

The Diachrony of the Hebrew Verb בָּעַל

Clara Carbonell Ortiz

Diccionario histórico de la lengua española (DHLE),
Centro de Estudios de la RAE, Spain

Abstract

Lexicographers and biblical scholars have traditionally disagreed regarding the chronological distribution of the sexual and marital meanings of the verb בָּעַל. Some restrict the sense ‘to penetrate’ to post-biblical corpora, whereas others assert that it is also present in the Hebrew Bible. This research seeks to 1) assess the degree of suitability of these claims, 2) analyse the semantics and morpho-syntactical structure of בָּעַל in its diachronic extension, and 3) determine when the semantic evolution DOMINION/MARRIAGE > SEX happened. To this end, a wide array of sources, both direct (Hebrew Bible, Qumran documents, Mishnah, and Tosefta) and indirect (the ancient versions and dictionaries) is thoroughly examined.

Keywords

Ancient versions, comparative Hebrew lexicography, diachronic semantics, Hebrew Linguistics, sexed agency

1. Introduction

The verbal root בָּעַל appears 16 times in the Hebrew Bible (HB): 10 times in *qal*,¹ twice in *nifal*,² and 4 times in *qal* passive.³ The latter is used to refer to the married woman, either as בָּעֵלָה (Gen. 20.3 and Deut. 22.22) or simply as בָּעֵלָהּ (Isa. 54.1), and also, metaphorically, to the land governed by YHWH (Isa. 62.4). According to the data, the *nifal* conveys the action experienced by the woman when getting married (only attested in Prov. 30.23, תִּבְעַל)⁴ and, in the same vein, it also serves to depict the subdued land (Isa. 62.4). Both passive verbal forms are linked to a female subject in biblical Hebrew. In spite of the scant evidence, this syntactical trait is not random but characteristic of the idiomatic functioning of the verb, as we shall see below.

Contrastingly, the *qal*—and hence active—attestation of this verb is solely connected to men, who play the role of agents. Some of these instances relate again to the realm of wedlock: בָּעַל conveys the act of a man marrying a woman (Deut. 21.13; 24.1; Isa. 62.5a), but it also serves to portray YHWH as Israel’s husband (Isa. 26.13; 54.5; 62.4b,5b), as well as the nation

¹ Deut. 21.13; 24.1, 1 Chro. 4.22, Isa. 26.13; 54.5; 62.5[x2], Jer. 3.14; 3.32, and Mal. 2.11.

² Prov. 30.23 and Isa. 62.4.

³ Gen. 20.3, Deut. 22.22, and Isa. 54.1; 62.4.

⁴ Fox changed the vocalization into תִּבְעַל and accordingly translated the excerpt as “under a hateful woman, when she gains mastery” (2009: 876-877).

of Judah taking a foreign idol's daughter as their wife (Mal. 2.11). In all these instances, **בָּעַל** requires an accusative.

Additionally, this verb can denote the possession or governance of a land and its people. There are three different syntactical arrangements for this case: *a*) with accusative (Isa. 26.13; 54.5;⁵ 62.5); *b*) with the preposition **בְּ** (Jer. 3.14; 31.32⁶); *c*) with the preposition **לְ** (1 Chro. 4.22). Verses in groups *b* and *c* are unrelated to the marital sense of **בָּעַל**, but group *a* is akin to it. In fact, the semantic cores DOMINION and MARRIAGE present in **בָּעַל** (so much more in the nominal pattern **בָּעַל**⁷) are so greatly intertwined that the attempt to make any substantial differentiation between the two is alien to the biblical linguistic and cultural systems. They are not even two related senses, but rather the same meaning in—what we now deem to be—different contexts.⁸ The verses associated with possession suggest that a deity is thought to own a nation in the same fashion that a king is portrayed ruling over a country or a man becoming the lord (husband) of a woman.

As can be inferred from the textual data, a prominent characteristic of this verb is its distribution of male and female parties.⁹ From a syntactic standpoint, men perform the verbal action as the active subjects, whereas if women play the role of subjects, the verb switches to a passive tense. Only men are agents, whereas patients are necessarily women. In other words, the sexed agency of marital **בָּעַל** is exclusively male.

The second characteristic of the verb concerns its meaning: in the biblical stratum, **בָּעַל** relates only to the act of becoming a husband. Some authors have argued that this verb has a sexual meaning not only in the rabbinic stratum but also in the HB (see below). However, the biblical textual data relating to **בָּעַל** does not support this claim, as I demonstrated elsewhere (2023: 42-45), and it is only in retrospect and conditioned by the rabbinic texts that a sexual meaning can be ascribed to the HB. In the Israelite society, sexual intercourse between a married couple was certainly taken for granted but, according to the linguistic data available, the verb **בָּעַל** never served that semantic purpose in the HB.

There is a large number of verbs expressing sexual activity in BH.¹⁰ In view of this lexical availability and diversity, it is noteworthy that an originally marital verb like **בָּעַל** had

⁵ This has been called into question by the suggestion of a homonym close to Phoenician *B^hL* (mirroring Hebrew **בָּעַל**), which fulfils the parallelism with **בָּעַל** in the verse. It was first proposed by Gordon (1995), and later backed and spread by Dahood (1962: 362). This homonym has been welcomed in the *DCH* with an entry of its own, **בָּעַל** II (Clines, 1995: 237).

⁶ The medieval lexicographer Yonah ibn Yānnāh, in this ground-breaking dictionary (*ca.* 1050), deemed these two verbs to be distinct from all other attestations of **בָּעַל** and pointed to the connection with the Arabic cognate **بَعَلَ**. For the original Arabic, see Neubauer (1875: col. 102). For the medieval Hebrew translation, see Bacher (1896: 70).

⁷ Notice that **בָּעַל** only partakes in the semantic domain DOMINION, but not in MARRIAGE.

⁸ Tigay bore this in mind in his translation of Deuteronomy: “you may come to her and possess her” (for Deut. 21:13) and “a man takes a wife and possesses her” (for Deut. 24:1) (1996: 194, 221).

⁹ A series of articles dealing with this category of analysis is currently under progress and will appear under the title “The Concept of Sexed Agency and Its Significance in Sexual Hebrew Verbs”. In the meantime, a succinct treatment of this issue can be found in Carbonell Ortiz (2022: 129-34).

¹⁰ The semantic domain SEX in BH was the subject of my doctoral dissertation, where I carried out an in-depth lexicological and metalexicographical analysis of this set of verbs (Carbonell Ortiz, 2022).

evolved to be a sexual verb by the earliest writings of the rabbis. At some point, the *qal* and *nif'al* of this verb stopped meaning 'to become a husband' / 'to become a wife', respectively, and became 'to penetrate' / 'to be penetrated'. This semantic transformation persisted in subsequent phases of the language and is still current in modern Hebrew.

In the following pages, I shall address two questions that, *prima facie*, belong to different realms (diachrony and reception) but that are closely linked to each other. Regarding the evolution of **בָּעַל**, I shall analyse textual data from Qumran, the Mishnah, and the Tosefta and navigate the morpho-syntactical possibilities opened up by the semantic shift DOMINION/MARRIAGE > SEX. Regarding the reception of biblical **בָּעַל** in Jewish and Christian sources, I shall attempt to discover if the post-biblical meaning was ever anachronistically extrapolated into the biblical layer.

2. Defining biblical **בָּעַל**: The story of an ambiguity

In the scholarly literature produced over the last decades, significant ambiguity has persisted concerning the semantic description of biblical **בָּעַל**. A clear example is found in the new edition of the Temple Scroll (hereafter, TS) carried out by Schiffman and Gross (2021). The verb **בָּעַל** appears twice in this document: in 11Q19 63:14 (standing for Deut. 21.13) and 65:7 (reflecting a *Vorlage* distinct from MT Deut. 22.13). In the accompanying translation, the editors rendered the verb as 'to have sexual relations' in both verses (pp. 185 and 189). However, in the commentary section, they seemingly changed their mind and concluded that the author of the text "took [ובעלה] to mean 'and he marries her'" (p. 189). This semantic contradiction is harmonised in the lexical index, where **בָּעַל** is defined as 'marry' and 'have sexual intercourse' (p. 314) at the same time.

This ambivalent or hesitant translation of biblical **בָּעַל** is not unique. Quite the contrary, it has a long, and impressive history in the records of Hebrew philology at large and in lexicography in particular. Dictionary authors and biblical commentators alike have found themselves compelled to choose one of the two following possibilities: *a*) limiting the marital meaning to the biblical stratum while ascribing the sexual meaning to the rabbinic period; *b*) asserting that the sexual meaning is also biblical and, consequently, denying any semantic evolution in post-biblical times.

2.1. *First hypothesis: The meanings belong to different strata*

An early rejection of the sexual meaning of biblical **בָּעַל** was uttered by Luzzatto in his commentary on Isaiah (1855). Addressing the meaning of Isa. 62.5, where a comparison is drawn between the young man who **יִבְעַל** a virgin and YHWH who **יִבְעַלְוֶהָ** (referring to the people of Israel), Luzzatto felt an urge to clarify that, in the HB, **בָּעַל** only conveys the new woman's status under her husband's authority. He explained that the wife (in his words, **בעולת בעל**) who is married to a man (for which he intentionally used **נבעלה** *à la biblique*) is nothing but a woman under a man's authority (**ידו** or **תחת רשותו**) (Luzzatto, 1855: 610). The theological comparison drawn by Isaiah means, Luzzatto continued, that the virgin bride of Israel is bound to come under the control and protection of YHWH. Luzzatto's Jewish readers

did not require an explicit reference to the rabbinic sexual meaning to understand that he was pointing to the existence of two linguistic strata concerning **בָּעַל** and making a statement concerning their semantic distribution.

Luzzatto's remark is in full agreement with a number of renowned lexicographers that would compound their dictionaries in the following decades. These are classical authors of Talmudic lexicography like Levy and Jastrow, and the mastermind behind the first dictionary that included all the phases of the Hebrew language: Ben Yehudah. All of them avowed for a distinction between two semantic phases of the verb **בָּעַל**. Levy did it as follows:

Beiwohnen, coire, sow. Vom ehelichen, als auch vom unehelichen Umgange mit einem Weibe (die im bh. urspr. Bedeutung unseres Ws.: beherrschen, besitzen, ist in dem Rabbinischen nur in dem Sbs. **בָּעַל**, **בְּעֵלָה** gebräuchlich) [...] **נִבְעְלָה** es wurde ihr beigewohnt. [...] In *masc.* Form nur vom Zwitter [*sic*]: **נִבְעַל**. (Levy, 1876: 247)¹¹

Levy considered that the primitive meaning of the verb was 'to rule' and that the semantic core DOMINION/MARRIAGE was preserved in nominal forms alone (*i.e.*, in **בָּעַל** as 'husband'/'male owner' and in **בְּעֵלָה** as 'female owner'), whereas the verb shifted towards the semantic domain SEX.

Jastrow described the verb in the same vein and included the same information regarding the *nif'al*:

[in b. h. *to be master, protect;*] *to have sexual intercourse* (both legal or illicit), *to embrace a woman* [...] **נִבְעְלָה** *she had intercourse.* [...] Masc. **נִבְעַל** (of the hermaphrodite [*sic*]). (Jastrow, 1903: 182)

Jastrow began his entry by giving the biblical meaning and only later did he offer the rabbinic sense, thus inverting the order followed by Levy. Levy and Jastrow examined the same textual corpus and used the same methodology. Both of them focused on the world and words of the rabbis, *i.e.* post-biblical Hebrew intermingled with Jewish Aramaic.

Compared to Levy's and Jastrow's dictionaries, Ben Yehudah's endeavour was different in nature and pioneering in scope. Aiming to put all the puzzle pieces together to provide the Jewry of his time with a functional *koine*, he became the first lexicographer to gather together all linguistic layers of the Hebrew language. His entry of **בָּעַל** meets the requirements of a well-structured display of diachronic information in a plurilingual format:

¹¹ 'It means 'to have sexual intercourse'. Said of marital and also extra-marital relations with a woman (the original biblical Hebrew meaning, 'to rule', 'to own', is used in rabbinic Hebrew only in the nouns **בָּעַל** and **בְּעֵלָה**) [...] **נִבְעְלָה** means 'is penetrated'. [...] In masculine form, it is only said of the hermaphrodite: **נִבְעַל**. Here "Zwitter" refers to the man who plays a passive role in homosexual intercourse. This also applies to Jastrow's employment of "hermaphrodite" (see below).

to have dominion over, beherrschen, devenir maître de	א [שם שלטונו על אחר, נהיה לו לאדון]
to take a wife, heirathen eine Frau, épouser une femme	ב [בעל אשה, נהיה לה לבעל]
to have sexual intercourse, beischlafen, cohabiter avec une femme	ג [ביחוד, שכב אשה] ¹²

(Ben Yehudah, 1980: 577)¹³

Sections א and ב deal with the semantic domains DOMINION and MARRIAGE, respectively. The sexual sense appears in section ג. The asterisk that precedes reflects the notation system conceived and deployed by Ben Yehudah: it tags the lexical item as rabbinic. The absence of any symbol whatsoever characterises a word as originally biblical, as is the case in sections א and ב.¹⁴

The conclusions and concerns of these three lexicographers are identical, since all of them emphasise the need to distinguish two chronological layers of the verb.

2.2. Second hypothesis: The sexual meaning is also biblical

Other authors have merged the chronology of the sexual and marital meanings. This approach can be found in dictionaries both diachronically and synchronically oriented. Let us select again three works: Fün̈n's (concerned with BH and RH), Even-Shoshan's (dealing with all the phases, following Ben Yehudah's steps), and Kaddari's (exclusively concerned with BH):

Fün̈n (1884: 291)	קנית קנין אשה על ידי הזווג, הייראטהען, בייוואהנען, ומורכב מן בא-על [...] ¹⁵
Even-Shoshan (1960: 139)	נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה הַזְדִּיג, בָּא בְיַחְסֵי מִין עִם אִשָּׁה [...] הָיָה אָדוֹן לְ-, מָשַׁל [...] ¹⁶
Kaddari (2006: 114)	שָׁלַט, נהג דין אדון [...] נהג כדרך בעל באישה, ידע אותה [...] ¹⁷

These dictionaries were written in different centuries but they all agree in providing a sexual definition for biblical בָּעַל. Fün̈n stated that the verb means the act of getting married through sexual intercourse (על ידי הזווג), which seemingly echoes a famous *mishnayah* on the ways to marry a woman (בביאה, Kidd. 1.1). Even-Shoshan agreed with this and employed the same verbal root, הַזְדִּיג. Kaddari opted for a more biblical flavour and rendered it with the euphemistic verb יָדַע.

Some modern scholars have followed this analysis. For example, in his textual commentary on the TS, Brin stated that this verb denotes sexual intercourse both in the HB

¹² 'A. To have control over another, to become their lord. [...] B. To marry [בעל] a woman, become her husband. [...] C. * In particular, to sleep with a woman'.

¹³ The *editio princeps* of this volume was published in 1908. For a full chronology of the dictionary, see Mirkin (2007: 180-190).

¹⁴ This scientific approach was a suggestion made to Ben Yehudah by the Alliance Israélite Universelle (Fellman, 1973: 74). The system, with slight variations in the symbols, outlived Ben Yehudah's work and was reused by later lexicographers, like Even-Shoshan (1960) and Targarona Borrás (1995).

¹⁵ 'To acquire the property of a woman through sexual intercourse, [in German] "heiraten", "beiwohnen". It is compounded by בא-על'.

¹⁶ 'To marry a woman by having sexual intercourse, have sexual relations with a woman [...]. Become the lord of, govern [...]'.

¹⁷ 'To rule [...], behave as a husband, know her'.

and in the language of the rabbis (1978: 24). Likewise, Brenner accepted the same interpretation when defining the term *בְּעוּלָה* as “the one who has been ‘mastered’, that is penetrated (by a ‘husband’)” (1997: 26). Muchnik similarly claimed that, in the Bible, “[t]he verb *liv’ol* (‘to have sexual intercourse’) derives from the root of the word *ba’al*, and it solely denotes the action of the man” (2015: 36). Both Brenner and Muchnik are right to underscore the male agency of the verb but they fail to acknowledge that *בְּעַל* did not mean ‘to have sexual intercourse’ in the HB. Neither did it mean ‘to become a husband’ in rabbinic sources.

3. The meaning of *בְּעַל* in early rabbinic sources

Early rabbinic sources offer numerous examples of the root *בע"ל* in its varied morphology.¹⁸ The verb in the *qal* is used to refer to sexual intercourse in the Mishnah¹⁹ and the Tosefta.²⁰ That the act is purely sexual and not necessarily linked to marriage can be contextually inferred, for example, from Yev. 5.3-5. This passage deals with the woman whose husband gives her the *get* and later has sex with her (*נתן גט ובעל*). The logic of the sequence entails that he did not sleep with her as his husband but as a stranger. Also, according to Kel. 1.4, the discharging woman pollutes the unspecified man who has sex with her (*שהיא מטמאה את*) (*בועלה*). In Tosefta Nashim, the verb is more commonly used in marital contexts (Ruiz Morrell and Salvatierra Osorio, 2001: 482). However, the participle *בועל*, ‘he who penetrates’ (see Sot. 5.1), refers to the adulterous lover. This new morphology makes a clear contrast with the *בְּעַל* or ‘lord-husband’.

The penetrative meaning of the verb is especially self-evident in a passage of great linguistic interest—Sanh. 11.6, which elaborates on the death penalty for the man who sleeps with a married woman even if the marriage had not been consummated. The framing is as follows: a man has sex with (*הבא על*) another man’s woman (*אשת איש*) who had come under his marital authority (*נכנסה לרשות הבעל לנשואין*), although her husband had not slept with her yet (*שלא נבעלה*). Notice the synonymy between *נבעלה*, referred to her, and *בא על*, referred to him, the latter being the Mishnaic version of Biblical *בוא אֶל* (Brin, 1978: 24). The noun *בְּעַל* and the newly developed verb have shifted away from each other in terms of semantic domains. Only then is it possible to say that a man is a woman’s *ba’al* despite not having *ba’aled* her yet.

The semantic evolution of the verb *בְּעַל* is inextricably intertwined with its morphological development, which brings us again to the matter of sexed agency.

¹⁸ The textual database used for this search has been *Ma’agarim*. For the sake of clarity and brevity, and taking into account their early chronology, only examples culled from the Mishnah and Tosefta are offered.

¹⁹ Yev. 5.3-5; 4.5; 8.5, Sot. 3.6; 4.2; Sanh. 9.6; 11.1.6; Kel. 1.3-5, Nid. 2.3; 4.1; 5.4, Zav. 5.11.

²⁰ Qid. 3.8, Nid. 3.3[x2]; 5.1,6[x2]; 9.4[x2],5,12, Zav. 3.1,3, Yad. 1.7.

3.1. *The continuity of male agency*

The sexed agency of sexual בָּעַל is identical to that of marital בָּעַל in the Bible, but their *raison d'être* differs in each case. In BH, the impossibility of female agency is assured by the cultural practices of marriage: it is the man who *ba'als* a woman, and not vice versa, because the party to be taken in marriage must be female. This also accounts for the lack of a morphological counterpart of the noun בָּעַל in the realm of wedlock. In other words, a woman may own things and characteristics,²¹ but when it comes to her husband, she is a בְּעוּלָה and not a בָּעֻלָּה. This is also based on logical reasoning: two individuals cannot simultaneously be the possessors of each other, for if one owns, the other must be owned.²²

The continuity of the male agency in RH is ensured by the penetrative meaning that the verb has adopted. The man *ba'als* a woman, and not vice versa, because he has the phallus. For that reason, a man who is sodomised will be understood as a man being *ba'aled* by another.

The development of the *nifal* is widely attested in the Mishnah, although it is always said of a woman.²³ Notice, for example, the reference to fornication in Yev. 6.5 (ושנבעלה בעילת (זנות)). The noun בְּעֻלָּה that appears in this excerpt expresses coition regardless of its legality.²⁴ Virtually all *nifal* examples in the Tosefta refer to the woman as well.²⁵ There is one felicitous attestation of the masculine to describe the man rendered invalid for priesthood after having been sodomised. The text goes on explaining that a woman, who may also be penetrated, is automatically disqualified from that position (Bik. 2.4, ואם נבעל בעבירה פסול מן הכוהנה (כנשים)).

3.2. *Possible explanations for the change of semantic domain*

Determining why בָּעַל evolved in this manner is a necessarily speculative task. There are, however, two plausible causes: 1) metonymy and 2) phonetic similarity.

Metonymy could have been a semantic influence behind this change, provided that marriage is inherently linked to the realm of sexual relations. The transition from MARRIAGE to SEX left some vestiges of the old meaning in the new stratum, since בָּעַל and בְּעוּלָה never shed

²¹ 1 Sam. 28.7[x2], 1 Ki. 17.17, and Nah. 3.4.

²² The anti-Jewish disregard for Masoretic vocalization, which is characteristic of Hutchinsonian lexicography (18th century, England), created an odd situation in this regard. In his dictionary (1767), Bate claimed that the term *be'ulah* was indeed to be pronounced *ba'alah*. This was apparently supported by the *scriptio defectiva* בְּעֻלָּה (Gen. 20:3 and Deut. 22.22) with the vowels removed (although it goes against the evidence of the *scriptio plena* בְּעוּלָה, in Isa. 54.1; 62.4). Accordingly, he wrote: "A master, lord over, or owner of any thing; fem. בעלה [...] "she is בעל בעלת בעל owner of a husband;" hath a lord over her. Exod. xxi, 3. "if he be בעל אשה owner of a wife." (1767: 77). Bate was unable to find his way through the maze into which this linguistic theory had trapped him. He was forced to follow the impossible logic of an *owner* having an *owner*, although he tried to smooth out the contradiction with the help of lexical variation ('lord' instead of 'owner').

²³ Yev. 6.5; 13.12, Sot. 2.6, Sanh. 11.6, and Edu. 8.2.

²⁴ Yev. 5.1,6; 8.5, Ket. 5.1, Nid. 10.1,8. Its synonym בִּיאָה succeeded in Mishnaic literature to denote sexual intercourse, but it became superseded by בְּעֻלָּה in the Middle Ages (*v. gr.*, as the *definiens* of sexual verbs in dictionaries; Carbonell Ortiz, 2022: 716-718).

²⁵ Tosefta Shev. 3.8, Yev. 3.8[x3], Ket. 3.7;4.2, Git. 4.8, and Edu. 3.3.

their marital meaning. On the contrary, the neologism **בוּעַל** is integrated into the new sexual paradigm. When comparing **בַּעַל** to **בוּעַל** (Sot. 5.1), it is noticeable how the morphological pattern disambiguates the context (marital or extra-marital) although both males perform the same physical act with a woman.

The second hypothesis coincides with Fün̄n's remarks, previously expounded. This explanation considers the late sexual expression **עַל בּוֹא** as the reason for the sexualisation of **בַּעַל**, which would have taken place out of phonetic similarity with the former.

In either case, the action of metonymy or phonetic similarity implies that the difference between BH and RH must be understood in chronological (and not dialectal) terms (Bar Asher, 1999: 120-121).

4. The attestation of **בַּעַל** in Qumran

This verb survived in a small number of scrolls in Qumran. If Olyan's translation is correct, in one instance is **בַּעַל** used as a transitive verb meaning 'to rule over' (**ובעלתם**, in 4Q382 Frg. CIV: 3) (Attridge et al., 1994: 401). This usage departs from the biblical syntax seen above (plus **ב־** or **ל־**). In another scroll (4Q381 Frg. XIII: 1), the reconstruction **בעלת** (parsed as *qal*, 2nd p. sg. masc.) is uncertain (Eshel et al., 1998: 100). The *qal* passive is innovative vis-à-vis the biblical documentation, since it serves to characterise a person with a given ability. For example, in the Damascus Document (CD Frg. 10 i: 2 and Frg. 9 v: 14) the appointed "מבקר" must be a man between thirty and fifty years old and "בעול בכול סוד אנשים ולכול לשון למשפחותם", that is, 'skilled in all the secrets of the men and all the languages according to their families' (cf. Baumgarten and Milik, 1996: 72, 109). Likewise, in the War Scroll (1QM 6.12) is it written "ובעולים לשמוע קולות ולכול מראי דמיונים", that is, 'those skilled in hearing noises and in all sorts of visions' (cf. Yadin, 1962: 289). In all these instances, **בַּעַל** belongs to the semantic realm DOMINION in two variations: the power exerted on something as its chief (*qal*) and the possession of a skill (*qal* passive).

The marital/sexual meaning of **בַּעַל** is limited to two attestations in the Temple Scroll (3rd-2nd centuries BCE). The excerpt 11Q19 63.14 reads: "אחר תבוא אליה ובעלתה והיתה לכה". This sentence is an exact quotation of Deut. 21.13 and is embedded in a larger passage that reworks the laws of the captive wife described in that chapter. It has a three-fold syntactical structure. The element **תבוא אליה** conveys a sexual meaning, whereas the second and third items are marital. These last two are not tautological. Indeed, they frame the bond in a mirror-like manner: **בעלתה** indicates what he becomes towards her, while **והיתה לכה** refers to what she becomes towards him. The denominative nature of **בַּעַל** is here most evident.

Although I believe this is the original sense of the biblical passage, one wonders if the author of the TS that was reorganising this material understood it otherwise. Was the sexual meaning of **בַּעַל** already current? If so, did it influence the interpretation of the biblical verse? If not, the proper translation should be (a) (see below), in which the sexual meaning rests

upon בוא אָל alone. However, if the semantic shift had already happened, the option to ponder is (b), where בוא אָל functions solely as a verb of movement:

	והיתה לכה לאשה	ובעלתה	אחר תבוא אליה
a)	and she will become his wife	and will marry her	Then he will approach her [<i>sexually</i>]
b)	and she will become his wife	and will penetrate her	Then he will approach her [<i>literally</i>]

The second and last attestation of the verb בָּעַל in the TS sheds still more light on the matter. 11Q19 65.7 reads: “כי יקח איש אשה ובעלה ושנאה”. The verse stands for MT Deut. 22.13, which has a slightly different wording: “כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ וּשְׂנֵאָהָ”. I examined this case in my previous paper (Carbonell Ortiz, 2023), where I made two claims. First of all, I proved that the *lectio* ובעלה is not a deviation from or linguistic upgrade of the MT made by the author of the TS, but that it is already present in the Deuteronomy manuscript that he used for his composition. Secondly, I emphasised that LXX Deut. 22.13 and the translation of Targum Neophiti offer additional proof of a *Vorlage* different from MT as far as Deut. 22.13 is concerned.

Given the dearth of evidence, it cannot be definitely concluded that בָּעַל meant ‘to penetrate’ in the TS. Nevertheless, the alternation between this verb and בוא אָל in Deut. 22.13 makes sense when taking into account their phonetic affinity, and all the more if we consider the late preferred variant of בוא אל (בוא על). Most importantly, their interchange could have been prompted by their synonymy. In fact, the paths of these two verbs crossed once again in the annals of RH and in identical circumstances (see textual variants of Sot. 3.6; Carbonell Ortiz, 2023: 52).

5. The translation of בָּעַל in the Greek versions²⁶

5.1. Marital meaning in the LXX

The LXX is systematic in the translation of בָּעַל with συνιστέω.²⁷ Even the syntagm בָּעַלְתָּ בָּעַלְתָּ is rendered with the participle perfect active of this lexical root: συνωγακυντα ἀνδρῖ (Gen. 20.3 and Deut. 22.22). In Isa. 54.1, the isolated word בָּעוּלָה also becomes ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα. The need for an adjustment in Isa. 62:4 (אלי תהי גי סוס וסוֹמֵנָה) is due to the reference to the land. In Ben Sira, this Greek verb also corresponds to the presence of the root בע"ל in the Hebrew *Vorlage*, which I have collected and discussed elsewhere (Carbonell Ortiz, 2023: 42-43).

The semantics of συνιστέω shed light on how the verb בָּעַל was understood in the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE by the Alexandrian Jews in charge of the LXX. According to the *LSJ*, the verb συνιστέω can mean both “dwell”/“live together” and “live with [somebody] in wedlock” (Liddell

²⁶ All the textual variants have been extracted from the edition of the LXX in the Göttingen series (Wevers, 1974; Wevers, 1977; Ziegler, 1983; Ziegler, 1984). For the hexaplaric material of Proverbs, the edition of Field (1875) has been used.

²⁷ Gen. 20.3, Deut. 22.13,22; 24.1, and Isa. 62.5.

et al., 1940: 1721). The second sense is widely attested in the biblical text, while the first meaning is only illustrated by Sir. 25.16.

Although all instances of לַעֲבֹד are rendered with συννοικέω in the LXX, it is noteworthy that this equivalent was also sometimes used to translate other marital verbs, like הִיָּתַח, הִיָּתַח, and נָשָׂא. This allows us to gain some insight into the pragmatics of the LXX translation in relation to wedlock. As its own etymology suggests, the Greek συννοικέω conveys the circumstance of a couple living together. Its employment in the LXX, regardless of the Hebrew verb present in the *Vorlage*, indicates that the Alexandrian translators were interpreting the social circumstances of biblical wedlock and going beyond—or leaving aside—the precise meaning of the Hebrew words. The starkest contrast between לַעֲבֹד and συννοικέω is that the Hebrew refers to the act of acquiring a woman while συννοικέω points directly to the most visible hallmark of this social covenant.

The geographical distance between the TS and the LXX and chronological proximity of them are intriguing for this study. If the linguistic data of the TS is interpreted so as to suggest that לַעֲבֹד already meant ‘to penetrate’, then we can infer that there was a dialectal disagreement regarding לַעֲבֹד in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. Whereas the Alexandrian translators would have had in mind the original, marital semantics of לַעֲבֹד when they provided the equivalent συννοικέω, in Judea the sexual shift of the verb, characteristic of the rabbinic stage of the language, would have been already operative.

5.2. *The changes of the recentiores*

The comparison between the LXX and the *recentiores* allows us to examine the diachronic characterisation of the verb לַעֲבֹד. The following tables gather the scanty data available.

- *Qal:*

	TM	LXX	α'	σ'	θ'
Isa. 54.5	בַּעֲלֶיךָ	κύριος	εχει σε	κυριευσει σου	-
Mal. 2.11	וּבְעֵל	ἐπετήδευσεν	ἔσχε	ἔσχε / ἐκτήσατο	ἔλαβε

In Isa. 54.5, the contrast between LXX and Aquila-Symmachus presumably stems from alternative vocalisations of the Hebrew. The LXX suggests that the translators read the noun לַעֲבֹד plus the pronominal suffix, whereas the reading of the two extant *recentiores* coincides with the verbal morphology that the Masorah would eventually bequeath. On the one hand, Symmachus chose to repeat the root of the LXX and adjust its lexical category (from κύριος to κυριεύω).²⁸ On the other hand, Aquila opted for another possession-related verb, ἔσχω. This word was also preferred Aquila and Symmachus (in the first instance, ἔσχε) for Mal. 2.11 and it

²⁸ In the LXX, the verb κυριεύω has an interesting history of translating varied Hebrew verbs of DOMINION, mostly לָשַׁחַט (Gen. 3.16; 37.8, Jos. 12.2, Judg.^B 9.2; 14.4, 2 Chron. 20.6, Ps. 105.41, Isa. 3.4, 12; 19.4; 42.19 [contrary to the MT, which presupposes the root לָשַׁחַט], Lam. 5.8, and Dan. 11.3).

will appear again for the translation of **בְּעוֹלָה**. Theodotion's choice reflects a marital understanding of **בְּעַל**, since *λαμβάνω* is the current translation of marital **קָלָה** in the LXX.

- *Nif'al*:

	TM	LXX	α'	σ'	θ'
Isa. 62.4β	וְאַרְצָךְ תִּבְעַל	- και τῆ γῆ σου οἰκουμένη - και ἡ γῆ σου συνοικισθήσεται - και ἡ γῆ σου οικισθήσεται ²⁹	-	και ἡ γῆ σου συνοικισθήσεται	
Prov. 30.23	תַּחַת שְׂנוֹאָה כִּי תִבְעַל	και οἰκέτις ἐὰν ἐκβάλῃ τὴν ἐαυτῆς κυρίαν και μισητὴ γυνὴ ἐὰν τύχῃ ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ	-	και γυνὴ μισουμένη ὅταν συνοικήσῃ	-

In Isa. 62.4β, the LXX textual tradition is pluriform and both morphological options (with and without *συν-*) are attested. The variant *οικέω* seems to mitigate the anthropomorphic, worldly undertone of the passage. Symmachus and Theodotion stuck with the Hebrew metaphor of the wife-land and accordingly translated it with *συνοικέω*. The Greek verb appears previously in the first part of this verse (*συνωκισμένη*) for the *qal* passive **הָעוֹלָה** (see table below). It is noticeable how their systematic translations contrast with the LXX.

In Prov. 30.23, Symmachus resorted to *συνοικέω* once again. He parsed **לְעַל** as a passive tense, in accordance with the MT.

- *Qal* passive:

	TM	LXX	α'	σ'	θ'
Isa. 54.1	מִבְּנֵי בְּעוֹלָה	ἡ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα	-	υπερ τους υιους της υπαιδρου	
Isa. 62.4α	וְלֹאֲרָצָךְ תִּבְעַל	[absent]	εσχημενη	συνωκισμενη	

In Isa. 54.1, the **בְּעוֹלָה** is depicted by Symmachus and Theodotion as the woman who is subject to her husband, which resonates with some biblical excerpts (cf. LXX Prov. 6.24,29, Sir. 9.9; 41.23, and later also in Rom. 7.2). The translation of this verse by Symmachus and Theodotion, as given in the table above, is drawn from the Göttingen edition of the LXX. However, in his commentary on Isaiah, Eusebius of Caesarea reported that Theodotion read otherwise: *ἡ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα* (Ziegler, 1975: 339), agreeing with the LXX reading.

In summary and insofar as the scarcity of hexaplaric evidence allows us to conclude, the Greek verb *συνοικέω* was partially resisted by the *recentiores*. This verb seems to be kept only in passive forms. Two conclusions can be drawn from the collected data. Firstly, equivalents other than *συνοικέω* aim to echo the literal meaning of the Hebrew verb and resist the sociocultural adaptation of the LXX, which added a certain domesticity to the semantics of the term. Secondly, the extant translations relate to the semantic realms of DOMINION and MARRIAGE (*κυριεύω, ἔχω, κτάομαι* and *λαμβάνω*), without a vestige of a sexual understanding of **בְּעַל** by the *recentiores*. Whether this absence is for linguistic reasons or due to textual contingency is unfortunately beyond the bounds of possibility.

²⁹ The last two textual variants appear in the textual apparatus of Ziegler's edition (1983).

6. The understanding of בָּעַל by the Targums and the Peshitta

In Palestinian and Babylonian Aramaic, the verb בָּעַל means 'to have sexual intercourse' (Sokoloff, 1992: 227; 2002: 109). The semantic and consonantal agreement between Aramaic בָּעַל and RH בעל prompts us to consider whether the meaning is Aramaic in origin and influenced Hebrew at a later stage or if it happened inversely. Whatever the case may be, this etymological and semantic coincidence makes it difficult to delve into the Targumic understanding of biblical בָּעַל in cases where the rendering is Aramaic בעל.

This is what happens in Targum Onqelos twice: first in Deut. 21.13 (ותבעלינה) and later in 24.1 (ויבעלינה).³⁰ This small number of verses, together with the lexical similarity between the Hebrew and the Aramaic of Tg. Onq., makes it impossible to prove or disprove the semantic development of Hebrew בָּעַל at the time of this Targum. The problem lies in the fact that the Targum might be pursuing one of the following strategies: *a*) a change of form: by calquing the Hebrew בָּעַל into Aramaic בעל while preserving the marital meaning of the former in the latter, or *b*) a change of content: by translating the Hebrew בָּעַל into a real Aramaic בעל, with the sexual meaning noted above. In his glossary of Tg. Onq., Cook argues for the second option, suggesting that בעל meant 'to marry, to become husband' (2008: 38).

To my knowledge, these verses are not extant in the Fragmentary Targum, while Targum Jonathan is unfortunately of no use for this inquiry. The marital use of בָּעַל in the Prophets always reflects the conjugal metaphor YHWH IS ISRAEL'S HUSBAND and Tg. Jon. dodges these instances of anthropomorphism. In Isa. 26.13, Tg. Jon. chooses an Aramaic verb of DOMINION that does not resonate with wedlock at all (שליטו בנא). In Isa. 54.5, the word is interpreted with a vocalisation different from the masoretic tradition and in full agreement with the LXX (מרִיךְ דַּעֲבֵרִיךְ, underlying *בָּעֲלִיךְ instead of בָּעֲלִיךְ). In Isa. 62.4,5, the metaphor is abandoned for the sake of an image of settlement: the land is inhabited (תתיתב, יתבא, and מתיתב עולם עם בתולה) like a young man dwells with a virgin (יתיתבון בגויך בנכי).

Contrary to all the textual witnesses explored so far, Tg. Neoph. does shed light on the semantic evolution of בָּעַל. The feminine *qal* passive is understood on marital grounds as 'a woman taken by a man' (אתת נסיבת גבר), Gen. 20.3 and Deut. 22.22). Nevertheless, for the first time we witness how a translation of the Bible understands this Hebrew verb in sexual terms. In this Targum, the verb בָּעַל is systematically rendered with אודמן לוותה, which means 'to have sexual intercourse' (Sokoloff, 1992: 179):³¹

³⁰ Unlike Tg. Neoph., Tg. Onq. Deut. 22.13 does not reflect a *Vorlage* with בָּעַל but rather the MT וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ, which is translated with וייעול לוותה.

³¹ As Sokoloff points out and beyond the text of Tg. Neoph., this Aramaic verb is employed in the Fragments of the Palestinian Targumim for Gen. 30.3; 38.18; 39.10 (rendering בּוֹא אֶל) and the glosses of Tg. Neoph. in Gen. 29.1 and Lev. 15.24 (the latter having שָׁכַב).

Deut. 21.13: ותזדמן לוותה

Deut. 22.13 (*versus* the MT): ויזדמן לוותה

Deut. 24.1: ויזדמן לוותה

The translation of sexual verbs in Tg. Neoph. is exceptionally systematic. A set of equivalents, which are either etymologically cognate or semantically like-minded to the Hebrew, are carefully kept throughout this Targum. This means that not only is **בָּעַל** always translated with **אזדמן**, but also that **אזדמן** only translates **בָּעַל** in Tg. Neoph.³² The sexual understanding of **בָּעַל** may respond to two situations: either the Aramaic **בעל** conditioned the targumist's interpretation or the rabbinic sense of the Hebrew was already prevalent at that time. A priori, I consider the latter hypothesis preferable, since the former assumes that the targumist lacked proficient translation skills.

The data regarding Tg. Neoph. reveal two important linguistic features. First, the fact that **בָּעַל** was not rendered with a verb of DOMINION suggests that the targumist did not consider the Hebrew verb to have a figurative sense stemming from a primary meaning unrelated to sex, as is the case with the vast majority of sexual verbs in Hebrew, like **בוא** (MOVEMENT > SEX). Secondly, the choice of the generic verb **אזדמן** means that **בָּעַל** was most likely viewed as the proper verb for coition in Hebrew.

The date of composition of Tg. Neoph. has been a much-debated question since its discovery, with suggestions ranging from pre-Christian times to the Renaissance.³³ Díez Macho, who discovered the manuscript and later edited it in the 1960s-1970s, claimed an early date of composition, in the 2nd century at the latest (1960: 3). If his estimate is correct, Tg. Neoph. would be the first indirect source to point to a sexual understanding of **בָּעַל** (predating the rabbinic records). Even if later dates are deemed more probable like the 3rd or 4th century, as Alexander preferred (1992: 323), Tg. Neoph. would still be the earliest source to account for a sexual interpretation of biblical **בָּעַל**.

The translation of **בָּעַל** in the Peshiṭta is in its marital sense twice: first in Deut. 21.13 (**נסב**), where the chosen verb (*nsb*) is the regular equivalent for **לָקַח**; and later in Prov. 30,23 (**נסב**), with a paraphrasis that is equivalent to the marital Hebrew collocation **לָקַח אִשָּׁה לָהּ**. The translation of **בָּעַל** in Deut. 24.1 is relevant to this discussion because it is one more instance of a sexual interpretation of the Hebrew verb. The segment **כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה** is rendered with **כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה**, whereas **וּבָעַלָּהּ** is translated with **וּבָעַלָּהּ** (the verb *dmk* systematically stands for sexual **שָׁכַב** in the Peshiṭta). It is as if the previous presence of the marital expression **לָקַח אִשָּׁה** cancelled the marital meaning of **בָּעַל** or made its presence tautological. This line of exegetical thought would have led the translator

³² This is true regarding the main text, but it does not apply to the marginalia. I shall delve in this matter in my forthcoming article "The Translation of Hebrew Sexual Verbs in Targum Neophiti and its *marginalia*".

³³ For a detailed account of the varied proposals, see Alexander (1992: 323). A complete bibliographical list can be found in Talshir (2002).

to ascribe a sexual meaning to **בָּעַל**, especially if that sense was already current in the contemporary language of the rabbis.

7. Did Jerome understand **בָּעַל** according to its rabbinic development?

The Vulgate is the last link in the chain to be scrutinised. Given the extended use of the LXX by Jerome and its previous influence on the Old Latin versions, a brief review of the Greek **συνουαίω** is once again necessary. Let us start by noticing that this verb appears once in the New Testament, in reference to the married man who lives with his wife (1 Pet. 3.7). In this verse, Jerome calqued the Greek etymology of the word through the Latin “cohabitare”. However, whenever he found **בָּעַל** in the HB, he seemingly ignored the verb **συνουαίω**. The only exception to this rule is Isa. 62.4-5. Here Jerome transformed the metaphor and wrote *terra tua inhabitabitur* (**וְאִרְצָךְ תִּבְעַל**, Isa. 62.4), *habitabit* (**יִבְעַל**, Isa. 62.5a), and *habitabunt in te* (**יִבְעֲלֶיךָ**, Isa. 62.5b). The word *habitare*, also present in the Targumic **יתב**, harmonizes the Greek heterogeneous triad **οἰκουμένη**, **συνουαίων**, and **κατοικήσους**.

Assuming that all the translations quoted here were indeed penned by him, Jerome appears to have made different choices in the translation of this controversial verb in Hebrew. In the following sections, I shall examine if the sexual rabbinic sense might have exerted some influence on Jerome’s understanding of biblical **בָּעַל**.

7.1. *Prov. 30.23 in the Vulgate*

The realm of wedlock is manifest in Prov. 30.23. Here, the Vulgate reads **תבעל** as *cum in matrimonio fuerit adsumpta*. The Latin paraphrase makes clear that the vocalisation of the tense is passive, just like the MT.

7.2. *Deut 22:13 in the Vulgate*

Jerome perplexes the textual critic in Deut. 22.13. The three-fold structure of the Hebrew (**כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ וְשָׂנְאָה**) is reduced to a two-fold structure in Latin (*si duxerit vir uxorem et postea eam odio habuerit*). There is no sexual verb in this verse, which prompts us to wonder if Jerome translated from a Hebrew *Vorlage* that had: 1) **וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ** (like the MT); 2) **וּבִעְלָהּ** (as reflected in LXX-TS-Tg. Neoph.); or 3) nothing, which he accordingly reflected in his translation.³⁴ If there was indeed a second, sexual item in Jerome’s Hebrew *Vorlage*, did he just ignore it, trying to circumvent a translation problem? It is not the first time Jerome omits one of the elements in triple structures like the one above (*cf.* Deut. 25.5), so the possibility of an exegetically motivated absence is worth considering.

³⁴ The presence of *et postea* is not significant from a text-critical point of view and does not signal the presence of **וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן** or the like in Hebrew. Jerome usually employed this adverb to make the juxtaposition / transition of Hebrew verbs smoother.

In Deut. 21.13, the Vulgate reads *et postea intrabis ad eam dormiesque cum illa erit uxor tua* for *וְאַחַר כֵּן תָּבוֹא אֵלֶיהָ וּבַעַלְתָּהּ וְהָיְתָה לְךָ לְאִשָּׁה*. The Hebrew lexical elements are apparently redistributed in the Latin sequence. In Hebrew, intercourse is conveyed by *בּוֹא אֵל*, and its taking place verifies that the man becomes her *ba'al* whereas the woman becomes his wife. Although Jerome agreed on the cause (sex) and the result (marriage), he might have understood the semantics of the Hebrew verbs differently. In the Latin rendering of this verse, it seems like *בּוֹא אֵל* is interpreted as a verb of movement (*intrabis ad eam*), whereas the sexual meaning is placed in *בַּעַל* (*dormiesque cum illa*). Jerome translated sexual *בּוֹא אֵל* with *ingredi ad* in almost all cases,³⁵ whereas his employment of *intrare ad* seems to have been connected to the act of entering into a place, such as a woman's tent (Judg. 4.18 is a clear example, for Hebrew *סוּר*). Although the precise semantic distinction between these two Latin renderings of *בּוֹא אֵל* is subtle and would require an independent study, the absence of *ingredi* in Deut. 21.13 is telling from a statistical point of view.

Regrettably, the *recentiores'* translations of this verse did not pass down to us. However, Jerome's odd rendering of *בַּעַל* here is suspicious enough to make us wonder if his knowledge of RH might be evident in this verse. It is unquestionable that Jerome was acquainted with RH, provided his acknowledged familiarity with non-biblical Hebrew literature and his apprenticeship under c Jewish teachers or converts (recounted in epistles 125 and 84, respectively). It is the extent and accuracy of his linguistic competence in Hebrew that has been questioned.³⁶ Analysing Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah, Graves (2007) found that he sometimes aligned with rabbinic exegesis instead of the *recentiores*. This is coupled with the fact that Jerome's translations sometimes correspond to RH rather than BH. But Graves's examples are not strictly valid for our discussion, insofar as they do not picture Jerome's acceptance of a meaning which is unique to the rabbinic stratum.³⁷

Rehm's research is more suitable to our inquiry. Focusing on Jerome's commentary on Isaiah, he examined verses where Jerome attributes a meaning to a word that does not appear in our dictionaries (Rehm, 1954: 175). Unquestionable interferences of RH in Jerome's translation were addressed in the third section of Rehm's article. Three of the six cases concern words bearing one meaning in BH and a second meaning developed at a later stage.³⁸ Rehm

³⁵ Gen. 6.4; 16.2,4; 19.31; 29.21,23; 30.3,4; 38.2,8, Judg. 16.1, Rut 4.13, 2Sam. 3.7; 16.21,22; 17.25; 20.3, 1Chro. 2.21; 7.23, Ps. 51.2 (*iuxta hebraeos*), Prov. 6.29, and Eze. 23.44.

³⁶ For a summary of this debate and the authors involved in it, see Graves (2007: 71-86). Graves claimed that Hebrew was still spoken in 4th-century Palestine, although restricted to few familiar situations, and that Jerome had a good, albeit passive, knowledge of it.

³⁷ The first case is *יְחִיד* as *solitarium* or *unigenitum* (Graves, 2007: 123, 129 n. 49). *Pace* Graves, the meaning *solitarium* can be traced in the biblical stratum as well (*v. gr.*, Ps. 25.16). The semantics of this word is surrounded by great theological controversy. For a debate of LXX's translation of Hebrew *יְחִיד* and its ramifications in the New Testament, see Lee (2014: 93-121). The second instance discussed by Graves is *בְּסוּד* as *in consilio* or 'in secret', concerning which he acknowledged that the meaning *consilio* "was a common meaning for *סוּד* in Middle Hebrew [...] and which was also an attested usage in the biblical period" (2007: 120).

³⁸ The cases are *וּקְאָב אֲנוּשׁ* (Isa. 17.11), taking the last word as the adjective 'enormous'; *גָּבַר* (Isa. 22.17), understood as *gallus gallinacius*; and *סֹפֵר* (Isa. 33.18), interpreted as *doctor* (Rehm, 1954: 193-194).

proved the existence of a number of anachronistic translations of biblical words by Jerome, which is attributable not only to his acquaintance with rabbinic exegesis but specifically to his knowledge of RH. These precedents suggest the possibility that *וַיִּבְעַלְתָּהּ* = *dormiesque cum illa* should be regarded as another instance of diachronic semantic extrapolation in the Vulgate. Whether it was an anachronistic slip in Jerome's translation or a deliberate change because he deemed the sexual meaning more suitable for this context, it is impossible to ascertain. Perhaps it is also unwise to speculate further on it.

7.4. Deut. 24.1 and Mal. 2.11 in the Vulgate

The heterogeneity in the translation of *בָּעַל* continues in these two verses. Here, Jerome chose *habere* instead: *si acceperit homo uxorem et habuerit eam* (Deut. 24.1) and *habuit filiam dei alieni* (Mal. 2.11). The verb *habere* can have a sexual meaning in Latin (Adams, 1982: 187-188) and it is precisely in these terms that the first Christian lexicographer of BH analysed Jerome's rendering. Johannes Reuchlin, who authored the first BH-Latin dictionary of the pre-modern period,³⁹ provided a definition of the verb *בָּעַל* that aimed to explain the Hebrew as well as to justify Jerome's translation. In his dictionary (1506), Reuchlin displayed a list of Latin equivalents to *בָּעַל* where there is only one verb of marriage and four verbs that have a sexual meaning: 'Rem cum muliere habuit, coiuit, subagitauit, maritauit, subuigauit [...]' (Reuchlin, 1506: 86-87).⁴⁰ Immediately afterwards, Reuchlin clarifies that

Hieronymus honeste traduxit habuit muliere[m] ut Deute. xxiii. Si acceperit homo uxorem et habuerit eam & eiusdem libri ca. xxi. Uariando traduxit pro dormire cu[m] ea. Et postea intrabis ad eam domiesque cum illa. (1506: 87)⁴¹

Reuchlin went beyond a succinct quotation of Jerome, even though such a reference would have sufficed. Instead, Reuchlin preferred to elaborate on the translation and claimed that Jerome's *habere mulierem* was a mere euphemistic variation of *dormire cum muliere*.⁴²

Latin *habere* sounded sexual to Reuchlin, but a modern biblical scholar should acknowledge that Jerome's lexical choice has a more convoluted genesis. This rendering did not occur to Jerome spontaneously, but it seems to be an adaptation of a Greek interpretation of which he had sight. It is certainly not coincidental that *habere* echoes Aquila and Symmachus ἔσχε, found at least in Mal. 2.11. This might also hold true for Deut. 24.1, but the *recentiores* are not extant for this verse. The survival of this fragment of Malachi allows us to wonder if Jerome chose *habere*, in the very first place, to favour the reading of these two

³⁹ I follow Craig's terminology (2011) to refer to this period in the history of Hebrew dictionaries.

⁴⁰ The disruptive presence of "maritauit" seems to respond to the word *בָּעַלְתָּהּ*, which is explained at the end of the entry. In this list, it is remarkable that Reuchlin dispensed with Jerome's own equivalents and offered synonyms of his own instead.

⁴¹ 'Jerome translated [the verb *בָּעַל*] euphemistically as *habuit mulierem*, like in Deut. 24[.1]: *Si acceperit homo uxorem et habuerit eam*. And in the same book, chapter 21 [verse 13], he changed the translation for *dormire cum ea*: *Et postea intrabis ad eam domiesque cum illa*.'

⁴² Needless to say, Reuchlin should have thought the same of Mal. 2.11, where *habere mulierem* appears again, but this verse is absent from his entry.

recentiores at the expense of the LXX translation. Jerome's sexual translation of **בָּעַל**, either with *habere* or *dormire*, would cast a long shadow in pre-modern Christian lexicography (Carbonell Ortiz, 2022: 277-83).

8. Conclusion

The wide range of data collected in the previous pages allows us to picture the linguistic landscape of the verb **בָּעַל**. The original, biblical meaning was confined to the realm of ownership, whence the marital application of the verb, whose nominal character is self-evident: **בָּעַל** meant 'to marry', in the sense of 'becoming a husband'. The sexed agency of this verb is exclusively male and requires a feminine patient (either as the subject of *nifal* forms or as the accusative of *qal* forms). The early writings of the rabbis, such as the Mishnah and the Tosefta, present a different scenario in terms of semantics. In the rabbinic stratum, the verb acquires a sexual meaning, displacing the marital sense that characterises it in the HB. Notwithstanding this semantic change, the sexed agency of the verb remains unaltered. The cause does not lie in sociocultural practices (unlike the case of biblical **בָּעַל**) but rather in biological realities, since only men can penetrate with the phallus. Additionally, the patient is no longer identified with one single sex (unlike the case of biblical **בָּעַל**), and the reason for it lies again in physiology. Whereas only a woman can be married by a man in the Israelite culture, both men and women can be penetrated.

Dictionaries of Hebrew which include different phases of the language and other scholars' opinions have been examined. Some authors consider that the sexual meaning is a semantic evolution that took place in the rabbinic stratum, whereas other authors extrapolate the sexual meaning to the biblical corpus. This paper, together with my previous research (Carbonell Ortiz, 2023), aims to prove that the latter proposal is anachronistic.

The diachronic approach of this article has required the examination of intermediate phases between the **בָּעַל** of the HB and the **בָּעַל** of the rabbinic literature. The Qumran documents are fundamental to understanding the morphological evolution of the verb and the developed meaning 'to be skilled at something', but they are not very helpful for examining the marital/sexual use of the verb. The *qal* of **בָּעַל** is preserved in two excerpts of rewritten Bible (in 11Q19). In one instance, the wording does not reflect the MT and **בָּעַל** stands for a *Vorlage* containing **בָּוֹא אֶל**. Although many are the factors and nuances to be considered, this textual variation is suspicious and may be the missing link in the semantic evolution of **בָּעַל**.

Once all direct sources have been explored (HB, Qumran, Mishnah, and Tosefta), indirect sources like the ancient versions are examined. The LXX, the extant fragments of the *recentiores*, and Tg. Onq. understood the biblical passages of **בָּעַל** in marital terms. However, Tg. Neoph. systematically interprets the verb in sexual terms, which means that the rabbinic meaning of the verb was already the prevailing one. More intriguing are the cases of the Vulgate and the Peshiṭta. Each translation contains one instance where **בָּעַל** is interpreted in sexual terms (*dormire*, **דָּרַם**), but they disagree concerning which passage (Deut. 21.13 and 24.1, respectively). Despite the scanty hexaplaric material relating to Deut. 21.13, the overall data tips the scales in favour of Jerome resorting to RH to interpret this verse, thus introducing an anachronistic translation. Regarding the Peshiṭta, the reason for a sexual translation of the

verb seems to be rooted in the perceived incompatibility between two juxtaposed marital verbs (בָּעַל and לָקַח) that caused the translator to resort to the rabbinic meaning of the latter.

Author's Note

This article should be read in the light of my last paper, where I argued for the existence of a Hebrew *Vorlage* that contained the verbal form ובעלה instead of MT וּבָא אֵלֶיהָ in Deut. 22.13 and survived only secondhand in the LXX, 11Q19, and Tg. Neoph. (Carbonell Ortiz, 2023). Dictionary entries written in a language different from English will be translated in the footnotes. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

ORCID iD

Clara Carbonell Ortiz <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9173-846X>

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