָה) refers to idolatry or idols. The Luther translation of 1534 appears to be the first explicit example of this second line of interpretation with “*Sie räuchern den*

problematic side.” See C. Wynand Retief, “The Deity in the Definite Article,” 343–344.

³ Jerry Shepherd, “לְשׁוֹא *šāw*” in volume 4 of *NIDOTTE* (ed. Willem VanGemen; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 53–54 notes that לְשׁוֹא “seems to have two interrelated senses, namely ineffectiveness and falseness, the latter probably being derived from the idea that hopes and expectations prove false when placed in persons and things that are ineffective and therefore untrustworthy... In a few places the term seems to denote ineffectiveness without necessarily implying deceit or falsehood ... In most places, however, the idea of falsehood or deceit is present, and perhaps primary.” The two senses of the term are expressed in the titles of the articles of respectively Friedrich V. Reiterer, לְשׁוֹא *šāw*’ worthless.” Column 447–460, in volume 14 of *TDOT* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) and John F. A. Sawyer, “לְשׁוֹא *šāw*’ Trug,” Column 882–884 in *THAT*, Band II (. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann; München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976).

⁴ Jer 2:30, 4:30 and 6:29 were discussed in: C. Wynand Retief, “The Anti-Yahweh Label *laššaw*’ in Jeremiah (PART 1),” *OTE* 34/3 (2021), 935-959.

⁵ LXX: εἰς κενὸν ἐθυμίασαν; see Online: <https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/septuagint-lxx/read-the-bible-text>. Targum Jonathan: אָרִי לְהִנְאָה אֶסִּיקוּ בּוֹסְמִין, see Targum Jonathan on Jeremiah – Sefaria, Online: 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 Targum of Jeremiah: Translation with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 12; Colleville: 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.”

⁶ See Robert Hayward’s translation of אָרִי לְהִנְאָה אֶסִּיקוּ בּוֹסְמִין in *The Aramaic Bible, volume 12, The Targum of Jeremiah*, 101.

Göttern” (*own emphasis* – CWR). Since then a number of translations have followed suit.⁷ It seems obvious that these translators worked on the premise that the proposition ל in לְשׂוּאָה in the combination לִקְטֹרֶט indicates the object of worship to which the incense offerings are offered, with the implication that לְשׂוּאָה cannot simply be describing the futility of the religious ceremony. In other words, *לְשׂוּאָה is acknowledged as the object or recipient of sacrifices. The polemic rhetoric of the cultic setting is a clear indication that this object is a deity other than Yahweh; in semantic terms a vain, worthless, idol. Interpreters who connect the idol(s) to Ba‘al⁸ make this move apparently without realising the rhetorical implications of the grammatical definiteness of the abstract noun *šāw*.⁹ The definite article determining the noun is simply ignored.¹⁰

1 Conclusion

The stance of this study that the definiteness of the abstract noun should be recognised especially because of its semantic-rhetorical function, offers an explanatory basis for the well-established tradition that לְשׂוּאָה in Jer 18:15 refers to a deity or deities other than Yahweh, with the probability that it might allude to Ba‘al.

⁷ Cf. for example, ASV 1901, “For my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to false [gods]”; Afrikaans (1933) – “*hulle laat rook opgaan vir die nietige afgode*”; Afrikaans (1983) – “*hulle bring reukoffers vir gode wat nie bestaan nie*”; Esv 2001 “they make offerings to false gods”; Herziene Statenvertaling (2010) – “*Zij brengen reukoffers aan nutteloze afgoden*.” Modern commentators are generally in agreement with this, for example, John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 438; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly and Joel F. Drinkard (jr.), *Jeremiah 1–25* (Word Biblical Commentary 26; Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 249; Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 21A. New York: Doubleday, 1999), 822; William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 1–25* (ed. 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 (oddly) remarks that this a possible reference to the idols.

⁸ For example, Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 438; Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 1–25*, 524.

⁹ Curiously, Lundbom, with a keen eye for what he calls “a disparaging name for Ba‘al,” translates Jer 18:15 as “they burn incense in vain,” with the note that the reference here would be to the idols. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, 822. Lundbom consistently translates *laššāw*’ in all texts in Jeremiah as “in vain.”

¹⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 1–25*, 524, labels לְשׂוּאָה as a euphemism for Baal, comparable to “‘a nothing’ (הַבֵּל) in 2:5, ‘lie’ (שֶׁקֶר) in 5:31 and 13:25, and ‘shame’ (בִּזְשָׁת) in 3:24 and 11:13.” Holladay unwittingly quotes the other nouns that most probably allude to Baal, but erroneously in their indefinite forms. See also the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh of 1985/1999: “They sacrifice to a delusion” – Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society* (TANAKH Translation; Oxford: University Press, 2004), 964.

C JER 46:11

The subject matter of verse 11, namely an attempt at healing with reference to the balm of Gilead (also 8:22, implicated in 51:8; see also Gen 37:25), is intertextually connected to passages in Jeremiah addressing the plight of Israel (8:11–23, 30:12–17) and Babylon (51:8–9). The “Virgin daughter of Egypt,” בְּתוּלַת בְּתִמְצָרִים is ordered to “go up,” עלי (to) Gilead to get balm. The imperative עלי is foregrounded as the fifth repetition of the specific verb occurring four times in verses 7–9, albeit with different nuances, but probably with the same intention. Verse 11 should therefore be interpreted as part of a poem,¹¹ designated by Holladay as “a mocking song (vv. 3–12) taunting Egypt for its lack of prowess in the battle of Carchemish.”¹² The command to בְּתוּלַת בְּתִמְצָרִים to “go up,” is clearly an ironic depiction of the “rise,” which is the fall, of Egypt, in line with other ironic terminology¹³ connected to עלה, referring to Egypt: the Nile [as chaos waters?] (vv. 7–8) and its horses (v. 9).¹⁴ Further elements of mockery could be present in the words following the command for “Virgin Daughter Egypt” to “go up” (to Gilead) for healing balm. Holladay detects this in the first word of the line: לְפִשׁוּאֵי הַרְבֵּיתִי¹⁵ רַפְּאוֹת תַּעֲלֶה אֲיִן לְךָ, which he (like most translations) translates as “In vain you multiply remedies, new skin none for you.” The last element achieving mockery, according to Holladay, is “the emphatic ‘in vain’ in verse 11 as a judgment on all the efforts of Egypt.”¹⁶ Lundbom, also reading לְפִשׁוּאֵי as “in vain,” typifies the irony as “*epitrope*,” feigned support for an action known to bring harm or to be of no avail.¹⁷ Therefore, לְפִשׁוּאֵי read as “in vain,” apparently supports the mocking, ironic, even sarcastic, tone of the passage. The point, however, is that these viewpoints work with the presupposition, fortified by centuries of repetition, that לְפִשׁוּאֵי signifies futility. A new, incisive look at the text is necessary in the effort to prove our proposition that the Masoretic vocalisation

¹¹ According to Lundbom, verses 3–12 form an oracle, a group of four poems, of which verses 11–12 is the final one. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 203. Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52*, 316 is of the opinion that the poetry of verses 3–12 “gives every evidence of unity.”

¹² William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 317.

¹³ Widely noted, see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 203, with reference to Chotzner 1883:14, Rudolph, Weiser.

¹⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52*, 317–321 notes that ironic questions (vv. 5, 7) are asked; “rivers which are convulsed” suggests underground rivers (Pss 24:2, 74:15); all three verbs in verse 9 are ambiguous and עלו may also mean to retreat. In sum, it is an ironic text.

¹⁵ Q^{re}’ of Ketîb הַרְבֵּיתִי. This is the archaic spelling (compare 2:19, 20, 33). See Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52*, 316.

¹⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52*, 317.

¹⁷ Lundom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 203.

of לְשׂוֹא was intentional as to the referential function of the lexeme *throughout the entire text of MT Jeremiah*.

Let us start with the core phrase in verse 11b: לְשׂוֹא הַרְבִּיתִי לְךָ רַפְאוֹת תַּעֲלֶה אֵין לְךָ רַפְאוֹת תַּעֲלֶה אֵין לְךָ. Lundbom¹⁸ observed that the *ṭa ‘āmē hammiqrā’* of Jer 30:13 combines רַפְאוֹת תַּעֲלֶה, which should preferably be followed in 46:11b (pace BHS) to serve as the subject of the second colon (רַפְאוֹת תַּעֲלֶה אֵין לְךָ = “you do not have medicines for scar-healing”). רַפְאוֹת is accordingly not the object of הַרְבִּיתִי. The reading of LXX, T and modern translations, which follows the MT in 46:11, relies on a *ṭa ‘āmē hammiqrā’*, which is inconsistent with its first occurrence in MT Jeremiah, and therefore questionable. Lundbom’s own solution for the perceived first colon clause לְשׂוֹא הַרְבִּיתִי is to combine the verb with the verbs in the preceding line, translating it with “in vain you keep doing it” (i.e. going up to Gilead to collect balm). This move by Lundbom is unconvincing and, in the light of this study, unnecessary. The fact is that the verb [הַרְבִּיתִי] is not standing alone, as it appears to Lundbom¹⁹, but does have a qualifier preceding it, namely לְשׂוֹא. This of course is only visible when the referential value of the lexeme is recognised. לְשׂוֹא הַרְבִּיתִי would then read, “You have multiplied (*those with*) *covenantal ties with ‘The Worthless One’...*” To make meaning of this, the exegetical tools pertaining to “The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender,” as well illustrated by Mary Shields in her study on Jer 3:1–4:4,²⁰ can prove fruitful.

In the present study, only a few pointers should suffice. The question is: which other texts speak metaphorically in disparate terms about “the multiplication” of ties to god(s), maybe even switching gender within the metaphoric cluster? It seems that “dialogue with the tradition, both absorbing it and transforming it, even transgressing it, [as] a rhetorical strategy”²¹ is also true of Jer 46:3–12 in its use of Ezek 16 and its sister passage, Ezek 23, together with the help of other informative background texts.

1. The ‘multiplication of (ties with) gods’ in terms of רַבָּה *hiphil* + disparaging name of god/s (as object) is evident in Ezek 16. Jerusalem/Judah is accused three times of ‘multiplying’ her idolatrous prostitution in the phrase, וַתַּרְבִּי אֶת־פְּזִנְתְּךָ, “you multiply your prostitution” (Ezek 16:25, 26, 29). The verb, as in Jer 26:11a, is in the 2fs form. The object of Jerusalem’s harlotry in the central denunciation (v. 26) is (the memory of) the Egyptians:

¹⁸ Jack R. Lundom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 204.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mary E. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute: The Rhetorics of Intertextuality, Metaphor and Gender in Jeremiah 3.1–4.4* (JSOTSup 387; London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

²¹ Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 164.

והזני אֶל־בְּנֵי־מִצְרַיִם שְׁכֵנֶיךָ גְדֹלֵי בָשָׂר

“You prostituted with the (male) Egyptians,
the ones that have intercourse with you²², with their big penises²³.”

2. At this point, the reference in Ezek 23:19–20 to Egypt with its oversized male organs of lust in equestrian terms²⁴ is intertextually related to both Ezek 16:26 and the imperatives עלו פרשים and עלו הסוסים in Jer 46:4, 9. This intertextual connection only becomes visible once it is realised that עלו גלעד in verse 11, interpreted as imperative + object, “Go up to Gilead,” determines the interpretation of the syntax of the preceding עלה imperatives.²⁵ This insight seems to be absent thus far, as is evident from the inconsistency of translations.²⁶ While a number of translations understand the substantives connected to עלה in verses 4 and 9 to be subjects (vocatives), the consensus is that this is not true of עלו גלעד in verse 11 and that the LXX “went astray in the syntax here, understanding ‘Gilead’ as a vocative parallel to the vocatives in v 9.”²⁷ The logic of this discomfort of all other versions with the LXX, even the Vulgate, is that the (further) order to Virgin Daughter Egypt to fetch balsam, lies in its reference to the renowned balsam of Gilead (Jer 8:22, Gen 37:25). Thus, Gilead indicates the geographical target of עלו and cannot be the addressee (according to LXX). Furthermore, there are multiple texts where the geographical target is indicated without any prepositional indicator or directional *he* after (different forms of)

²² Rather than the traditional “your neighbours,” שכניך in a sexual-religious metaphor is “your shrine-dwellers,” that is, those taking their presence in your holy space, ‘tent’ אהֵל. Oholibah, “My tent is in her” (Ezek 23) would be, within the frame of meaning of this text, the name given to Jerusalem from the stance of her male sexual partner, referring to her (holy!) vagina, which is (to be) inhabited (filled!) by his (holy!) life-creating sexual organ. Whereas, Isa 6:2–3, for example, uses discreet language, maintaining the gravitas of Yahweh’s holiness [“his seams (כנפים // שולים) fills the temple, and his כבוד fills the whole earth/land], Ezek 16 // 23 unscrupulously and pornographically describes the course sexual overtures – with its intertextual implications in Jer 46.

²³ בָּשָׂר in this context = penis.

²⁴ The author of Jer 46 apparently reads בשר־המורים בשרם and וזרמת סוסים זרמתם as poetic parallelisms, emphasising the same oversized “sexual organ of a horse/donkey.”

²⁵ A systematic study of עלה without prepositions to the object should confirm this notion.

²⁶ The imperatives עלו is rendered (therefore conceptualised) in a variety of ways, while (1) both substantives connected to the imperative עלו הפרשים (v 4, and הסוסים v 9) are interpreted as subjects (vocatives), e.g. LXX, Vulgate, Afr53, KJV, RSV, ESV, NIV, NKJV, ASV, HSV 2010, Afr2020, Lundbom, Thompson; (2) the substantive in verse 4 is understood as object and in verse 9 as subject (vocative), e.g. Afr83, NIV NASV, Holladay; (3) הפרשים verse 4 as subject and הסוסים in v 9 as object (Luther 1545, 1984, 2017); (4) both substantives as objects, e.g. NBV 2004.

²⁷ Holladay, *Isaiah 2 (Chapter 26–52)*, 321.

עלה.²⁸ As noted, a study on עלה directly connected to its intended target-object should add additional intertextual support for Gilead as the place where “Virgin Daughter Egypt” is ordered to ‘ascend to.’

3. A strategy of rereading in the light of additional texts, either from outside, and/or further on in the text, would ensure that the subject-addressees and target-objects of verse 11 “Go up (Virgin Daughter Egypt) to Gilead” is consistently read back into verse 4–9. The horses then become the target-object to be mounted. The addressee-subjects ordered to do so, are not mentioned, which is rhetorically significant.²⁹ The ‘red light zone’ of Ezek 16/23 is reflected in the six-fold עלה (Jer 46:4–11) that takes the lead in sexual innuendo—in this case, through the metaphorical vehicles of horses-to-be-mounted (vv. 4a, 9) and the Nile-to-mount (vv. 7–8), against the backdrop of a battle (v. 4b), which turns out to be the prophetic day of Yahweh’s judgment (v. 10).

In verses 7–8 and finally in verse 11, the picture comes out of the paint. The unidentified military personnel who were ordered to mount war-horses (vv. 4–6, 9) – intertextually, the lustful Egyptian ‘horses’ with which Jerusalem/Judah/ Oholibah had illicit sexual intercourse – firstly manifest as Egypt, eager that “I will rise up” and “toss myself about,”³⁰ “cover” the earth, and finally “destroy a city and its inhabitants.” Aware of the pornographic allusions from Ezekiel, it takes little effort to identify all these verbs as oblique ‘euphemistic’ allusions to sex acted out with increasing violent movements and a notion of all-encompassing virility (fertility), ending up in an orgasm of (military) destruction of its object of lust.

After “the massive theological assertion”³¹ celebrating Yahweh’s eventual military victory with bloody sacrifice (v. 10), a final manifestation of Egypt is called up in the mocking song. The gender changes abruptly from Egypt as the epitome of male sexual overlord and violator to that of a sexually innocent, even ignorant, unmarried בת־מִצְרַיִם “Virgin Daughter-of-Egypt.” Her role, however, is much more than an agent of healing (as assumed from a first-

²⁸ For example בֵּית־אֵל in Gen 35:1, 3; Judg 1:22, 20:18, 31; בֵּית יְהוָה in 2 Kgs 19:14, 20:5, 8; 23:2, Isa 37:14, 38:22; 2 Chron 29:20, 34:30; בֵּית־אֲוֹן in Hos 4:15; צִיּוֹן in Jer 31:6; אֶת־הַהָר in Num 13:17, רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה in Deut 3:27 (subject Moses), הָעַי in Josh 8:1, 3 (לְעֵלוֹת הָעַי); הַר־תְּבוּר in Judg 4:12; הַר־צֹלְמוֹן in Judg 9:4; דָּרְךְ מִדְּבַר אָדָם in 2 Kgs 3:8; מָרִים in 2 Kgs 19:23 = Isa 37:24; הַלְּבָנוֹן in Jer 22:20; [יַעְלוֹן] חוּמָה in Joel 2:7; רִמַת גִּלְעָד in 1 Kgs 22:12 = 2 Chr 18:11.

²⁹ In the politico-military reading of the text, they may be, by inference, the Egyptian (Thompson, Bright, Lundbom) or even the Babylonian armies (Holladay, Brueggemann). These are, however, assumptions made by association.

³⁰ The verb גַּעַשׁ is described as a “process by which humans or objects move up and down or to and fro – to shake; to toss about.” See MARBLE (previously De Blois, Reinier and Enio R. Mueller, eds. *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*.

³¹ Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck up, to Tear down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 26–52* (ITC Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 221.

impression reading); she is called up to enact the same role as the unidentified ‘mountaineers’ (vv. 4, 9) and the Egyptian Nile-like sexual pervert (vv. 7–8). She, like them all, is to perform the act of עלה, to ‘mount’ Gilead—and take its balm. The sexually loaded deeper level of interpretation raises the expectation that צרי may, apart from its literal medicinal meaning, be a reference to an aphrodisiac. Indeed, it seems that Oholiba of Ezek 16 – building herself ‘a height,’ רמה (רמות-גלעד) comes to mind!) with the implication to ‘go up’ and explicitly ‘commit abomination’ תעב (vv. 24–25) – is here replaced by “Virgin Daughter-of-Egypt.” Her presumably innocent virgin status is apparently an ironic, even sarcastic slant to the ‘healing,’ a likely form of satire.³²

4. Gilead and its healing balm gets a deeper metaphorical meaning strengthening the case of Egypt’s involvement in ‘prostitutional’ idolatry once the intertextual links to a number of texts are uncovered. The following additional, side remarks all come together to label Gilead in Jer 46:11 as such.

- Judges 10:8 states that the Israelites who were *beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorite(s), in Gilead* (בְּאֶרֶץ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר בְּגִלְעָד) were oppressed. Irrespective of how one interprets the relative constructions in this verse, Gilead is directly connected to האמרי as its habitat.

- In another side remark, in the retelling of Ahab’s violent and murderous take-over of Naboth’s vineyard and the subsequent curse on Ahab, 1 Kgs 21:25–26 identifies the (repugnant) act of idolatry (תעב, הלך אחרי הגללים) with the Amorites (האמרי).

There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel (ESV).

The specific verb chosen to introduce the behaviour of Ahab who “sold himself מכר (*hitpa’el*) [to do evil]” should not go unnoticed. The root מכר is intrinsically connected to the traditions pertaining to Gilead.³³

³² As suggested by Erin Risch Zoutendam, “A Grotesque Attack: Reading Ezekiel 16 as Satire to Address Feminist Critiques,” *CTJ* 52/ 1 (April 2017): 63–84.

³³ Machir was the father of Gilead – Num 26:29; 27:1; 36:1; 1 Chr 2:21, 23; the sons of Machir went to Gilead and dispossessed the Amorites living there – Num 32:39; Moses gave Gilead to Machir – Num 32:40, Deut 3:15; Joshua gave half of Gilead and other cities to Machir and the Machirites, מכרי – Josh 13:31; Gilead, the son of Machir got [the land of] Gilead “because he was איש מלחמה, a man of war” [associated with מְכָרָה, aggression? weapons?] – Josh 17:1. Hosea goes into dialogue with this tradition, “absorbing, transforming, even transgressing it (cf. Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*, 164) by labelling Gilead as “a city of evildoers, tracked by blood” גִּלְעָד קִרְיַת פְּעֻלֵי אֲוֹן עֲקֻבָּה מִדָּם (Hos 6:8).

• Ezekiel 16 together with chapter 23 is connected to רבה hiphil and עלה in Jer 46:11. A curious remark in Ezek 16:3 states “your father was ‘the Amorite’ (האמרי) and your mother a Hittite (חתי), repeated in verse 45 in reverse order in the plural “your (plural) mother was a Hittite (חתי), and your (plural) father ‘an Amorite’ (אמרי). John van Seters³⁴ concludes that this name combination coincides with Assyrian and Babylonian texts before the first millennium BCE, does not correlate with 8th–6th century inhabitants of Palestine, and is therefore probably taken over by Israelite writers as an ideological rather than historical reference to designate, in prophetic perspective, the ancient idolatrous nations which Yahweh expelled from the land of Palestine. According to Van Seters, the terms Amorite and Hittite are used with a pejorative intention.³⁵ The function of these designations in Ezek 16 is, via the above-mentioned and other texts,³⁶ the bridge to Gilead as the ideological centre of anti-Yahweh worship by the nations, all eventually expelled or to be expelled by Yahweh. Egypt is part and parcel of these nations. Is Egypt not resolving to ‘go up’ (in a formidable act of fertility religion ‘to cover the whole land’) “like the Nile” (vv. 7–8)? With the same intention “Virgin Daughter Egypt” is apparently exhorted to ‘go up’ to Gilead to take ‘balm’ (aphrodisiac to enhance her metaphorical prostitution?) (v. 11).

1 Conclusion

A rich tapestry of intertextuality, metaphor and gender switch, in this study triggered and necessitated by the reading of לשוא as “The Worthless One,” portrays Egypt’s downfall at the hand of Babylon as Yahweh’s judgement on those that oppose his lordship and associate themselves with **haššāw*’ as is the case with Israel/Judah/Jerusalem in the preceding texts (Jer 2:30; 4:30; 6:29; 18:15). While it is possible, even obvious, to connect **haššāw*’ to the Baal (or the Baals) of Judah’s worship in the first four לשוא texts, the object of Egypt’s worship, on pure historical grounds, makes a direct connection to the god Baal most unlikely. Jeremiah 46:11 is therefore a correction of the notion that לשוא is an identification marker of a specific deity and indirectly confirms the wisdom of ancient translators of Jer 18:15 who labelled לשוא as unspecified deities.³⁷ This last reference to לשוא in Jer (46:11) is a reminder that לשוא is an oblique and disparaging allusion to the object of (misplaced) worship, adoration, trust in אלהים אחרים – in covenantal terms בעל / בעלים – in opposition and total contrast to Yahweh the Trustworthy One.

³⁴ John van Seters, “The terms Amorite and Hittite in the Old Testament,” *VT* 22/1 (1972), 64–81.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁶ See Josh 24 (especially vv. 14, 15, 18), Jer 5:19–20. Other prophetic oracles against Egypt that speak of Baal or idols (gods) are Isa 19:1, אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם, הָאֱלֹהִים, and Ezek 30:13, גִּלְיָהּ, parallel אֱלֹהִים.

³⁷ See footnote 7.

The interpretative keys to unlock the theological intent of לְשׂוֹא are surprisingly the same as those used by Mary Shields in "Circumscribing the Prostitute": a keen eye for multiple intertextual references and allusions, interacting metaphors and gender switches. On a philosophical level, a comparison of the present study with that of Shields³⁸ nudges the insight that לְשׂוֹא is, in essence, a dense metaphor circumscribing the prostitute-in-covenant-relationship with her (collective or individual) overlord, *ba'al*, emphasising the dishonourable and disparaging name she allows herself to be subjected to.

D FINAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Jeremiah 18:15 is the only text with an interpretative tradition acknowledging לְשׂוֹא as referent to the (worthless) idols. Those interpreters who connect the idol(s) to (the) Ba'al³⁹ have made this move apparently without realising the rhetorical implications of the grammatical definiteness of the abstract noun *šāw'*. This study offers an explanatory basis apparently not contemplated yet.
2. While it is possible, even obvious, to connect **haššāw'* to the Baal (or the Baals) of Judah's worship in the first four לְשׂוֹא texts (Jer 18:15 as well as 2:30; 4:30 and 6:29)⁴⁰, Egypt (the subject matter of Jer 46) can hardly be connected to Baal worship. Jeremiah 46:11 therefore modifies the notion that לְשׂוֹא functions as identifier of Baal *per se*. The wisdom of ancient translators of Jer 18:15 who labelled לְשׂוֹא as unspecified deities⁴¹ is thereby confirmed.
3. The traditional stance that לְשׂוֹא denotes *futility* in Jer 46:11 could only be refuted by a search for intertextual clues, alertness to connecting metaphors and accompanying gender switches. These are the very same rhetorical devices illustrated in Mary Shields' study of Jer 3:1–4:4.
4. The title of Shields' study, "Circumscribing the Prostitute," succinctly summarising her work, harbours the insight that this final occurrence of לְשׂוֹא in Jer 46:11 (MT) does not describe, but rather *circumscribes*, the 'Egyptian prostitute' in relation to her (misplaced) object of worship – in covenantal terms her בעל / בעלים. Assuming consistency in the referential value of לְשׂוֹא throughout MT Jeremiah, the term serves as a dense metaphor circumscribing the prostitute-in-covenant-relationship with her (collective or individual) overlord/s (*ba'al/b^e'alim*).

³⁸ Shields, *Circumscribing the Prostitute*.

³⁹ For example, Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 438; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 524.

⁴⁰ C. Wynand Retief, "The Anti-Yahweh Label *laššāw'* in Jeremiah (PART 1)," *OTE* 34/3 (2021), 935-959.

⁴¹ See footnote 7.

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