Time in Ancient Hebrew Lexicon: The Case of yrḥ and ḫds

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Abstract:
This paper presents the linguistic data concerning two lexemes that belong in the lexical field of time, yrḥ and ḫds. Coseriu’s methodological principles of structural lexematics are applied to the study of the ancient Hebrew lexicon. The analysis consists of five steps: distributional, classematic, syntagmatic, componential and paradigmatic analyses. Through these steps the meanings of these signifiers are described in detail and three lexical units are identified: ḫds1 ‘month’, ḫds2 ‘(day of) New Moon’ and yrḥ ‘month’. ḫds1 and yrḥ seem to be interchangeable variants. The role of the latter as an archaism could not be proved, given the scarcity of the data and the ‘resurgence’ of the substantive at a later phase (LBH3).

Keywords: Ancient Hebrew Linguistics, Biblical Studies, Lexical Semantics, Time

1. Introduction

Time – as well as having the unfortunate and fastidious habit of flowing inexorably on – engages, more than anything, human beings’ curiosity and their faculty of imagining. To comprehend its inner nature and unlock its secrets gives the illusion of being capable of unraveling the ultimate mystery in which human mortality is shrouded. To meet an end vexes and frightens us – to die, in a word, is an infinite one tries to elude.1 It is exactly the words for time on which I would like to focus. The Hebrew lexicon for time has been studied before. These analyses aim to identify the peculiar

* I would like to thank Julia Bolton Holloway for having read a preliminary draft of this paper and revised my English prose.

1 Many modern languages make extensive use of euphemisms in this regard: to pass away, to pass on, to perish, depart this life etc.; it. perire, andarsene, spirare, passare a miglior vita, decadere, scomparire etc.
concept of time that was common in ancient Israel. Due to the unique circumstances of the textual tradition of Hebrew, lexical stock is one of the few sources on the topic of time - or at least it was so deemed by the many scholars who have researched it. In these cases, linguistic data was used to substantiate analyses which were not strictly linguistic. As a matter of fact, in keeping with many other ancient cultures, even Hebrew culture was not compelled to make explicit and systematic observations on the idea of time. Hence, one do not have texts which deal specifically with this issue, shedding light on Hebrew’s distinctive perspective on it.

As we were saying, in this paper I would like to focus attention on the ancient Hebrew lexicon concerning time from a structural-semantic point of view. My analysis will be consistent with Eugenio Coseriu’s work and his structural lexematics, applied to Ancient Hebrew by Ida Zatelli and Angelo Vivian.

My aim is not to discuss the concept of time from a philosophical perspective. What I am interested in is the study of the linguistic tools used by native speakers in order to denote a semantic area, which is so important in our life. To analyse the structural relations in a semantic field may give us a precise idea of how speakers used to segment lexical units in the semantic continuum pertaining to time. Moreover, this examination allows us to define the specific areas of signification for each lexeme which belongs to the said field and to discern the paradigmatic relations that determine the choice between one or another unit in different syntagms and expressive contexts. This methodology is aimed to contrast an inveterate tendency proper to Hebrew lexicography to analyse each lexeme in a sort of linguistic isolation as if they could not be found in the same sources or they were not placed in a reciprocal relation.

This kind of atomism in a lexical-semantic analysis is found under the entries to lexemes of time in the main lexicons dedicated to biblical Hebrew. For instance, one may consider the nouns ‘wlm, nṣḥ and ‘d: the translation

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2 For a brief history of research on this topic, see Perani (1976) and Barr (2009 [1969]). Barr (1961) contains a major critique of the so-called biblical theology, which deemed Greek thought as fundamentally different from Hebrew thought. In Barr’s opinion such a radical polarization based upon alleged linguistic criteria was unfounded and erroneous. He claims that the linguistic data were often inadvertently presented so as to fit preconceived notions about the subject matter. Barr (2009 [1969]) picks up again that critique, focusing on the subject of time. See also Stefani (1999) and Prato (2013), from the latter particularly chs. 3-4. Brin (2001) shifts back the focus on textual sources. As far as I can tell, it is the most comprehensive and recent work on the topic. However, from a methodological standpoint it is not so much a linguistic study as a textual analysis based on philological criteria.


4 See Coseriu (1971c: 304-305).
given in many cases shows a variance which cannot be supported by a rigorous analysis of data. ‘Perpetuity’ (nṣḥ and ‘d), '(long) duration' and 'long time' (wlm), ‘everlastingness’, ‘duration and permanency’ (nṣḥ), ‘lasting future time’ and ‘eternity’ (‘d) are some of the translations suggested.5 As we can see, lexicons differ sometimes significantly over the meaning of the same lexeme. Moreover, different translations are given for the three nouns, which were quoted before, even though from a close study it emerges that the respective areas of signification are most likely the same.6

The inconsistencies inferred by the picture that has been drawn before in the definitions of the meaning of the units, may be rectified through an analysis of the paradigmatic structure of the semantic field to which the lexemes belong. The paradigmatic oppositions along the distinctive traits of meaning or semes that exist between lexical units, allow us to delimit gradually and with greater precision the specific area of signification which is proper to each lexeme.

This kind of analysis I would like to propose in this brief article. Naturally, for the purpose of this paper, it will not be possible to examine the whole lexical field of time. Instead, nouns will be studied. In particular, this paper will be focussed on yrḥ and ḥdš.

The analysis will be structured as follows:

- distributional analysis: distribution of each lexeme within each functional language7 of biblical Hebrew will be examined;8
- syntagmatics and classematic analysis: syntagmatic data pertaining to the lexemes examined will be presented in order to identify the specific classes whom they belong in;9
- analysis of selected occurrences of the lexical units;
- componential analysis: the meaning of each lexeme will be described for all of the functional languages and the distinctive semantic traits will be identified;

5 See BDB, HALOT and DCH, ad voces. See also Lisowski (1966) and Mandelkern (1955), ad voces.

6 Barr tacitly backs this argument quoting von Orelli, who, after having identified three different meanings for the three substantives basing such a distinction upon etymological criteria, “has himself to admit that in usage little essential difference of sense seems to have been known. In fact the linguistic consciousness of the writers was ‘dull’ towards the etymological nuances, and no wonder, since much of the prehistory of the words must have been unknown to them”. See Barr (2009: 90-91 [1969]).


8 Post-biblical Hebrew, i.e. that of Ben Sira, qumranic Hebrew and mishnaic Hebrew, will be left out. A study of the lexical field of substantives of time for these linguistic phases is currently in progress as the present author’s PhD thesis at the University of Florence.

- paradigmatic analysis: the reciprocal paradigmatic oppositions of the lexical units will be studied in order to gain a better understanding of the structure of the lexical field.

A list of functional languages pertaining to biblical Hebrew is shown in the following table:\(^\text{10}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Languages in Biblical Hebrew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABH</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EBH1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EBH2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EBH3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EBH4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LBH1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LBH2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LBH3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{10}\) See Zatelli (2004: 140-142).
2. Distributional Analysis

Table 2. Distribution of the lexemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ḥdš</th>
<th>yrḥ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABH</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBH1</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBH2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBH3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBH4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BH</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1 Notes

A remarkable gap in the distribution of the two lexemes can be observed. ḥdš occurs 291 times in biblical Hebrew, whilst yrḥ is to be found only 21 times - a circa 14:1 ratio. Therefore, the latter is quite rare especially when compared to the former. Both the lexemes show a marked decrease in frequency in the transition from EBH to LBH. Only 30% of the occurrences of ḥdš is to be found in LBH. For yrḥ that figure decreases by another 5%. For a correct interpretation of these data it is necessary to take account of the unique circumstances of textual transmission when it comes to the sources at our disposal. It is no coincidence that if we look beyond these two substantives to encompass the lexical field in its entirety we will notice that a similar

11 See Lisowski (1966) and Mandelkern (1955), *ad voces.*
decrease in frequency is common to most of its lexical units. This is partly, if not exclusively, due to the fact that EBH corpora are sensibly larger than LBH ones, as can be easily inferred by the functional language table. However, sometimes a decrease in the use of a lexeme can be caused by a restructuring of the specific areas covered by each lexemes within the lexical field. One of the aims of this study is to shed some light on this matter.

It is worth noting that both lexemes show their highest frequency of occurrence in the historical-narrative corpora. In fact, the biblical narrative pericopes are built upon a complex chronological structure made up largely of dates, both absolute and relative. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that substantives as šnh ‘year’, ḫds ‘month’ and ywm ‘day’ constitute the basic elements of such structure. This fact explains the high frequency of ḫds in the functional languages EBH1 (119x) and LBH1 (85x). We deliberately did not mention yrḥ. This lexeme appears to be marginal, despite the fact that its main area of application is in the same dating system as that in which ḫds appears. EBH1 shows 14 occurrences. From LBH1 it is conspicuously absent. However, the picture is made considerably fuzzier by the fact that of those 14 occurrences of yrḥ in EBH1 8 come from epigraphic sources. Moreover, all of those instances of the lexeme occur in the very same text, the Gezer Calendar - Gez(10). It is indeed one of, if not the most ancient Hebrew text to have survived. However, it is also deemed by some scholars to be a sort of school exercise carried out by a pupil. Which renders the extensive use of the lexeme difficult to interpret. All of this adds up to only 5 instances of yrḥ within the biblical text. The contrast with the situation of ḫds could not be any starker: 8 occurrences from inscriptions versus 111 from the Bible. This is much more interesting if we consider the scarcity of epigraphic sources still extant.

The early poetical language (EBH2) shows ḫds much less frequently (53x). As for yrḥ we do not have a sufficiently wide study sample (1x). It is nonetheless worth noting the fact that all the instances of the former, except one (Ps 81:4), occur in the prophetical books. This means that the lexeme is virtually absent from both the Psalms and wisdom literature.

Neither substantive occurs in late poetical language (LBH2).

The juridical-cultic corpus (EBH4) includes 30 instances of ḫds, whilst yrḥ is virtually absent from it (1x).

In the poetical language of Job (LBH3) the former lexeme turns out to be marginal (2x). Unexpectedly the latter is represented to a greater extent (4x).

12 The reading yrḥ šḥ for Arad(6): 20.2, inscription on a jar, is Aharoni’s. We would have here another name of month from the ancient Canaanite calendar. However, following Lemaire (1973) one should read gr’ bn ‘zyhu, in any case a reading far from being certain. Given the fragmentary state of the text, this occurrence will be excluded from the subsequent analysis. See Davies (1991: 18); Renz and Röllig (1995-2003, vol. 1: 385-386).

Given the diatopically distinct nature of LBH3, we could be looking at a differently structured lexical field. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the author made a peculiar stylistic choice, reviving a substantive no more in use.

3. Classematic Analysis

Since the passage is obscure precisely in regard to ḫds, Ho 5:7 will be excluded from the analysis. The numerous suggested interpretations are not based on sufficiently cogent arguments. Three classes have been identified: time units, feasts and states. The first, not surprisingly, is the most frequent for a lot of time substantives. Every lexeme that designates a definite segment of time susceptible of becoming a standard unit of measurement belongs in this class. Therefore, there are two possibilities: either these units represent the time intervals within which an event or an entity are placed on a specific point in time or that the duration of a given phenomenon is measured by means of a series of said units. Both ḫds and yrḥ designate the lunar month - the ancient Hebrew calendar was in fact lunar. The referent is both the calendar month, with conventionally set chronological limits, i.e. with a beginning and an end on fixed days; and the corresponding standard measure of duration. Varying portions of a year can be measured through a series of monthly standard units. The same applies to every other time unit: months can be measured in days (ywlm), generations, entire lives or reigns in years (ṣnh) and even greater time spans in generations (d(w)r). As far as ḫds and yrḥ are concerned it is worth stressing the fact that both lexemes designate the same time interval, the lunar month.

The second identified class - feasts - accounts for a clearly discernible change in lexical combinations for ḫds. This phenomenon sets apart this lexeme from yrḥ. What emerges is a peculiar affinity of the former with šbr ‘Sabbath’, ḥg ‘feast (associated with pilgrimage)’, mw’d ‘festival, time of festivity’. In this case, the referent is the New Moon, the day or, generally speaking, the time...
when a conjunction between Earth’s satellite, the Sun and our planet occurs. However, the New Moon is not merely an astronomical phenomenon through which individuals experience the passing of time. Rather, it has an additional distinctive trait, its ritual and festal nature.

Identifying the third class has been quite a challenge. The fact that only one passage seems to reveal this semantic use case renders the thesis suggested below dubious at best. In the passage in question - Jer 2:24 - the noun refers to the estrus cycle of a wild she-ass. The matter becomes even more complicated if one takes into consideration the symbolic significance of the animal and its condition since it is said that nobody can “bring her back” during the breeding season and that its owners will not have to go far looking for her because it is going to be found with a mate. The passage is going to be analysed further on but, for now, it will suffice to underline the necessity of exercising caution when drawing inferences from an isolated source.18

3.1 Archaic Poetical Hebrew (ABH)

Only ūrb occurs in the archaic poetical corpus. However, even this lexeme is quite secondary since it is found in a single and obscure passage. The class time units has been chosen for reasons which will be explained in the analysis of the passage.

Table 3. Classematic Analysis: ABH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archaic Poetical Hebrew (ABH)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ūrb</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBH1)

In the historical-narrative corpus ūrd belongs in the classes time units and feasts. yrh belongs in the class time units.

Table 4. Classematic Analysis: EBH1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBH1)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ūrd</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrh</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 On the caution required when selecting the various classemes, see Zatelli (1978: 30-31).
3.3 Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)

In early poetical Hebrew ḥdš belongs in three classes: *time units*, *feasts* and *states*. For *yrḥ* it has been identified the classeme *time units*.

Table 5. Classematic Analysis: EBH2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ḥdš</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrḥ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Poetical Hebrew of Hosea (EBH3)

Hosea makes use exclusively of ḥdš and only in one occasion. The lexeme belongs in the class *feasts*.

Table 6. Classematic Analysis: EBH3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poetical Hebrew of Hosea (EBH3)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ḥdš</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrḥ</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)

In the juridical-cultic corpus both lexemes occur. ḥdš belongs in the classes *time units* and *feasts*, whilst *yrḥ* in the class *time units*.

Table 7. Classematic Analysis: EBH4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ḥdš</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrḥ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)

In late historical-narrative Hebrew only ḥdš is to be found in the classes *time units* and *feasts*. 
Table 8. Classematic Analysis: LBH1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ḥds</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrh</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)

Both ḥds and yrh in the poetical language of Job belong in the class time units.

Table 9. Classematic Analysis: LBH3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)</th>
<th>Time units</th>
<th>Feasts</th>
<th>States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ḥds</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Syntagmatics

ḥds: the noun is masculine, although in Gen 38:24 one can read kmšlš ḥdsym. The feminine numeral could lead us to conclude that the substantive could both be masculine and feminine. However the uniqueness of the occurrence could be interpreted as the product of a scribal error.19 According to the Masoretes the lexeme follows the pattern CVCC proper to the so-called segholates.20 It presumably follows the qutl pattern,21 although one cannot make a final conclusion, given the lack of direct parallels in other semitic languages.22

The lexeme occurs in the singular ḥds and in the plural ḥdsym.

19 BHS, ad locum in the critical apparatus quotes the variant reading of the Samaritan Pentateuch kmšlš ḥdsym.

20 These are nouns that presented the primitive sequence CVCC, which was not tolerated in the biblical text by the Tiberian tradition of vocalization. See Joüon and Muraoka (2011: 221-226).

21 Along with qatl and qitl it is one of the conventional names, widely adopted in the field of Hebrew linguistics, that indicates the original phonological pattern of the segholates. qitl is taken as a model of consonantal root. The three patterns can be represented as follows: CaCC, CiCC, CuCC.

22 HALOT, ad vocem quotes Ugaritic ḫḏ. However, Ugaritic texts, as is usual for semitic languages, show only the consonantal graphemes.
yrḥ: the noun is masculine, again a segholate. In this case we are fortunate enough to have a few parallels from other Semitic languages that reveal the qat hil pattern for our lexeme.

(1) a. yahra (Mandaic)
b. warḥ (Ethiopic)
c. (w)arhu (Akkadian)

(HALOT: ad vocem)

The lexeme occurs in the singular yrḥ and in the plural yrḥym, as well as a dual form with pronominal suffix 3rd ps. m. s. yrḥw which is exclusive to epigraphic sources.²³

4.1 Archaic Poetical Hebrew (ABH)

This corpus shows a single occurrence of yrḥ, whilst none of ḫds. The substantive is governed in construct state by grš ‘bounteous crop’ and is parallel with šms ‘sun’.

4.2 Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBH1)

xford: the singular form can be found in construct state syntagms as nomen regens, i.e. the governing noun, with ywm ‘time’, byb ‘Abib’ and zw ‘Ziw’ (3x, 1x, 1x respectively). As can be easily seen, just a handful of combinations seem to be possible. The syntagm ḥds ymym (ḥds + ywm) is analogous with what we found in some modern languages, namely syntagms like ‘a month’s time’ and in Italian, ‘un mese di tempo’. As for the rest of the occurrences the lexeme shows a not so surprising predilection for names of months. The plural form functions as nomen regens of šnh ‘year’ (2x). The substantive occurs in the singular as nomen rectum of bn ‘(x months) old’ (9x), lb ‘burnt offering’ (1x), ywm ‘day’ (2x) and mhrt ‘the next day’ (1x). In the plural, of r{s ‘beginning, first of’ (3x) and cardinal numerals (3x).

The lexeme can be found in prepositional phrases preceded by b ‘in’ (27x) and l ‘related to/of’ (39x). There are only two instances of the noun preceded by ‘d ‘until’.

ḥds takes the following clitic pronouns: 2nd ps. m. pl. -km (2x) and 3rd ps. m. s. -w (2x).

²³ It is a variant of the Masoretic yrḥw, written in scriptio defectiva. The most plausible interpretations of this form read it as either yarḥaw or yarḥew, both dual in number followed by a pronominal suffix 3rd ps. m. s., according to the respective origin of the form: the south for the former, the north for the latter. See Renz and Röllig (1995-2003, vol. 1: 32-34).
It is followed by the demonstrative adjective zh ‘this, that’ (6x) and by ordinal numerals (33x).

The noun is added in apposition with cardinal numerals that agree with it in gender and number (15x).

Moreover, in the singular it takes the role of accusative of limitation preceded by a cardinal numeral (2x).

As an accusative of temporal determination usually preceded by a numeral the lexeme expresses duration (11x).

ḥdš is seldom the subject noun of a sentence (5x). It almost exclusively occurs in nominal clauses. In one case the verb hyh 0/1 ‘to be, to happen, to come to pass’ takes ḥdš as subject.

yrm: the singular form can be found in construct state as nomen regens of the names of months zw ‘Ziw’ (1x), bwl ‘Bul’ (1x), ‘tnym ‘Etanim’ (1x) and of ywm ‘time’ (1x).

The lexeme occurs in prepositional phrases with b ‘in’ (3x).

There is only one instance of the accusative of temporal determination and one of apposition with a cardinal numeral.

All instances of yrm as subject noun in nominal clauses in this functional language (8x) are attested in the already mentioned Gezer Calendar (end of 10th century BCE).

From the data examined above, we can conclude that the two lexemes are basically interchangeable on a syntagmatic and classematic level. In the course of componential and paradigmatic analyses we will try to determine whether we are dealing with allotria or with contextual variants.25

4.3 Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)

ḥdš: there is a single instance of the lexeme in construct state, followed by the name of month šbt ‘Šebaṭ’, derived from the Babylonian calendar.

The substantive is often preceded by the prepositions l ‘related to, of’ (24x), b ‘in’ (18x) and mdy ‘from’ (1x).

Rare are the occurrences of clitic pronouns affixed to the lexeme: 3rd ps. f. s. -ḥ (1x), 3rd ps. m. s. -w (1x) and 2nd ps. m. pl. -km (1x).

The substantive is followed by ordinal numerals (17x) and preceded by cardinal numerals (6x).

24 BDB and HALOT, ad locum interpret the name of the seventh month in the Canaanite calendar according to the most frequent meaning assigned to the adjective: ever-flowing. Therefore, yrm b’inym would mean ‘month of steady flowings’, the only ones still to have water in September/October.


26 As in the phrase ‘from month to month, every month’. 
The verbs *ykl* 0/1 ‘(to be able) to endure’ (1x) and *śn*’ 0/1 ‘to hate’ take ḥdš as object, whilst the verb *’br* 0/1 ‘to pass’ (1x) takes it as subject.

*yrḥ*: as for the single instance of *yrḥ* it is preceded by the preposition *b* ‘in’ and followed by a cardinal numeral.

4.4 Poetical Hebrew of Hosea (EBH3)

ḥdš: the noun with the clitic 3rd ps. f. s. pronoun occurs as the object of the verb *ṣḥt* H/1 ‘put an end to’.

4.5 Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)

ḥdš: in construct state it is either followed by *bib* ‘Abib’ (5x) or preceded by *mwd* ‘set time’ (2x), *ywṃ* ‘day’ (2x) and *bn* ‘(x months) old’ (1x).

The prepositions *l* ‘related to, of’ (14x) and *b* ‘in’ (10x) precede the lexeme.

It occurs along with ordinal numerals (7x) and demonstrative adjective *zh* (1x).

It is the object of the verb *ṣmr* 0/1 ‘observe, celebrate, keep’ (1x).

*yrh*: the substantive is attested in the accusative of temporal determination expressing duration, followed in construct state by *ywṃ* ‘time’.

4.6 Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)

ḥdš: in construct state the singular form occurs as the *nomen regens* of names of months *’dr* ‘Adar’ (8x), *nysn* ‘Nisan’ (2x), *tḥt* ‘Tebet’ (1x), *sywn* ‘Siwan’ (1x), *kswl* ‘Kislew’ (1x), whilst in the plural it is followed by *ṣnh* ‘year’ (1x).

As *nomen rectum* in the singular it follows *mḥqt* ‘division’ (1x), whilst in the plural it is preceded by *kl* ‘all, total’ (1x).

As observed in other functional languages the lexeme occurs with the prepositions *l* ‘related to, of’ (38x), *b* ‘in’ (19x) and *mn* ‘from’ (1x).

It is often followed by ordinal numerals (44x), seldom by the demonstrative *zh* ‘this, that’ (6x).

There are instances of apposition with a cardinal numeral (7x).

The substantive occurs as an accusative of temporal determination (6x) and as an accusative of limitation preceded by a cardinal number (2x).

The verb *ng*’ 0/1 ‘to arrive, to come’ takes ḥdš as subject (2x).

4.7 Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)

ḥdš: the noun can be found in construct state syntagms as *nomen rectum* with *mspr* ‘number’ (2x).

It has the 3rd ps. m. s. clitic pronoun affixed (2x).

It occurs as the subject of the verb *ḥṣṣ* 0/2 pass. ‘to be cut (in two) > to be curtailed, to be at an end’. In fact, the subject noun would be *mspr*, but the verb agrees in number with ḥdš.
**yrh**: the plural can be found in construct state as *nomen regens* followed by *šw’* ‘futility’ (1x) and *qdm* ‘antiquity, ancient times’ (1x). As *nomen rectum* with *mspr* ‘number’ (1x).

A single instance of the substantive with a preposition can be found, with *k* ‘like’ (1x).

It is the object of verbs *nhl* H/1 pass. ‘to become the possessor of’ (1x) and *spr* 0/1 ‘to count’.

5. Sources

5.1 Archaic Poetical Hebrew (ABH)

(2) Dt 33:14

*wmmd* tbw’t *šmś* *wmmd* *grί* *yrhm*:

‘With the bounteous yield of the sun, and the bounteous crop of the months.’

A slightly altered translation than TNK’s was adopted in this case. *Months* was preferred to *moons*. The reason behind this choice is that there is not a single case in the whole Bible in which *yrhm* stands for ‘moons’. Even if one chooses to leave aside as a later linguistic innovation the Masoretic tradition that clearly distinguishes between *yrh* ‘month’ and *yrh* ‘moon’ by means of a different vocalization, we cannot avoid the simple fact that the former has both a singular and a plural form, whilst the latter never appears to have a plural form. Therefore, translating it with ‘moons’ ignores any evidence to the contrary. The problem arises from the fact that *yrhm* is clearly in parallel with *šmś* ‘sun’, which would render a translation ‘moons’ all the more suitable. However, even if we accepted that translation, how could we account for the use of the plural form? Why ‘moons’? After all it is the moon and its movement that governs the agrarian cycles, not several moons. Only metre and prosody could explain the presence of a plural in lieu of a singular. Unfortunately, a decision in this regard could not be made, given the uniqueness of this scenario. The reference to the moon and its cycles, so fundamental to the agrarian economy characteristic of ancient civilisations, is already implicit in the lexeme *yrhm* ‘month’. So a parallel with *šmś* ‘sun’ is not out of place.

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27 All translations are TNK’s unless otherwise stated.

28 GLAT (vol. 3: 1104) translates “yield of the months”. A similar translation can be found in von Rad (1966: 203), “the rich yield of the months”. See also Christensen (2002: 841.843 fn 14.c.851). He (Ibidem, 843 fn 14.c) quotes Craigie (1976: 397 fn 24), in holding that *yrhm* “means both ‘months’ and ‘moons’”. In fact, Craigie writes: “There may be a deliberate play on words, for this word may also be translated ‘moons’ (cf. ‘sun’ in the preceding line)”.

However,
As shown in § 3.1 we placed the lexeme within the class *time units*. Since as we have seen the passage is obscure and the syntagm *gr' yrhm* is a *hapax legomenon* in biblical Hebrew, this was done in a dubitative fashion. For all these reasons the lexeme in EBA will not be subject to further treatment during componental and paradigmatic analyses.

5.2 Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBH1)

(3)  

(a) 1K 6:1

"wyby bšmwnym śnh w'rb' m'wt śnh ls't bny-yšr'l m'ṛś-mšrym bính hr-b'y't bḥđś zw hw' bḥđś bński mnlk śīmh 'l-yšr'l wybn bbyt lḥwḥ:

‘In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites left the land of Egypt, in the month of Ziw - that is, the second month - in the fourth year of his reign over Israel, Solomon began to build the temple of YHWH.'

(b) 1K 6:37-38

37 bính hrby'yt ysd byt yhwh byrḥ zw;38 wðśnh h'ḥt ṣrh byrḥ bwl hw' bḥđś bński klh bbyt lkl-dbryw whkl-mśtpw wybnhw sb' śnym:

37 ‘In the fourth year, in the month of Ziw, the foundations of the House were laid;’ 38 ‘and in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul - that is, the eighth month - the House was completed according to all its details and all its specifications. It took him seven years to build it.’

The examples provided above attest the main use of the two lexemes in the biblical narratives. They provide the building blocks for the chronological structure that holds together those narratives. It is no coincidence that a substantial number of their occurrences can be found in dates. The frequent combination with numerals, with the preposition *b* ‘in’ and with names of months shows their belonging in the class *time units*. Both lexemes establish a paradigmatic opposition to another member of the lexical field, *śnh ‘year’*.

Examples (3)a and (3)b show that the two substantives can be used interchangeably. Both occur in the very same syntagmatic context (*b + śnh X b + ḥdš/yrḥ Y*). It is worth noting that both are followed by the name of month derived from the Canaanite calendar, *zw*. In (3) b *yrḥ* is followed by another name of month: *bwl*. However, in this case we can observe a rather interesting phenomenon, that is, the insertion of a gloss to the phrase *yrḥ bwl*.29 The text reads *byrḥ bwl hw’ bḥđś bński* ‘in the month of Bul - that is the eighth month’. One possible explanation for this fact is that *yrḥ* had begun to be perceived as an archaism, a variant belonging in a different

as we have seen, his assertion cannot be verified with the extant sources. On the contrary, they seem to point in the opposite direction.

29 BHS sees it as an interpolation. See BHS, *ad locum* in the critical apparatus.
synchronic level. The distribution of the two lexemes clearly shows that ḥdš is the obvious choice when designating the lunar month. In fact, yrḥ is virtually absent from every other EBH corpus and entirely so from LBH except for LBH3. In this regard, the Gezer Calendar would seem to support the notion that in ancient times yrḥ could be more frequent. However, since the language of Gez(10) is typologically early biblical Hebrew, its decrease in frequency must have taken place for the most part in a time prior to that of the earliest extant documents.

(4) a. 1S 6:1
wyhy 'rwn-yhw bīdh plīym ḥbīh ḥdšym:
‘The Ark of YHWH remained in the territory of the Philistines seven months.’

b. Ex 2:2
wthr h’sh wrld bn wr’ ‘tw ky-ṭwb hw’ wtspnhw šlb yrḥym:
‘The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months.’

c. 2K 15:13
šlw m-bn-ybyš mlk bnt ślšym wti’ inh l’zyḥ mlk yhwḥd wymlk yrḥ-ymbn
bšmrwn:
‘Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah, and he reigned in Samaria one month.’

(4)a shows ḥdš in an expression of time duration measured in standard units: the Ark had fallen into the hands of the Philistines and it remained with them for seven months.

(4)b and (4)c show yrḥ in a similar context and in the same function. Unfortunately, we cannot draw clear conclusions from (4) b, since the syntagm ṳpn “to hide” 0/1 + yrḥ is a hapax legomenon, ergo the reasons behind this lexical choice remain obscure. On the contrary, in (4) c the lexeme occurs in the same syntagmatic context found in 2K 23:31 (et al), providing clear evidence of its interchangeability with ḥdš.

(5) 1S 20:5
wy’mr dwd ’l-yhwntn hnh-ḥdš mḥr w’nky yḥb-’ṣb ’m-hmlk l’kwł wšltlny
wnstrty bīdh ’d h’rb ḫlṣy:
‘David said to Jonathan: - Tomorrow is the new moon, and I am to sit with the king at the meal. Instead, let me go and I will hide in the countryside until the third evening.’

(5) shows the distinctive traits by which the two lexemes differ from one another. In this case, ḥdš belongs in the class feasts. It is written that David
should usually dine at court during the Feast of New Moon. What reveals a change in class is once again the lexical combinations. The lexeme appears alongside mhr ‘tomorrow’ in a nominal clause. Therefore it follows that ḥdš cannot possibly refer to the time unit ‘month’. Instead, it designates the day of New Moon, which has a festive character by virtue of its importance for determining the rhythm of agriculture. If one compares the data to those available in the other Semitic languages documented in the area, one will realise that the signifier assigned to the signified ‘month’ is derived from the root *WRḤ. Therefore, given the innovative character of the lexeme in the Hebrew language it is at least possible that in a pre-documentary phase of the language ḥdš denoted primarily the New Moon. Then, its area of signification would extend to encompass the meaning ‘month’, gradually eroding away the area of signification covered by yrh. Etymological considerations seem to support this theory.30 It is, therefore, necessary to identify two distinct lexematic units, that account for the observed polysemy.

5.3 Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)

(6) a. Jer 1:3

wyhy bymy yhwyqym bn-yʾṣıyhw mlk yhwdh ‘d-tm ʾty ʾṣrh ḥnh lsdqyhw bn-yʾṣıyhw mlk yhwdh ‘d-glwt yrwšlm b ḥdhš hḥmyḥ:
‘And throughout the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, when Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month.’

b. Ezek 39:12

wqbrwm byt yśrʾl lmʾn ṭhr ʾt hʾrš ibʾh ḥdšym:
‘The House of Israel shall spend seven months burying them, in order to cleanse the land.’

c. Zc 11:8

wʾkhʾ ṭʾḥʾš hrʾym byrḥ ʾḥd wtqṣr npšy bhm wgm-npšm bḥlh by:
‘But I lost the three shepherds in one month; then my patience with them was at an end, and they in turn were disgusted with me.’

As we have seen in the corpus EBH1, the standard poetic language uses ḥdš as time unit in dates in order to indicate a calendar month with conventionally set beginning and end or in syntagms of time duration. In (6)a one reads b ‘in’ + ḥdš + ordinal numeral. It is important to underline the lack of the names of months which instead are present in the corpus EBH1. In (6)

30 Consider the adjective ḥdš ‘new’ and the verb ḥdš ‘to renew’, attested exclusively in the form 0/2.
b we find the syntagm cardinal numeral + ḫds to express the duration of the action - the burying of Gog and his multitude with purifying purposes. The only occurrence of yrḥ in (6)c is again in the class time units. In this case the syntagm b ‘in’ + yrḥ + cardinal numeral denotes the period of time in which the action takes place - the loss of the three shepherds.

(7) a. Is 1:13-14
13 'l’ twsypw hby’ mnḥt-šw’ qtrt tw’bh hy’ly ḫds wibt qr’ mqr’ l’-wkl’ wn w’šrh: ḫdsykm wmw’dykm šn’h npṣy hyw ‘ly ḫrḥ nl’yty ns’;
13 ‘Bring no more useless offerings, incense disgusts me. / New moon, sabbath, holy convocation - I cannot stand wickedness combined with solemn assembly.’ // 14 ‘I hate your new moons and festivals, / they have become a burden to me, I am tired of putting up with them.’31

b. Am 8:5
l’mr my y’br ḫds wašybr šbr wibty wnpṭh-br lhqtyn ‘yph wlḥgdyl šql w’lt w’mt m’zny mrmh:
‘who say: “When will the new moon pass, so that we may sell our grain; and the shabbath, so that we may open our stores of grain?” - who reduce the quantity (ephah), while raising the price (shekel); and cheat with crooked scales;’32

One can observe the polysemy of ḫds also in the poetic language. In (7)a, the noun parallels the lexemes šbt ‘sabbath’, mqr’ ‘(sacred) assembly, convocation’ and mw’d ‘(time of) festivity’, which unsurprisingly indicate festivity. Another sign of the change of class is that the 3rd ps. m. pl. clitic -km is attached to mw’d and ḫds, which in conjunction with these lexemes conveys the relation of belonging felt by every member of the community. Therefore, festivities are imbued with a unique feeling of self-determination. To this picture belongs also the holiday of New Moon.33 For (7)b identifying the classeme was quite challenging. The translation, that was mentioned, makes a definitive choice in favour of the class feasts. However, if we change “When will the new moon pass” to “When will the month pass [...]” the passage makes perfect sense. Although this is an interesting hypothesis, it does not account for the reason why the merchants cannot trade and must wait the end of the month in order to resume their business activities. Because it is a holiday, the feast of New Moon prescribes that all work must be suspended. Hence, the remark of the merchants would be more appropriate in this context. However,

33 See Blenkinsopp (2000: 184).
the two possibilities are sound. Not by chance in Arad(6): 5:12-13 and Ne 7:72 one reads brmn y’br ḥdš ‘before the month/New Moon passes’, and uyg’ bhdš hšby’y ‘when the seventh month arrived’. Here the lexeme is once again ambiguous. In the second passage the ordinal numeral dissolves any doubt. If the verb had been the same in both sentences, it would have been easier but it is interesting to observe that in both syntagms verbs of motion are found, one that expresses passage, that is the end, the other the arrival, that is the beginning of the time which ḥdš denotes. As a result, the syntagmatic context is not decisive in this case.34

(8) Jer 2:24

pr’ lmd mdbr / b’wt npśw ṣ’ph ṭwḥ t’nth my yśbh’hl / kl-mbqṣyh l’y’y’pw ḥdš yns’wnḥ:
‘a wild ass used to the wilderness / in her desirous craving sniffing wind in her season who can bring her back? / All who seek her need not tire themselves in her month they will find her.’35

We are presented with another difficult passage in (8). The syntagm b ‘in’ + ḥdš + ps. f. s. clitic pronoun -b ‘her’ + ms’ ‘to find’ 0/1 + paragogic n + 3rd ps. f. s. clitic pronoun -b ‘her’ is attested only in this passage. The translation shown above refers neither to the class time units nor could it refer to feasts. Herein lies the difficulty in interpreting the text. Lexical parallels shed some light on the matter: ḥdš stands in paradigmatic opposition to ‘wh’ ‘desire’ and to ṭ’nh ‘season of heat’.36 The latter is, unfortunately, a hapax. HALOT and BDB both refer to the estrus cycle and there can be no doubt that it lies within a well-defined time span. It is certainly possible, but unfortunately unverifiable, that this is the main reason behind the choice of ḥdš - a lexeme usually denoting a time period - in order to convey the same meaning as ṭ’nh. However, the focus here is not on time, but on a recurring physiologic state characteristic of some mammals.

We cannot exclude the possibility that what we have here is a figurative use of the lexeme unique to this passage. Without additional data judgement must be suspended. Hence, these data will not be taken into account during componential and paradigmatic analyses.

5.4 Poetical Hebrew of Hosea (EBH3)

(9) Hos 2:13
whšbty kl-mśwś hgh ḥdš wšbth wkł-mw’dh:
‘And I will end all her rejoicing: Her festivals, new moons, and sabbaths - All her festive seasons.’

The data pertaining to ḥds in Hosea is consistent with what we observed in the preceding corpora concerning the class feasts. The lexical unit occurs once again alongside šbt and mw’d, with the addition of ḥg ‘feast (associated with pilgrimage)’. It is worth noting that all the quoted lexemes receive the 3rd ps. f. s. clitic pronoun -h, as seen in the early poetical corpus.\(^{37}\)

5.5 Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)

(10) a. Lv 23:5
ḥdš hr’šwn b’rb’h ʿsr hds byn h’rbym ps hlyhw:
‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to YHWH.’

b. Dt 21:13
whsyrb ’r-śmlt šbyh m’lyh wyšbh bbytk wbkth ʾr-ḥb wʾ-ʾmh yrḥ ynym ywh ʾk ʾkw’ ṭbw’ ṭlyh wbʾštḥ whyth lk lʾḥ:
‘and [she will] discard her captive’s garb. She shall spend a month’s time in your house lamenting her father and mother; after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife.’

(10)a and (10)b confirm both lexemes as belonging in the class time units for the juridical-cultic corpus. In (10)a ḥds designates the monthly calendar unit specified by the ordinal numeral in dates. Moreover, the syntagm b + cardinal numeral + l ‘related to/of’ + ḥds places the described action in a specific day of the month. (10)b constitutes the only instance of yrḥ within the corpus: the lexeme denotes the time span of a month that amounts to the duration of the action.

\(^{37}\) See the curious translation and the relevant remarks shown in Andersen and Freedman (1980: 215-250). It seems unnecessary to see here a case of metonymy, such that ḥg, ḥds and šbt would denote each a different kind of feast on the basis of their annual, monthly and weekly periodicity, respectively.
Syntagmatic relations in (11) clearly show that the referent is not the time unit, but rather the feast of New Moon. The definite article h- and the construct state syntagm of ywm ‘day’ with ḫdš prove the inadequacy of the meaning ‘month’. Moreover, the parallelism between ḫdš and ṣbt dispels any lingering doubts.

5.6 Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)

In comparison to the homologous corpus within EBH, i.e. EBH1, one does not notice sensible variations in the use of the lexeme. The same system for dating events or individuals is employed. The syntagmatic context seems to remain largely unchanged. We still find b + ḫdš + ordinal numeral in dates. Alone or together with cardinal numerals the substantive expresses time duration. The paradigmatic opposition between ḫdš and ṣnh is still active, where the former is used to measure segments of a year.

As we have seen in EBH1 the use of numerals for identifying the different months is parallel to that of proper names.38

It is worth noting the absence of yrḥ from the late historical-narrative language, which would seem to confirm the end of the process of substitution of ḫdš for yrḥ.

38 At this synchronic level the Babylonian calendar had taken the place of the ancient Canaanite one. Hence, the months are assigned different names.
(13) Ezr 3:5

w’hrykn ‘lt tmyd wh’dysym wkl-mw’dy yhw hmqdysym wkl mtnb ndbh lyhw:
‘Followed by the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the new moons and for all the sacred fixed times of YHWH, and whatever freewill offerings were made to YHWH.’

(13) documents the use of ḫdš within the class feasts. Once again the parallelism with mw’d reveals the correct classeme. The ritual context is confirmed by the presence of ‘ḥ burnt offering’. The referent is the New Moon celebration during which a sacrifice was performed.

5.7 Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)

(14) a. Job 14:5

’m hwsym ymyw mspr-hdšyw ‘tk ḡw ‘ṣyt wl’ y’bwr:
‘His days are determined; You know the number of his months; You have set him limits that he cannot pass.’

b. Job 39:2
dspr yrhm tml’nḥ wyd’t ‘t ldtnḥ:
‘Can you count the months they must complete? Do you know the season they give birth?’

Despite the many stylistic choices unique to the author of the poetic sections included in the Book of Job, which result in verses of rare beauty, the nature of the two lexemes as time units is rather evident.

(14)a shows ḫdš in opposition to ywm ‘day’. Both are preferred to ṣnh ‘year’ in order to present human life in its most distinctive feature, i.e. that it is bound to end. This stylistic choice conveys a much more powerful image of human existence as inherently limited. Measuring a lifetime by days and months, when years would be normally required for such an extended time segment, gives to that sense of limit a much more disturbing vividness. This is further evidenced by the fact that mspr ‘number’ precedes ḫdš in construct state.

As for yrḥ, similar conclusions can be drawn from (14)b, where it takes the role of object for the verb spr ‘to count’ 0/1.39 The lexeme refers to the gestation period of does.

When the distributional data about the two lexemes were presented at the beginning of this paper, one could not help but notice that yrḥ is unexpectedly more frequent than ḫdš in LBH3. Moreover, this is the only LBH corpus that

39 Incidentally, one can notice the same root SPR as in mspr ‘number’, cited above.
attests it. Examining the rest of the data, this is by all means an anomaly and one with no obvious explanation. The two substantives seem interchangeable as *alloetria*, that is stable variants not influenced by context. Since *yrḥ* shows more occurrences than *ḥds*, the suggested theory that considers the former as an archaism, does not seem acceptable for this functional language. However, it is advisable to exercise caution, given the scarcity of instances of the two lexemes. A study of later linguistic phases, namely the language of Ben Sira’, of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of the Mishnah is necessary to test the validity of said theory.

6. Componential Analysis

Based on the data presented above, the different lexical units will be identified and their meaning described by means of their distinctive semantic features. Those units that occur only once in a functional language will be excluded from the analysis, since they do not belong to the lexical field in those languages.

The sequence of semes will adhere to the following pattern: ‘LF feature + class + dimension + x feature + y feature […]’.

6.1 Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBHI)

The analysis has shown the existence of three lexical units:

- *ḥds*¹ “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”
- *ḥds*² “(day of) New Moon” → “time” + “feasts” + “technical-religious dimension” + “astronomical” + “definite”
- *yrḥ* “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

The first distinctive feature is obviously that pertaining to the entire lexical field, ‘time’. It sets apart all these lexemes from every other lexeme. The various classes have already been discussed in § 3. As far as dimensions are concerned, see § 7.1. This leaves three additional semantic features to be accounted for. The first is the feature ‘astronomical’, which is common to several lexemes belonging in the lexical field. This trait describes the profound link between the movement of celestial bodies and time measurement. As for *ḥds*³, *ḥds*² and *yrḥ* the focus is on lunar phases. Every 29 days, that is, every month the Moon shows the same phase to Earth. Hence, the subsequent feature, ‘period of 29 days’. The position relevant to *ḥds*² is reached by the Moon
when a conjunction between the satellite, Earth and the Sun occurs, such that the lunar disc is not visible. Since it was directly related to the rhythm of agricultural life, in ancient times this moment assumed a festive character for many cultures. The semantic feature ‘definite’ indicates that the denoted portion of time has well-defined limits.

Data reveal, and the semic composition shown above reflects this, that ḫds and yrḥ are interchangeable variants. The fact that the latter virtually disappears from the rest of the functional languages testifies to its prosaic character. However, this is not consistent with the situation observed in LBH3.

6.2 Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)

Two lexical units can be found in EBH2:

\( ḫds^1 \) “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

\( ḫds^2 \) “(day of) New Moon” → “time” + “feasts” + “technical-religious dimension” + “astronomical” + “definite”

As far as the early poetical language is concerned, yrḥ does not belong in the lexical field.

6.3 Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)

The data are consistent with those observed in the early poetical corpus:

\( ḫds^1 \) “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

\( ḫds^2 \) “(day of) New Moon” → “time” + “feasts” + “technical-religious dimension” + “astronomical” + “definite”

6.4 Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)

The same two lexical units were identified as in EBH2 and EBH4:

\( ḫds^1 \) “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

\( ḫds^2 \) “(day of) New Moon” → “time” + “feasts” + “technical-religious dimension” + “astronomical” + “definite”
Comparing the two historical-narrative corpora, one notices the absence of *yrb* from the late one.

6.5 Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)

The following lexical units are identified:

- *ḥds* “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

- *yrb* “month” → “time” + “time units” + “objective dimension” + “astronomical” + “period of 29 days” + “definite”

It is worth noting that in the poetical corpus of Job *ḥds* disappears. On the contrary, *yrb* is present.

7. Paradigmatic Analysis

7.1 Early Historical-Narrative Hebrew (EBH1)

As far as the topic of this paper is concerned, two dimensions can be distinguished: the *objective* dimension and the *technical-religious* one. The former includes the lexemes pertaining to the field that are used to place events/phenomena in time from an objective point of view. The main goal is that of devising a system through which every external observer can obtain temporal coordinates for any given event/phenomenon. And said coordinates are valid for every observer. There is no room for interpretation. Since lexemes like *ḥds*, *yrb*, *ḥqr* ‘morning’, *inh* ‘year’, *ywm* ‘day’ etc. belong in this dimension, they stand in paradigmatic opposition to other members of the field like *wlm* ‘the remotest time’, *qdm* ‘ancient time’ etc., which belong in the *subjective* dimension, or to *ḥds*, which belongs in the *technical-religious* dimension. As far as the technical-religious dimension is concerned, the perspective from which the observer experiences time is a ritual one. Time is perceived through its reoccurring cycles, that mark the social and agricultural life of the community, and for this reason it enters the realm of the sacred. Therefore, the new moon is not only an astronomical phenomenon through which one can measure time, but also a means of self-determination for the community and a guarantee that order will be preserved.

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7.2 Early Poetical Hebrew (EBH2)

The same remarks apply to the early poetical language. Given its absence, the oppositions between yrḥ and the other two lexical units are no longer active.

7.3 Juridical-Cultic Hebrew (EBH4)

The opposition between ḫds¹ and ḫds² by virtue of their dimension and class is still active. The former belongs in the objective dimension, whilst the latter in the technical-religious one. yrḥ is no longer functional.

7.4 Late Historical-Narrative Hebrew (LBH1)

No change is observed in the paradigm. The gradual opposition between ḫds¹, šnh and ywm remains unchanged. The paradigm shows no traces of yrḥ.

7.5 Poetical Hebrew of Job (LBH3)

In LBH3 the opposition between ḫds¹ and ḫds² seems no longer functional, given that there is no trace of the latter. On the contrary, yrḥ can be found as the same interchangeable variant of ḫds³, both belonging in the objective dimension and in the class time units as in EBH1. Their gradual opposition to šnh and ywm is active.

Whether this anomaly has to be ascribed to the diatopically distinct character of this functional language, it is hard to discern without having examined post-biblical data. It may well be an ancient element preserved here and lost elsewhere. However, it may also be due to a fortuitous circumstance in the transmission of the text, if one takes account of the scarcity of data.

8. Conclusions

The semantic study of ḫds and yrḥ proposed in this paper has led to the conclusion that it is necessary to distinguish three lexical units, of which two are interchangeable variants. The theory according to which yrḥ would be the older lexeme designating ‘month’, subsequently superseded by ḫds³, is destined
for the time being to remain just that, a theory.\textsuperscript{41} If we exclude LBH3, what can be observed is a gradual fading of \textit{yrh} into non-existence during the transition from EBH to LBH. Before one can draw any final conclusion, it will be a necessary step to examine the corpora of Ben Sira’, of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of the Mishnah, in order to gain an overall perspective on this matter.

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the lexical field of time a study of all lexemes in all the functional languages is required. Such a study goes well beyond the scope of and the limits imposed to this paper. Focussing on these lexemes has nonetheless allowed us to discern the structure of the lexical field pertaining to these units. In ABH, EBH3 and LBH2 the field does not seem to include these substantives. This could be due to a fortuitous circumstance in the text tradition, since these corpora have a limited range. It could also mean that these units are typical of prose. In the other functional languages lexical combinations have helped define the two meanings that goes under the same signifier \textit{ḥdš}. It is worth noting that the opposition between \textit{ḥdš} and \textit{ḥdš} seems to have enjoyed a relative stability throughout the whole arc of biblical Hebrew, a fate that was not shared by \textit{yrh}.

\textit{Abbreviations}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
chs. & chapters \\
f. & feminine \\
fn & footnote \\
LF & lexical field \\
m. & masculine \\
ps. & person \\
pl. & plural \\
s. & singular \\
Gen & Genesis \\
Ex & Exodus \\
Lv & Leviticus \\
Nm & Numbers \\
Dt & Deuteronomy \\
Jos & Joshua \\
Jdg & Judges \\
1S & 1Samuel \\
2S & 2Samuel \\
1K & 1Kings \\
2K & 2Kings \\
Is & Isaiah \\
Jer & Jeremiah \\
Ezek & Ezekiel \\
Hos & Hosea \\
\end{tabular}

Jo  Joel
Am  Amos
Jon  Jonah
Zc  Zechariah
Mal  Malachi
Ps  Psalms
Prv  Proverbs
Ezr  Ezra
Neh  Nehemiah


References


