



Lexical Variation in the Understanding of ברא: Homonymy or Polysemy?

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The Problem

Gen 1:1 (Qal)

בְּרִאָשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמֶן וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

In the beginning when God **created** the heavens and the earth.

Ezek 23:47a (Piel)

וְרִגְמוּ עַלֵּהוּ אֶבֶן קָהָל וּבָרָא אֶזְתָּהוּ בְּחֶרְבֹּתָם

The assembly shall stone them and with their swords they shall **cut** them down.

1 Sam 2:29 (Hiphil)

לֹמַה תְבַעַטְוּ בְזָבְחֵי וּבְמִנְחָתֵי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי מְעֻזָּן וַתְכַבֵּד אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶךָ מִמְּנִי לְהַבְּרִיא אֶת־
מִירָאָשִׁית כָּל־מִנְחָת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּי

Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honor your sons more than me by **fattening** yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?

Distribution of Verbal Stems (**ברא**)

Qal (38)

Gen. 1:1, 21, 27; 2:3; 5:1, 2; 6:7

Num. 16:30

Deut. 4:32

Is. 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7, 8, 12, 18; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17, 18

Jer. 31:22

Amos 4:13

Mal. 2:10

Psa. 51:12; 89:13, 48

Eccl. 12:1

Niphal (10)

Gen. 2:4; 5:2

Ex. 34:10

Is. 48:7

Ezek. 21:35; 28:13, 15

Psa. 102:19; 104:30; 148:5

Piel (5)

Josh. 17:15, 18

Ezek. 21:24; 23:47

Hiphil (1)

1 Sam. 2:29

Implications

Ibn Ezra: ". . . in accordance with its etymology: to limit, to define, by drawing or incising a line or boundary."

Bill T. Arnold, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Genesis*, 2009: "it seems likely that the verb *bārā'* has developed from 'separate by cutting' (the supposed *bārā'* III), and that it has here an intentional, and no less theologically significant connotation of creating by cutting, shaping, or fashioning. . . . God masterfully divides the cosmos by a series of 'cuts' and differentiates its components into 'kinds.'"

Recent Debate

- 2009, E. J. van Wolde.
 - בָרַא—to separate; to differentiate.
 - Underlying meaning in both Qal and Piel.
- 2010, Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel.
 - בָרַא—to build/construct.
 - To cut (Piel) is entirely unrelated.
- 2011, E. J. van Wolde and Robert Rezetko.
 - Counter Becking and Korpel's points, primarily using etymology.
- 2014, Terrance Randall Wardlaw .
 - “To create (something new)” as an extension of the concrete Piel “to cut.”
 - Creation occurs by cutting or sculpture.

Remapping the Problem (Identifying the Question)

- “The treatment of homonyms has been perhaps the most variable and inconsistent aspect of Hebrew lexicography.” David J.A. Clines
- Key terms:
 - Homonym.
 - Polyseme.

Understanding Homonymy

- **True homonym:** simultaneous homophone and homograph. Different origin.

- Arm—defensive and offensive outfit for war, things used in fighting.
 - Etymology: French *armes*, Latin *arma* (no singular).
- Arm—the upper limb of the human body.
 - Etymology: Common Germanic. Old Germanic **armoz*, cognate with Latin *armus*.

Understanding Polysemy

Polyseme: shared etymology.

Pupil—A person who is being taught by another. Older definition: an orphan or child.

Etymology: Anglo-Norman and Middle French *pupille*, classical Latin *pūpillus*.

Pupil—The opening in the iris through which light passes into the eye.

Etymology: Transferred use of classical Latin *pūpilla* (female child), so called on account of the small reflected image seen when looking into someone's pupil.

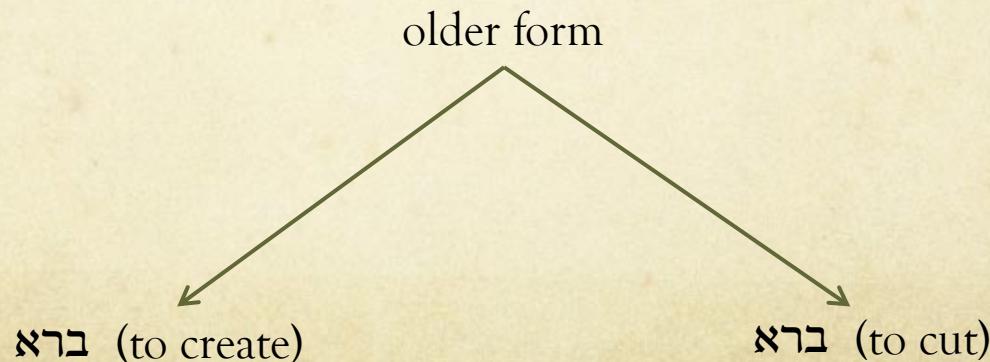
Equivalent occurrence in Greek *κόρη*—pupil of the eye; girl, maiden.

Underlying Possibilities

If homonyms:



If polysemes:



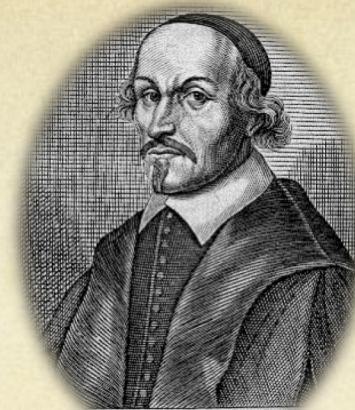
The Lexica

“I will offer an axiom: most dictionaries are copies of other dictionaries. Just as well, you might say, since a dictionary that had only original meanings would be useless. The downside, though, is that the mistakes and myopia of the past tend to be perpetuated, and that means for over 500 years in some cases.”

David J.A. Clines, *Towards a Science of Comparative Classical Hebrew Lexicography*

Johannes Cocceius

Lexicon et commentarius sermonis hebraici et chaldaici, 1714.



עַרְבָּה מִזְרָחָה בְּקָרְבֵּן וְעַרְבָּה תְּרִיבָנָה. Orientem & Occidentem fatis canere. Dan. 8, 14. Et alibi.

עַרְבָּה בְּקָרְבֵּן אֶלְפִּים ad vespertas matutina bis mille & trecenta. Dan. 8, 26. Et visio propterea vespere & matutina, --- vere est. Zach. 14, 7. וְעַרְבָּה וְרֹאיה-אוֹר tem-

porum vespertino erit lux in tristitia & desperatione omni-

Babylonem scriptura locat terram iudeorum. Sed quia in septentrionali climate est, licet ad ortum, si a vespere derivamus, erit oppositio ad /
עַרְבָּה קָרְבָּה. Esa. 13, 20. Jerem. 3, 2. Item Neh. 2, 19. Plural עַרְבִּים. 2. Chr. 21, 16. & 2. Chron. 17, 11.

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ערָב.

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ערָב עֲרוֹב עֲרוֹד עֲרוֹה

II. ערָב in fidem suam recipere, spondere pro aliquo. Für jemand Bürgerwerden. Börge werdest. Gen. 44, 32. ערָב in fidem suam recipit puerum. Lxx. ἐνδέκατον εἰδίον. spopondit, se eum salvum reducturum. Gen. 43, 9. אֶתְנָכְנֵי אֶתְרָבָנוּ ego eum recipiam in fidem meam, ex manu mea repetes eum. Prov. 11, 15. ערָב זָרָעַת quum in fidem suam recepit alium, pro eo spopondit, se præstitum debitum ipsius vel fidem ejus. Sic Prov. 20, 16. 27, 13. Jer. 20, 21. Et erit oracula ejus ex ipso. Et noster accepit habere eum.

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h. c. πνεῦμα ὃ δὲν αἴραβαν. Spiritus, qui est arrababo. per quem Deus nobis, ut in fidem suam receptis, spondet hereditatem. Ephes. 1, 14. ὃς δὲν αἴραβαν τὸ κληρονομιαῖς μου. Hes. αἴραβαν πρόδομα, quod ante datur fiduciae causa.

III. Suavem esse. Süsse seyn / angenehme seyn. Quod nobis convenit & se q. admiscet, id suave est. Prov. 3, 24. שְׁנָתָה וְעַרְבָּה שְׁנָתָה & suavis erit somnus tuus. Lxx. οὐδέως ψάσθετε. Wirß süsse schlaffen. Jerem. 31, 26. יְשֻׁנָּתִי עַרְבָּה לְיוֹם somnus meus suavis fuit mibi. h. c. mors mea mihi fuit

Gesenius
Handwörterbuch, 1828 (3rd)

Gesenius
Lexicon, 1833

Gesenius
Thesaurus, 1829

Gesenius
Thesaurus, 1858

Robinson (Eng trans.)
Hebrew Lexicon, 1836–54

Gesenius
Handwörterbuch, 1890
(11th)

BDB
HELOT Part 1, 1891



First Model

BDB, 1891

ברא 1

Qal—*shape, fashion, create.*

Niphal—*be created.*

Piel—*cut down, cut out.*

ברא 2

Hiphil—*be fat.*

Frants Buhl

Handwörterbuch, 1895 (12th)



ברא I. arab. **بَرَأَ**, aram. **חִנָּה** (sab. **חַנָּה**) (bed. bauen). Vgl. über das Alter des Wortes Wellh. Proll. 411, ZAW 1, 247, Dillm. zu Gn 1, 1.

Kal perf. בְּרָא, impf. יִבְּרָא, imp. בְּרָא, inf. בְּרָא, part. בְּרָא (nur Jes 45, 7), פֹּרְאָה, Suff. — 1) schaffen, hervorbringen und zwar nur vom göttlichen Schaffen, nirgends m. d. Acc. des Stoffes. So vom Hervorbringen des Himmels und der Erde Gn 1, 1, der Menschen 1, 27. 5, 1. 2 (u. oft bei P); 6, 7 (bei J) und anderer Naturgegenstände Jes 4, 5. 40, 28. Am 4, 13. Jes 45, 7, aber auch der Zustände in der moralischen Welt Jes 45, 7 (2tes Glied). Ps 51, 12. Jer 31, 22: *Gott schafft etwas Neues im*

Lande: das Weib wird den Mann schirmen. Mit dopp. Accus. Jes 65, 18: **הַגְּבִינִי בּוֹרָא אֶת יְרוּשָׁלָם נִיחַה** siehe, ich will Jerusalem in Frohlocken umschaffen (das Wort kommt überhaupt 20 mal bei Deuterojes. vor). Mit עֲשֵׂה wird es öfter synonym gebraucht, s. Gn 1, 26. 27. 2, 4; dass jedoch ein Unterschied zw. beiden war, ergibt sich aus 2, 3: **אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לְעֵשֶׂת בָּרָא** bed. näml. neu hervorbringen und die Konstr. ist wie die; s. Dillmann z. d. St.

Niph. 2. f. גִּבְרָאִת pl. גִּבְרָאות, impf. i. p. גִּבְרָאִין, inf. m. Suff. part. הַפְּרָאָך — geschaffen werden Gn 2, 4. 5, 2. Ps 148, 5 hervorgebracht werden Ez 21, 35: **בָּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־גִּבְרָאת** an dem Orte, wo du in das Dasein getreten bist, 28, 13. 15. Ps 104, 30. Ps 102, 19: **בְּעֵמָה בְּרָא** das Volk, das geschaffen wird, preise Jahve. Von den Wunderthaten Gottes Ex 34, 10. Jes 48, 7.† Deriv. בְּרָאתה vgl. בְּרָאתה.

II. ברא II. vgl. d. ass. *Istafal šutabru*, sich sättigen, III מרא מְרָא very sehr fest sein und ברה I. Vgl. Grill ZAW 8, 275.

Hiph. inf. m. Suff. **לְהַבְּרִיאָם**, fett machen, mästen 1 S 2, 29.† Derivat: בְּרִיאָה.

III. ברא III. vgl. IV.

Pi. 3. ps. cons. גִּבְרָאתה, m. S. גִּבְרָאות, inf. abs. בְּרָא, abholzen, den Wald lichten, roden, mit acc. Jos 17, 15. 18; übertr. zerhauen, Ez 23, 47.† — Für das dopp. Ez 21, 24 liest Corn. das zweite Mal בְּרָא und streicht das erste.

Two Paradigms

BDB, 1891

ברא 1

- Qal—shape, fashion, create
- Niphal—be created
- Piel—cut down, cut out

ברא 2

- Hiphil—be fat

Gesenius-Buhl, 1895

ברא 1

- Qal—schaffen,
hervorbringen
- Niphal—geschaffen werden

ברא 2

- Hiphil—fett machen,
mästen

ברא 3

- Piel—abholzen, den Wald
lichten, roden

Koehler-Baumgartner

Ludwig Koehler, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros. A Dictionary of the Hebrew Old Testament in English and German*, 1948–1953.

Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebraïsches und aramaïsches Lexicon zum Alten Testament [HALAT]*, 1967–1995, 5 vols.

Translated by M.E.J. Richardson, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old [HALOT]*, 1994–2000.

Following Gesenius-Buhl

KB (HALOT), 1967

I ברא

- Qal
- Niphal

II ברא

- Hiphil

III ברא

- Piel

IV ברא

- 2 Sam 12:17 > I. ברא

DCH, 1993

I ברא

- Qal
- Niphal

II ברא

- Hiphil
- Niphal (conj.)

III ברא

- Piel

IV ברא

- 2 Eat, see I. ברא

Two Paradigms

Qal and Piel as
Polysemes

Qal and Piel as
Homonyms

ברא 1

Qal—shape, fashion, create

Niphal—be created

Piel—cut down, cut out

ברא 1

Qal—schaffen,
hervorbringen

Niphal—geschaffen werden

ברא 2

Hiphil—be fat

ברא 2

Hiphil—fett machen,
mästen

ברא 3

Piel—abholzen, den Wald
lichten, roden