From polysemy to semantic change: remarks on the lexeme *miṣwà* in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew[*]

Romina Vergari
University of Florence (<romina.vergari@unifi.it>)

Abstract:

The paper discusses the semantic shifts of the lexeme *miṣwà* from Biblical Hebrew to Mishnaic Hebrew. This lexeme encodes some crucial notions of the Hebrew and Jewish value system, as those of commandment and duty. The linguistic data presented will offer a clear example of how the study of the late stratum of the biblical language can shed light on the diachronic semantic shift of the noun. Namely, Late Biblical Hebrew displays some significant semantic innovations, in the form of synchronic contextual variants, that will be fully developed in the post-biblical strata of the Hebrew language to the point of becoming the core meaning of the lexeme.

Keywords: *Diachrony, Mishnaic Hebrew, Polysemy, Semantics of Ancient Hebrew*

Introduction

The present paper is intended to offer a contribution to the semantic study of the lexeme *miṣwà*, which encodes one of the most central notions of the Hebrew and Jewish culture. The linguistic data presented stem from a systematic corpus-based distributional analysis conducted within the Historical-narrative Biblical Hebrew and within the Mishnaic Hebrew.[1] In particular,

---

[*] It is my pleasant duty to thank Dr. Hallel Baitner for the inspiring remarks on a first draft of the present paper presented at the Oxford Seminar in Advanced Jewish Studies held in the first half of 2018.

[1] The Mishnà is a collection of legal opinions which became the foundation document of rabbinic Judaism. Compiled in 200 C.E. in Eretz Israel by the patriarch Judah haNasi and his school, the Mishnà comprises the legal statements of the tannaim, i.e. rabbis, and the sages they considered to be their forebears, from Hellenistic times to the early 3rd cent. CE. This material, expressed in a spare post-biblical Hebrew, is arranged in 63 tractates divided into six orders: *Zeraim* ('seeds'), dealing with agricultural matters; *Moʿed* ('set

the survey aims at showing how the later linguistic strata of BH display innovations in the form of peripheral contextual semantic variants, which will become crucial for the diachronic developments of the lexeme.[2] I have focused my research on the Historical-narrative BH[3] as this language variety[4] often bears witness of linguistic innovations coming from non-literary uses of the language, especially compared to the poetic and the cultic-legal functional languages, which are generally more conservative and archaizing.

1. *The usage of* miṣwà *in Historical-narrative BH*

Before tackling the examination of the sense-nodules[5] activated by the usage of the noun *miṣwà* in historical-narrative BH, it is useful to make a few overall observations on its distribution and frequency and its syntagmatic features. The noun occurs 64 times in SBH1 (21 of them in the singular and 43 in the plural), and 38 in LBH1 (22 of them in the singular and 16 in the plural).[6] If we normalize the corpora of SBH1 and LBH1 per 10,000 words, we can easily observe that the normalized frequency ratio of *miṣwà* increases considerably from SBH1 to LBH1, going from 5.27 to 8.91.[7] This rise, moreover, concerns mainly the singular (from 1.72 to 5.16), while the plural remains substantially stable (ranging from 3.54 in SBH1 to 3.75 in LBH1).

times'), on the observance of festivals; *Našim* ('women'), primarily on relations between women and men; *Nezikin* ('damages'), on civil and criminal law; *Kodašim* ('holy things'), on sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple; *Tohorot* ('purities'), on the transfer, avoidance, and removal of ritual pollution. The division into tractates was already more or less established by the 3rd cent., but their arrangement within each order varies in different manuscript traditions. Tractate ʾAḇot ('Fathers'), a collection of wisdom sayings by a range of rabbis included within the order *Nezikin*, belongs to a different literary genre from the rest of the Mishnà. It includes a few quotations by rabbis of the generation after Judah haNasi, and may have been added to the Mishnà after its initial redaction; for an introduction see Strack and Stemberger 1992: 119-166, and Cohen 2007: 121-143. For the place of MH within the history of Hebrew language, see Sáenz-Badillos 1993: 161-201.

[2] With regard to the debated topic of diachrony in BH, especially in the domain of lexical semantics, I refer to the works of Avi Hurvitz, starting from his Hebrew University doctoral thesis, Hurvitz 1972, and subsequent works on corpus-based approach to the study of the BH lexicon, as Hurvitz 1995.

[3] For the identification of the Ancient Hebrew functional languages, I refer to the following important works: Vivian 1978; Zatelli 1978; Zatelli 1995, and Zatelli 2004.

[4] A *language variety*, or *lect*, is any intra-linguistic cluster of phenomena that we tend to refer to as dialect, sociolect, stylistic varieties; see Geeraerts and Kristiansen 2019: 150.

[5] For the definition of sense-nodules as relatively autonomous units of sense capable of playing an independent role in various semantic processes, see Cruse 2000: 30.

[6] For an analytical presentation of the data relating to the syntagmatic analysis of the noun in BH, see Appendix 5 in Vergari 2021.

[7] Considering that SBH1 and LBH1 are not corpora of the same size, the number of occurrences of a given textual item does not accurately reflect the relative frequency of it in each corpus. In order to compare corpora (or sub-corpora) of different size, we need then to normalize the occurrences of the item based on the respective total number of words, assumed to be 121,409 for SBH1 and 42,628 for LBH1. The raw frequencies of *miṣwà* are then: SBH1 = 64 per 121,409 words; LBH1 = 38 per 42,628 words. To normalize, we want to calculate the frequencies of our lexical item for each corpus per the same number of words. The convention is to calculate per 10,000 words for smaller corpora and per 1,000,000 for larger ones. In our case, we clearly opt for normalizing per 10,000. Calculating a normalized frequency is a straightforward process. The equation can be represented in this way: 64/121,409 is equal to x/10,000. We have 64 occurrences of *miṣwà* per 121,409 words in SBH1, which is the same as x (our normalized frequency) per 10,000 words. We can solve for x with simple cross multiplication: $x(121,409) = 64(10,000)$; $x = 64(10,000)/121,409$. Then, we can say that the normalized frequency ratio (per 10,000) of *miṣwà* is equal to 5.2 in SBH1. Generalizing we can find the normalized frequency of a given lexical item (per 10,000) by applying the following function: $F_N = F_O(10^4)/C$, where F_N is the normalized frequency, F_O the observed frequency, and C the corpus size. For the basic tools of lexical statistics, see Baroni 2008.

In terms of diachrony, *miṣwà* is regarded as a later formation compared to other legal words such as *ḥoq* and *mišpaṭ*, which are attested already in ABH. In terms of etymology, *miṣwà* is a transparent word; it is a nominal derivation from the verbal root *ṣwh* 'to command, to order,'[8] with *m-* preformative added to the verbal stem to produce a noun indicating the action to which the verb points (*nomen actionis*), or more frequently to its result (*nomen rei actae*).[9] Based on the distinction between *syntactic derivation* and *lexical derivation*, the noun can be included in the first class. As expected for these types of derivations, the word changes its lexical category from verb to noun, while the eventive meaning of the root is not touched and the noun retains the same valency of the verb.[10] Given its close connection with the root *ṣwh*, the noun embeds the idea of authority, which turns out to be an inherent feature of its meaning.[11] While the other words of the lexical field of 'rules and regulations' very often derive their authoritative reading from their usage in context[12] – mostly via syntagmatic modulation, suffice it here to recall the important role that the verb *ṣwh* plays in the domain of adnominal relative clauses attached to *ḥoq* or *mišpaṭ* – the substantive *miṣwà* refers to the idea of power *per se*, applying both to humans or divine authority.[13]

When divine authority is at stake, two main patterns of usage can be clearly discerned, with a remarkable impact on the reading's modulation. The first syntagmatic pattern is characterized by the usage of the term in the plural, specified by genitives pointing to God and accompanied by joint terms like *ḥuqqim*/*ḥuqqot*, or *mišpaṭim*. This pattern is typical of the formulaic language of the Deuteronomistic discourse tradition. In cognitive terms, the specific function of this text type is to convey the idea that the teaching of Moses is a unified bounded corpus made of discrete statements conceptualized as 'commandments.' Thus, a relation of meronymy can be envisaged between this contextual reading of *miṣwà* (i.e. *miṣwot*) and the term *torà* as it is used within Deuteronomy. The second syntagmatic pattern is characterized by the usage of the term in the singular, accompanied by joint terms like *torà*, *ḥuqqim*/*ḥuqqot*, or *mišpaṭim*, additionally combined with the adnominal demonstrative *zot* or the quantifier *kol*. As I will show through the following examples, this pattern's frequency increases considerably from SBH1 to LBH1. When the context triggers this particular reading, *miṣwà* turns out to be a referential synonym of *torà*, with remarkable ideological implications.[14] In Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic discourse tradition, *torà* and *miṣwà* appear to function as onomasiological alternatives to name the teaching of Moses in its path of formalization and fixation, and *miṣwà* is chosen precisely to place special emphasis on the authoritative aspect of it. In historical-narrative language thus the body of literature considered authoritative can be conceptualized in a unified manner either as a teaching (mainly an oral teaching in SBH1, and a written text to be expounded, explained,

---

[8] See *HALOT*, 7899: 1) 'to give an order, to command'; 'to command, instruct, order'; 3) 'to send someone (to a place, for a task)'; *BDB*, 8061: 1) 'to lay,' 'to charge upon; 2 and 3) 'to charge,' 'to command'; 4) 'to commission'; 5) 'to appoint,' 'to ordain'; for more detailed syntagmatic information see also *DCH* 7: 93-102. Jenni includes this stem among the transitive resultative verbs without basic form *qal*; see Jenni 1968: 246-248.

[9] See Joüon and Muraoka 2006: § 88 L, *e*.

[10] In nouns formed via lexical derivation instead, the change of category also affects the meaning, as in the case of *zbḥ* 'to slaughter for sacrifice,' and *mizbeḥ* 'altar'; see Panevová 2014: 7. Such a distinction has been set by the seminal work Kuryłowicz 1936.

[11] See Levine *TDOT* 8: 506.

[12] Especially through the usage of adnominal relative clauses.

[13] See *BDB* 8063: 1) 'commandment' of men (vz. of kings); 2) 'commandment of God,' in the singular: 'commandment,' 'code of law'; in the plural 'commandments,' of commands of D and later codes; and *HALOT*, 5540: 'commission,' '(individual) commandment,' '(set of all the) commandments,' 'right'; see also *DCH* 5: 446-448, 'command(ment).'

[14] For a definition of referential synonymy, see Grondelaers, Speelman, and Geeraerts, 2007: 994-995.

and interpreted in LBH1) or as a command to be executed. The latter conceptualization is far from being obvious. It is important to point out, as Levine has done, that it is within the hortatory Deuteronomic discourse tradition that the divine will expressed in the body of Scriptures as a unified textual corpus was initially understood and then transmitted as a command. It is worth stressing that this particular interpretation will be maximized in later rabbinic tradition, especially in halakhic discourse. As I will show, the data emerging from the present corpus-based analysis basically agree with the research in the domain of textual criticism in connecting this specific reading with Deuteronomistic redactional activity.

1. Expression of Divine Authority

1.1 The teaching of Moses as 'Commandment'

In Standard historical-narrative BH, especially within Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic discourse tradition, many examples can be found of a collective reading of *miṣwà*,[15] which parallels in many respects the usage of the noun *ṭorà*. I will focus on three main text types: *koֹl hammiṣwà* (singular definite plus quantifier)[16]; *hammiṣwà hazzoֹt* (singular definite plus adnominal demonstrative)[17]; and the pair *hatֹּorà wəhammiṣwà*.[18]

All these syntagmatic types are united by two facts. On the one hand, *miṣwà* occurs without those adnominal modifiers (pronominal suffixes or genitives) that are required for encoding the complements of eventive nouns. This fact suggests that the substantive is slowly changing its semantic type. It is formed through a syntactic derivation to indicate the process or the act of commanding and is becoming a referential noun that points to a complex object. On the other hand, the schemes under scrutiny convey a similar interpretation of *miṣwà*, which does not correspond to the uniplex reading 'one single commandment' but rather to an abstract unified notion corresponding to the revelation of the divine will as a whole.

I begin my analysis with the text type *kol hammiṣwà*, in which *koֹl* functions as the universal quantifier 'all,' 'whole' and *hammiṣwà* as its determiner. The combination turns out to be quite peculiar, if one compares the standard usage of *miṣwà* and other terms for rules and regulations in similar phrases.[19]

---

[15] A certain number of them are listed in Wienfeld's appendix "Deuteronomic phraseology"; Weinfeld 1972: 320-365; *DCH* distinguishes between 'singular used collectively' (Exod 24:12; Num 15:31; Deut 5:31; 6:1; 7:11; 8:1; 11:8; 15:5; 19:9; Josh 22:3; Ps 19:9; 119:96; 2 Chr 14:3; 31:21; Sir 6:37; 10:19; 15:15; 35:18.23; 37:12; 44:20; 45:5; 1QpHab 5:5; 1QS 8:17; 4QDc 1:6; GnzPs 1:10; and singular for 'one particular command' (1 Sam 13:13; 1 Kgs 13:21; Mal 2:14; Job 23:12; 2 Chr 29:25); see *DCH* 5: 446.

[16] See Deut 8:1; 11:8, 22; 27:1; 31:5 (SBH1); compare also Deut 5:31; 15:5; 19:9 (SBH4).

[17] See Deut 11:22; 30:11 (SBH1); compare also Deut 6:25; 15:5; 19:9 (SBH4).

[18] See Exod 24:12; Josh 22:5; in combination with other terms: 2 Kgs 17:34.37 (SBH1); and 2 Chr 14:3; 31:21 (LBH1). It must be said that additional schemes could be added, that convey a unified conceptualization of the Mosaic teaching (or the divine will) as *command*. On the one hand, some occurrences attest the usage of the noun in the singular, combined with other terms for divine precepts in plural, suggesting a semantic relationship of meronymy between them: *ʾt hmṣwh wʾt hḥqym wʾt hmšpṭym* (Deut 7:11). On the other hand, cases in which the term in the singular is specified by a relative clause with the verb *ṣwh* trigger the idea that the divine will be revealed through the mediation of Moses is a command (Deut 27:1). To this conceptualization, must be added the phrase *mṣwt Mšh* (2 Chr 8:13). Finally, the idea that the revelation of the divine will is a command *per se* is definitively sanctioned by expressions as *mṣwt YHWH* (or *ʾlhym*) (Josh 22:3; 1 Sam 13:13; Ezra 10:3).

[19] See Netzer 2013: 313; see *HALOT*, 4240, namely the meaning listed as seventh: "*kl* preceding collective

Normally, *miṣwà* combines with *kọl* in the plural, yielding the multiplexing reading 'all the commandments,' as in the following example:[20]

(1)   Deut 28:1
        whyh ʾm šmwʿ tšmʿ bqwl YHWH ʾlhyk lšmr lʿśwt ʾt kl mṣwtyw ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywmwntnk YHWH ʾlhyk ʿlywn ʿl kl gwyy h ʾrṣ
        'And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto the voice of YHWH your God, to observe to do *all his commandments* which I command you this day that YHWH your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth.' (NKJV)

The same applies to *ḥoq*, *ḥuqqà* and *mišpaṭ*. [21] These lexical items, nevertheless, occur as determiners of *kọl* also in the singular, but compared to *miṣwà*, they do not come to designate the whole teaching of Moses. The reading that most frequently arises in context is rather 'one single (specific) instance as a whole' of the type of statements to which each lexeme refers. The reference of such phrases corresponds to a cohesive unit excerpted from a body of statements alike. This phenomenon is observable in the following context:

(2)   Num 9:12
        kkl ḥqt hpsḥ yʿśw ʾtw
        '*according to the whole regulation of Pesaḥ* they shall do it.'[22]

In this passage, the reference of *ḥuqqat* is further bounded by the genitive *happesaḥ*, triggering the reading 'according the whole regulation of *Pesaḥ*.' It is in fact a special set of rules regarded as a unity and singled out from a multiplex body of discrete statutes regulating other matters.[23] The term *mišpaṭ* displays a similar pattern of usage in two instances pertaining to SBH2 and LBH2; in both the noun is further specified, in one case by a suffix:

'all': *kl h ʾdm* 'all men' Gen 7:21 (also Num 12:3; Judg 16:17)"; see also *BDB* 4485: "*kl* followed often by a singular, to be understood collectively, whether with or without the article: e.g. 2 Sam 20:22 *wtbw ʾ h ʾšh ʾl kl h ʾm* 'the woman went (to speak) to all the people."

[20] See also Deut 4:6; 28:1.15.45; 30:8; 1 Kgs 6:12; 2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 35:18 (SBH1); and 1 Chr 28:8; 2 Chr 24:20; Neh 10:30 (LBH1).

[21] Concerning *ḥuqqim*, see *ʾt kl hḥqym h ʾlh* 'all these statutes' (Deut 4:6), compare also Lev 10:11; Deut 5:31; 6:24; 11:32 (SBH4); concerning *ḥuqqọt*, see Num 9:3; Deut 6:2 (SBH1); Lev 19:37; 20:22; Ezek 18:19.21; 43:11[x2]; 44:5 (SBH4); Concerning *mišpaṭim*, see Exod 24:3; 1 Kgs 6:38 (SBH1); compare 2 Sam 22:23 (SBH2); Num 9:3; Lev 19:37; 20:22 (SBH4); and Ps 119:13 (LBH2).

[22] Among modern translations, some opt for a collective reading of the phrase *ḥqt hpsḥ*, see: "when they celebrate the Passover, they must follow *all the regulations*" (NIV); "according to *all the ordinances* of the Passover they shall keep it" (NKJV); others provide a unified reading, see "they shall offer it in strict accord with *the law* of the Passover sacrifice" (NJPS); "they will keep it, following *the entire* Passover *ritual*" (NJB); "according to *all the statute* for the Passover they shall keep it" (RSV); "according to *all the statute* of the Passover they shall observe it" (NASB); "the Passover shall be kept exactly as *the law* prescribes" (NEB).

[23] This usage is most likely attested also for *miṣwà*; the expression *ʾt kl hmṣwh ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm hywm* in Deut 27:1 may refer either to the requirement to erect an altar or the requirement to monumentalize the *tọrà*; but this passage is highly complex in terms of composition, and may reflects multiple additions of different textual material.

(3)   Prov 16:33
         bḥyq ywṭl ʾt hgwrl wmYHWH kl mšpṭw
         'The lot is cast into the bosom and *all its judgment* comes from YHWH.'[24]

in the second case by a governed Nph:

(4)   Ps 119:160
         wlʿwlm kl mšpṭ ṣdqk
         '*each of your righteous judgments* endures forever.'[25]

In the first example, the espression *kol mišpaṭọ* designates a single specific response of the *gọral*, the lot cast for the decision of questions, whereas the structure *kol mišpaṭ ṣidqẹka* in the second example can be explained assuming the distributive universal reading 'each,' 'every' for the quantifier *kọl*.

The examples in which *miṣwà* determines *kọl* in the singular, on the other hand, deviates decidedly from the pattern sketched above. Firstly, the phrase does not produce the distributive reading 'each commandment' nor the collective one 'all the commandments.' The examples collected suggest rather a unified interpretation pointing to a mass continuous entity, which is bounded only by the relevant adnominal relative clause 'that I command you today.' The noun's referent is thus as extensive as the speeches that Moses is delivering within the framework of the text of Deuteronomy. Accordingly, the usage of *miṣwà* comes to comprise not only the normative or directive sub-sections of these speeches, viz. the rules governing individual subjects, but also the narrative and hortatory parts of them. Such a usage punctuates the redactional interventions scattered throughout Deuteronomy, framing its structure, and expressing the clear ideology of the editors towards the text *in fieri*. In their estimation, the purport of Moses's speeches collected in Deuteronomy must be viewed alternatively as a teaching (*tọrà*) or as a command (*miṣwà*). The relevant examples of this reading are listed below.

The current structure of the second oration of Moses (Deut 4:44-28:68)[26] has been regarded as the outcome of a considerable amount of literary activity pertaining to one redactional stratum of the book.[27] The conceptualization of this whole unit as a *miṣwà* appears to fit very well the agenda of the redactors, as the following passage clearly shows.

(5)   Deut 8:1
         kl hmṣwh ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywm tšmrwn lʿśwt lmʿn tḥywn wrbytm wbʾtm wyrštm ʾt hʾrṣ ʾšr nšbʿ YHWH lʾbtykm
         '*the whole commandment* that I command *you* (sg.) today, you (pl.) shall be careful to do, that you (pl.) may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that YHWH swore to give to your fathers.'[28]

---

[24] See Fox 2009: 623.

[25] Several modern translations render *kl mšpṭ ṣdqk* in plural (NASB; NIV; NJB; NKJV; RSV; NJPS), suggesting a collective reading; see also Weiser's translation "everyone of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever"; see Weiser 1962: 737.

[26] According to Rofé 2002: 1-4.

[27] Many scholars consider the redactor named D$_2$ responsible for this redactional activity, namely for the opening of the collection (5:1; 6:9); 2), additional portions of the present introduction to chapters 6-11, which originally belonged to the "*tọrà*" (7:1-11; 11:22-25), and the overall current structure of the second oration (5:28; 6:1; 8:1; 11:22; 11:32-12:1; 26:16). According to Rofé the objective of the redactor was "to implement a comprehensive legal code, which would secure the status of law of the land through the sanction of royal backing and replace earlier legal compilations or the existing customary law," see Rofé 2002: 6.

[28] Among modern translations, "all the commandment" (RSV), and "all the Instruction" (NJPS) are in line with the reading I propose, while both "all the commandments" (NASB; NJB) and "every command" (NIV; NKJV) suggest a collective interpretation of *kol hammiṣwà*.

As observed by Weinfeld, the shift in person deixis from singular in the first clause (*ʾăšer ʾanoki məṣṣawəka*), to plural in the rest of the sentence (*tišmərun… tiḥyun urəḇitem uḇaʾtem wirištem*) is replicated in v. 19.[29] This fact may allude to the framing function of both verses, which indeed forms a kind of *inclusio* for chapter 8.[30]

The same degree of literary elaboration can be envisaged in chapter 11, within which the phrase *kol hammiṣwà* plays a significant role as a redactional mark:

(6)   Deut 11:8
        wšmrtm ʾt kl ḥmṣwh ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywm lmʿn tḥzqw wbʾtm wyrštm ʾt hʾrṣ ʾšr ʾtm ʿbrym šmh lˈršth
        'you shall therefore keep *the whole commandment*[31] that I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and take possession of the land that you are going over to possess' (RSV)

(7)   Deut 11:22
        ky ʾm šmr tšmrwn ʾt kl ḥmṣwh hzʾt ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm lʿśth lʾhbh ʾt YHWH ʾlhykm llkt bkl drkyw wldbqh bw (23) *whwryš YHWH ʾt kl hgwym hʾlh mlpnykm wyrštm gwym gdlym wʿṣmym mkm*
        'for if you will be careful to do *all this commandment*[32] that I command you to do, loving YHWH your God, walking in all his ways, and cleaving to him, then YHWH will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves.' (RSV)

Deuteronomy 11:22 recapitulates the statement expressed in v. 8, but it changes the arguments in favor of loyalty; whereas at the beginning of the section the keeping of the commandment is motivated by the inheritance of the good land and enjoyment of its produce,[33] the reward consists rather in military success in the final reprise of the theme. In this redactional verse, the phrase *kol hammiṣwà* is further specified by the adnominal demonstrative, with an obvious function of discourse deictic. Such an interpretation is attested also in other contexts:

(8)   Deut 30:11
        ky ḥmṣwh hzʾt ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywm lʾ nplʾt hwʾ mmk wlʾ rḥqh hwʾ
        'for *this commandment* that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off.' (RSV)

Remarkably, this syntagmatic structuring of *miṣwà* parallels that of *ṭọrà*. All the data collected suggest an interpretation of *miṣwà* as a continuous bounded entity designating the entire body of the Mosaic teaching in its process of fixation within the book of Deuteronomy, with particular emphasis on its binding force as a commandment that requires first and foremost

---

[29] See Deut 8:19 *ʾm šḵḥ tšḵḥ ʾt YHWH ʾlhyk … hʿdty bkm hywm ky ʾbd tʾbdwn* "if you (sg.) shall forget YHWH your God, and walk (sg.) after other gods, and serve (sg.) them, and worship them, I forewarn you (pl.) this day that you (pl.) shall surely perish."

[30] See Weinfeld 1991: 441.

[31] Compare "all the commandments" (KJV).

[32] Compare "all these commandments" (KJV), that assumes again a collective reading.

[33] This is a typical motif of the Deuteronomistic discourse tradition, see Weinfeld 1972: 341.

observance and obedience.[34] Moreover, such a usage can be traced back to the Deuteronomistic editorial enterprise, representing a peculiar feature of its discourse tradition. The structuring described so far and the underlying ideology deserve a proper place within the Deuteronomistic phraseology and should be integrated in the list of stylistic devices expressing observance of the law and loyalty to the covenant made by Weinfeld.[35]

In addition to what has been observed so far, it must be said that the close connection between *ṭọrà* and *miṣwà* as onomasiological alternatives to name the same referent is not only a characteristic typical of Deuteronomy, but it is also found in texts that cannot be directly related to its tradition. To give a clear example, I will now analyze the pair *ṭọrà umiṣwà*.[36] This combination occurs both in isolation and within more complex juxtapositions.[37] Interestingly enough, the two terms always agree in number and determination, which is a typical feature of hendiadys.[38] I begin my overview with an emblematic and famous context:

(9)   Exod 24:12
        wyʾmr YHWH ʾl mš ʿlh ʾly hhrh whyh šm wʾtnh lk ʾt lḥt hʾbn whtwrh whmṣwh ʾšr ktbty lhwrtm
        'And YHWH said unto Moses: 'Come up to me into the mount and be there; and I will give you the tables of stone, *the law* (lit. *the teaching and the commandment*) which I have written, that you may teach them.'[39]

Among commentators, Houtman understands *wəhattọrà wəhammiṣwà* as a hendiadys and renders it accordingly: '(the tablets of stone) containing the binding rules'[40]; Propp, on the other hand, opts for the more literal rendering: '(the stone tablets), the direction and the command.'[41] According to Propp's view, the first *wə* (*wəhattọrà*) must be understood as explicative.[42] Although he cautiously argues that "it is unclear whether what YHWH proposes to write in 24:12 is the same or a different text,"[43] nevertheless, his translation implies the appositive function of *wəhattọrà wəhammiṣwà* with respect to *luḥọt haʾeben* and, thus, he takes it as an identity of reference.[44] Another element, moreover, deserves to be taken into due consideration, namely the relative clause *ʾăšer kaṯaḇti ləhọrọtam*, which modifies the noun phrase *wəhattọrà*

---

[34] See Levine, *TDOT* 8: 509-510.

[35] See Weinfeld 1972: 332-339.

[36] For the plural usage, see Exod 16:28 *miṣwọtay wətọrọtay*, with the multiplexing reading "commandments and instructions" (SBH1); for the singular usage, see 2 Chr 14:3 *hattọrà wəhammiṣwà*, and 2 Chr 31:21 *uḇattọrà uḇammiṣwà* (LBH1).

[37] See 2 Kgs 17:34 *kəḥuqqọtam ukəmišpaṭam wəḵattọrà wəḵammiṣwà*; and 2 Kgs 17:37 *wəʾet haḥuqqim wəʾet hammišpaṭim wəhattọrà wəhammiṣwà*.

[38] See the relevant literature on the topic of hendiadys, in particular: Avishur 1972; Kuntz 2004; Lillas-Schuil 2006.

[39] Among modern translations, many understand *miṣwà* as a collective, and render it accordingly, see "I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandments" (NIV; NKJV); "I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments" (NJPS).

[40] See Houtman 2000: 296.

[41] See Propp 2006: 5.

[42] See *GKC* §155, 1a; it must be pointed out, moreover, that both SP *ʾt lḥt hʾbn htwrh whmṣwh*, and LXX τὰ πυξία τὰ λίθινα τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς witness a variant without the conjunction before *hattọrà*.

[43] See Propp 2006: 298-299.

[44] It is important to observe that, unlike what Propp claims, LXX takes only *wəhammiṣwà* as a collective tantamount to plural and not both terms (see τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς; see also Vulg. *legem ac mandata*).

wəhammiṣwà. The noun *miṣwà* is not included among the complements of the verb *yrh* (H/1 hiqṭil) 'to instruct,' 'to teach,' while the noun *ṭorà* (etymologically related to this root) is attested twice in this function, both in the domain of relative clauses,[45] and in the domain of verbal phrases.[46] This fact suggests a secondary juxtaposition of the term *miṣwà*, grounded in a process of conceptual identification.

The usage of *miṣwà* and *ṭorà* as a pair is steadily attested across Standard and Late historical-narrative language:

> (10)   Josh 22:5
> *rq šmrw mʾd lʿśwt ʾt hmṣwh wʾt htwrh ʾšr ṣwh ʾtkm mšh ʿbd YHWH lʾhbh ʾt YHWH ʾlhykm wllkt bkl drkyw wlšmr mṣwtyw wldbqh bw wlʿbdw bkl lbbkm wbkl npškm*
> 'Only take diligent heed to put in practice *the law*,[47] which Moses the servant of YHWH commanded you, to love YHWH your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep *his commandments*, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul'

and it is found up to the later linguistic layers of the biblical corpus:

> (11)   2 Chr 31:21
> *wbkl mʿśh ʾšr hḥl bʿbwdt byt hʾlhym wbtwrh wbmṣwh ldrš lʾlhyw bkl lbbw ʿśh whṣlyḥ*
> 'every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with *the law*,[48] seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.'

1.2 Commandment

Far more frequent and spread across different discourse traditions is the usage of *miṣwà* pointing to a single specific commandment originating from God. Such a reading arises mostly from the usage of the noun in the plural, which expresses the obvious multiplex discrete conceptualization 'commandments.' It is important to observe that the plural occurrences of the term are normally specified either by pronominal suffixes pointing to God (*miṣwọtay*, *miṣwọteḵa*, *miṣwọtayw*)[49], or by the genitive YHWH (*miṣwọt YHWH*)[50], a fact that marks a clear difference with the use described in the previous paragraph.

Two different aspects of this text type deserve special attention, one being formal, and the other referential. Firstly, considering the consonantal shape of the text, the form *mṣwt YHWH*

---

[45] See Deut 17:11 (SBH4).

[46] See Deut 33:10 (ABH).

[47] Literally "the teaching and the commandment"; compare "the commandment and the law" (NASB; NIV; NKJV; RSV); "the commandments and the Law" (NJB); "the commandments and the laws" (NEB); "the Instruction and the Teaching" (NJPS).

[48] NET translates like this; several translations, however, read *miṣwà* as a collective, compare "the law and the commands" (NIV); "the law or the commandments" (NJB; RSV).

[49] See Gen 26:5; Exod 16:28; Deut 4:40; 8:11; 11:1; 27:10; 28:15.45; 30:10.16; 1 Kgs 2:3; 3:14; 8:58; 9:6; 11:34.38; 2 Kgs 17:13; 23:3; (SBH1); and Ezra 9:10; 9:14; Neh 1:5.9; 1 Chr 28:7; 29:19; 2 Chr 7:19; 17:4; 34:31; Qoh 12:13 (LBH1).

[50] See Deut 10:13 (SBH1); and Ezra 7:11; Neh 10:30; 1 Chr 28:8; 2 Chr 24:20 (LBH1).

is ambiguous in terms of morphological number, it can be read either *miṣwat YHWH* or *miṣwọt YHWH*. Only context, in particular agreement, can help the reader disambiguate such a reading. Otherwise, we must rely on the Masoretic reading tradition. The second aspect concerns the reference of this expression. Its usage suggests that the meaning of *miṣwà* should be regarded as inherently underspecified with respect to the feature "origin of the command." Assuming its vagueness, the term calls for contextual specifications (genitives, relative clauses, pronominal suffixes), which have the main function of focusing the attention of the recipient on the origin of such a command. In other words, the divine origin of the command is not fully lexicalized in the semantics of *miṣwà* in BH as is the case for the English noun *commandment* compared to *command*.[51] Such feature was instead triggered by operations of sematic composition in context. A selection of examples showing this feature follows:

(12)   Deut 4:2
        lʾ tspw ʿl hdbr ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm wlʾ tgrʿw mmnw lšmr ʾt mṣwt YHWH ʾlhykm ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm
        'You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep *the commandments of YHWH your God* that I command you' (RSV)

(13)   Deut 11:13
        whyh ʾm šmʿ tšmʿw ʾl mṣwty ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm hywm hywm lʾhbh ʾt YHWH ʾlhykm wlʿbdw bkl lbbkm wbkl npškm
        'And if you will obey *my commandments* which I command you this day, to love YHWH your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul (v.14 he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil)' (RSV)

(14)   Deut 11: 26–27
        rʾh ʾnky ntn lpnykm hywm brkh wqllh (27) ʾt hbrkh ʾšr tšmʿw ʾl mṣwt YHWH ʾlhykm ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm hywm (28) whqllh ʾm lʾ tšmʿw ʾl mṣwt YHWH ʾlhykm
        'Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: (27) the blessing, if you obey *the commandments of YHWH your God*, which I command you this day (28) and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of YHWH your God (but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known).' (RSV)

(15)   Deut 28:13
        wntnk YHWH lrʾš wlʾ lznb whyyt rq lmʿlh wlʾ thyh lmṭh ky tšmʿ ʾl mṣwt YHWH ʾlhyk ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywm lšmr wlʿšwt
        'And YHWH will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward; if you obey the commandments of YHWH your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them.' (RSV)

---

[51] The feature "divine origin" is lexicalized in many modern languages that display semantic variance between a vague term "command," and a specific term "divine command", see Italian *comando* vs. *comandamento*; French *ordre* vs. *commandement*; German *Befehl* vs. *Gebote*; Spanish *orden* vs. *mandamiento*.

(16)   2 Kgs 18:6

wydbq bYHWH lʾ sr mʾḥryw wyšmr mṣwtyw ʾšr ṣwh YHWH ʾt mšh

'For he (king Hezekiah) held fast to YHWH. He did not depart from following him but kept *the commandments* that the Lord commanded Moses.' (RSV)

It is useful to mention that the term in the plural occurs often in combination with the quantifier *kọl* within both SBH1 and LBH1:

(17)   Deut 28:15

whyh ʾm lʾ tšmʿ bqwl YHWH ʾlhyk lšmr lʿśwt ʾt kl mṣwtyw wḥqtyw ʾšr ʾnky mṣwk hywm wbʾw ʿlyk kl hqllwt hʾlh whśygwk

'But if you will not obey the voice of YHWH your God or be careful to do *all his commandments* and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you' (RSV)

(18)   1 Chr 28:8

wʿth lʿyny kl yśrʾl qhl YHWH wbʾzny ʾlhynw šmrw wdršw kl mṣwt YHWH ʾlhykm lmʿn tyršw ʾt hʾrṣ hṭwbh whnḥltm lbnykm ʾḥrykm ʿd ʿwlm

'Now therefore in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of YHWH, and in the hearing of our God, observe and seek out *all the commandments of YHWH your God*, that you may possess this good land and leave it for an inheritance to your children after you for ever.' (RSV)

It is difficult to underestimate the pivotal role that the verb *ṣwh* (0/2, qiṭṭel) (especially within adnominal relative clauses) played in the conceptualization of the will of God as a command or a bounded set of discrete commandments, especially taking into account the fact that the noun *miṣwà* does not occur in the most ancient cultic and legal texts; its place is normally occupied by other terms such as *dəḇarim* (in the plural, in particular in the phrase *dibrẹ habbərit*)[52], *bərit*,[53] *tọrà*,[54] and *ḥuqqim* (in the plural)[55], used in isolation or in combination to form chains. These lexemes clearly derive their binding value from the syntagmatic relation with the predicate *ṣwh*

---

[52] Compare Exod 19:7 *wyśm lpnyhm ʾt kl hdbrym hʾlh ʾšr ṣwhw YHWH* "(Moses) acquainted them with everything that YHWH had commanded him"; Exod 35:1 *ʾlh hdbrym ʾšr ṣwh YHWH lʿśwt ʾtm* "these are the things that YHWH has commanded you to do"; Deut 28:14 *wlʾ tqwr mkl hdbrym ʾšr ʾnky mṣwh ʾtkm hywm* "do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the things that I command you this day"; and Deut 28:69 *ʾlh dbry hbryt ʾšr ṣwh YHWH ʾt mšh* "these are the terms of the covenant which YHWH commanded Moses" (SBH1); see also Jer 11:8 (SBH2); and Lev 8:36; Deut 6:6; 12:28 (SBH4).

[53] Compare Deut 4:13 *wygd lkm ʾt brytw ʾšr ṣwh ʾtkm lʿśwt ʿśrt hdbrym* "(YHWH) declared to you the covenant that He commanded you to observe, the ten commandments"; Josh 7:11 *wgm ʿbrw ʾt bryty ʾšr ṣwty ʾwtm* "they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them"; Josh 23:16 *ʿbrkm ʾt bryt YHWH ʾlhykm ʾšr ṣwh ʾtkm* "if you transgress the covenant of YHWH your God, which he commanded you"; and Judg 2:20 *yʿn ʾšr ʿbrw hgwy hzh ʾt bryt ʾšr ṣwyty ʾt ʾbwtm* "since that nation has transgressed the covenant that I commanded their fathers" (SBH1).

[54] Compare: Num 19:2 *zʾt ḥqt htwrh ʾšr ṣwh YHWH* "rule of the law that YHWH has commanded" (SBH1); and 1 Chr 16:40 *wlkl hktwb btwrt YHWH ʾšr ṣwh* "according to all that is written in the law of YHWH which he commanded Israel"; Neh 8:1 *ʾt spr twrt mšh ʾšr ṣwh YHWH ʾt yśrʾl* "the book of the law of Moses, which YHWH had commanded Israel"; Neh 8:14 *wymṣʾw ktwb btwrh ʾšr ṣwh YHWH byd mšh* "they found it written in the law that YHWH had commanded by Moses" (LBH1).

[55] Compare Num 30:17 *ʾlh hḥqym ʾšr ṣwh YHWH ʾt mšh* "these are the statutes which YHWH commanded Moses" (SBH1).

(0/2, qiṭṭel). As Levine rightly pointed out, none of the terms mentioned above express inherently the idea of authority,[56] whereas *miṣwọt* can be accounted for as a full nominal lexicalization of it.

Among the heads governing *miṣwọt* within verbal phrases, the verbs for hearing, such as *šmʿ ʾel/ʾet* and *ʾzn* (H/1 hiqṭil) occupy a prominent position, alongside of the obvious *šmr* 'to keep,' *ʿśh* 'to do,' 'to put into practice,' and *ʿzb* 'to abandon,' pointing to the idea of compliance or non-compliance with the commandments.

One frequent construction is *šmʿ ʾl* 'to consent,' 'to listen to.'[57] Scholars have devoted special attention to the construction *šmʿ b*, especially to the text type *šamaʿ bəqọl* 'to obey.'[58]

Regarding the construction *šmʿ ʾl*, Arambarri has observed that it expresses 'approval, consent, acceptance, receipt, consent,' or, in the negated form, 'refusal.'[59] He has pointed out, moreover, that the meaning 'obey' turns out to be largely context-dependent, since it arises only under specific circumstances, namely when the approval is made binding on the basis of social or religious relations. The systematic analysis of the distribution of *šmʿ ʾl* in SBH1 and LBH1 reveals that the action described by the construction applies in particular to a kind of consent carried out freely, by people whose obedience does not derive from a bond of subordination to a person in control but rather from a personal conviction or resolution. In this pattern of usage, the indirect complement governed by the verb normally points to a person who has previously made a request or a demand. In the majority of cases, the persons to whom the subject of the verb consents are not in a position of control with respect to his or her will. This type of obedience appears to be based on the persuasion that the requested action is convenient. Many examples can be found in the historical-narrative language: Abraham accepts the terms of Ephron (*wyśmʿ ʾbrhm ʾl ʿprwn*) in the negotiations for the purchase of land (Gen 23:16); the sons of Jacob try to convince Shechem and his father Ḥămor (*wʾm lʾ tśmʿw ʾlynw*) to be circumcised (Gen 34:17); Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to consent to Moses' requests (Exod 6:30; 7:4.13.22; 8:11.15; 9:12; 11:9); Ben-Hadad, king of Aram is persuaded by Asa king of Judah (*wyśmʿ bn hdd ʾl hmlk ʾs*) to enter into alliance with him (1 Kgs 15:20); king Ahasuerus's attendants fail to convince Mordecai (*wlʾ šmʿ ʾlyhm*) to pay tribute to Aman (Esth 3:4).[60] When the indirect complement refers to a person with authority over the subject, it is normally a family relationship between parents (both mother and father) and children (Gen 28:7; 49:2; Deut 21:18). The role of king Solomon towards the people can be included in this framework (1 Chr 29:23). God is convinced by those who invoke him (Gen 30:17.22; Exod 22:23; Deut 3:26; 9:19; 17:12; 1 Kgs 8:52; 2 Kgs 13:4) especially though prayers and petitions.[61]

---

[56] According to Levine, the idea of authority is somehow superimposed on the core meaning of these terms, and often justified by other co-occurrent elements: "The *mišpāṭ* should be followed because it represents the accepted standard of justice … the *ḥōq* should be followed because someone with authority has written or promulgated it … the *torâ* should be followed because it has been presented or shown to someone … the word *miṣwâ* is authoritative in and of itself"; see Levine, *TDOT* 8: 506.

[57] See Deut 11:13.27.28; 28:13; for the text type *šamaʿ ʾel*, see *DCH* 8: 461.

[58] For the text type *šamaʿ bəqọl*, see Udo Rüterswörden, "עמשׁ," *TDOT* 15: 265-266.

[59] See also Arambarri 1990: 154.

[60] Possibly the servants were genuinely concerned for Mordechai's safety in chiding him in a friendly way; see Moore 1971: 37.

[61] See *lšmʿ ʾl hrnh wʾl htplh* (1 Kgs 8:28, 29); *wšmʿt ʾl tḥnt ʿbdk* (1 Kgs 8:30); *lšmʿ ʾl tplt ʿbdk* (Neh 1:6).

In some of the passages quoted above[62] *miṣwọt* occurs as an indirect complement of *šmʿ ʾl*.[63] This construction is attested fifteen times in Deuteronomy,[64] with all the range of uses described.[65] Its distribution suggests that the reading that fits better corresponds to 'being persuaded to do something' rather than 'obeying as a subordinate.' Moreover, in hortatory discourse arguments in favor of obedience are mentioned on regular basis, that is, the reasons why it is convenient that the commandments are kept. This fact suggests that the kind of obedience expressed by the construction *šmʿ ʾl* needs to rely on adhesion resulting from a conscious conviction.

1.3 Divine standing order

One example in my database attests the usage of *miṣwà* for a standing order originating with God and imparted to a prophet acting as his attendant:

(19)   1 Kgs 13: 21-22
wyqrʾ ʾl ʾyš hʾlhym ʾr bʾ myhwdh lʾmr kh ʾmr YHWH yʿn ky mryt py YHWH wlʾ šmrt ʾt hmṣwh ʾr ṣwk YHWH ʾlhyk (22) *wtšb wtʾkl lḥm wtšt mym bmqwm ʾr dbr ʾlyk ʾl tʾkl lḥm wʾl tšt mym lʾ tbwʾ nbltk ʾl qbr ʾbtyk*
'He (the old prophet living in Bethel) cried to the man of God who came from Judah, 'Thus says YHWH, because you have disobeyed the word of YHWH, and have not kept *the command*[66] which YHWH your God commanded you, (22) but have come back, and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, Eat no bread, and drink no water; your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers."' (RSV)

The divine standing order to which this text refers is formulated for the first time in v. 9:

(20)   1 Kgs 13:9
ky kn ṣwh ʾty bdbr YHWH lʾmr lʾ tʾkl lḥm wlʾ tšth mym wlʾ tšwb bdrk ʾr hlkt
'For so was it commanded me by the word of YHWH, saying, 'You shall neither eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way that you came."' (RSV)

---

[62] See Deut 11:13; 11:27; 28:13.

[63] The same holds true for the combination *ḥqym wmšptym*; see, for exmple Deut 4:1 *wʿth yśrʾl šmʿ ʾl hḥqym wʾl mšptym ʾr ʾnky mlmd ʾtkm lʿśwt lmʿn thyw wbʾtm wyrštm ʾt hʾrṣ ʾr YHWH ʾlhy ʾbtykm ntn lkm* "and now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that YHWH, the God of your fathers, is giving you."

[64] The textual type *šmʿ ʾt* is also admitted, it combines with *ḥqym* (Deut 4:6), *dbry* (Deut 4:10), *ḥqym wmšptym* (Deut 5:1), *kl ʾr yʾmr YHWH ʾlhynw* (Deut 5:27), *mšptym* (Deut 7:12), *dbrym* (Deut 12:28, and 29:18), and particularly *qwl* (Deut 1:34; 4:36; 5:23.24.25; 5:28; 18:16; 26:7). The construction *šmʿ b* occurs only with *qwl* (Deut 1:45, with God as subject), and mostly with *qwl YHWH* (Deut 4:30; 8:20; 9:23; 13:5.19; 15:5; 21:18.20; 26:14.17; 27:10; 28:1.2.15.45.62; 30:2.8.10.20).

[65] God can consent to the someone's requests or not (Deut 3:26; 9:19; 10:10; 23:6); one shall not be persuaded to idolatry by the enticing speeches of a prophet or a seer, or a brother, a son, a daughter, a beloved wife, or friend (*dbry hnbyʾ hhwʾ ʾw ʾl ḥwlm hḥlwm hhwʾ*, 13:4.9); one must obey the priest and the judge (Deut 17:12); the nations listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners (18:14); a son must listen to the voice of the father and the mother (*šmʿ bqwl ʾbyw wbqwl ʾmw*), and obey them (*yšmʿ ʾlyhm*, 21:18); Moses' endorsement of Joshua places him in the position of being obeyed by the people (34:9); and finally, divine *mṣwt* must be obeyed (4:1; 11:13; 11:27.28; 28:1).

[66] RSV translates "the commandment.

This is not an absolute prohibition but a contingent command, valid in the situation represented by the narrative.

2. Expression of human authority

I have shown above that the reference to the divine origin of the command is not fully lexicalized in the substantive *miṣwà*. In fact, in Biblical narrative *miṣwà* applies also to binding instructions given by authorities to people in a subordinate position; the noun occurs particularly in the framework of royal and military commands.

Obedience in this case does not imply an act of a free decision but it appears as a duty, an obligation, or a responsability. With reference to its effect, such a command may be valid under given circumstances or retained irrespective of changing conditions. In the latter case, the order is a directive made known publicly by kings (David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Joash, Josiah, and Ahasuerus) [67] or officers in charge (*śarim*), which is binding on all people under their command, and intended to enforce a policy or a procedure. Such commands may be issued orally or may imply a written form. The typical structuring of this reading is *miṣwat-* (singular construct plus governed noun pointing to a human authority).

2.1 Standing order

Many examples can be found in SBH1of specific commands issued orally under certain circumstances:

> (21)   2 Kgs 18:36
> *whḥryšw hʿm wlʾ ʿnw ʾtw dbr ky mṣwt hmlk hyʾ lʾmr lʾ tʿnhw*
> 'But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for *the king's command* was, 'Do not answer him.'"[68]

The reading of *miṣwà* in 1 Kings 2:43 must be included in this group. In the narrative, one of the first acts of Solomon as a king is to enjoin Shimei to reside in Jerusalem, depriving him on pain of death of the freedom to move.[69] This action is expressed by the verb *ʿawad* (H/1 hiqṭil) 'to admonish,' 'to warn'[70] (1 Kgs 2:42). It is remarkable that Solomon had Shimei swear by YHWH, suggesting either that the royal order (*hammiṣwà ʾăšer ṣiwwiti ʿaleḵa*, v. 2:43) was not such a peremptory constraint *per se* or that Solomon felt himself not sufficiently established in his authority.[71]

In LBH1 a sentence of death by stoning issued by king Joash against the prophet Zechariah constitutes *miṣwat hammeleḵ*, which is immediately and publicly carried out:

---

[67] See Isa 36:21; 2 Kgs 18:36 (SBH1); and Esth 3:3; 2 Chr 8:14.15; 24:21; 29:15.25; 30:6.12; 35:10.15.16; Neh 11:23; 12:24.45 (LBH1).

[68] Parallel to Isa 36:21 *whḥryšw wlʾ ʿnw ʾtw dbr ky mṣwt hmlk hyʾ lʾmr lʾ tʿnhw.*

[69] The Solomon's command is expressed through a series of directive verbal forms: *bnh … wyšbt … wlʾ tṣʾ* (see 1 Kgs 2:36).

[70] For the meaning of the denominative verb *ʿwd* H/1 hiqṭil, see *HALOT*, 6843.

[71] See 1 Kgs 2:42 *hlwʾ hšbʿtyk bYHWH wʾʿd bk lʾmr* "did I not make you swear by YHWH and solemnly warn you."

(22)   2 Chr 24:21
wyqšrw ʿlyw wyrgmhw ʾbn bmṣwt hmlk bḥṣr byt YHWH
'They conspired against him, and *by command of the king* they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of YHWH.' (RSV)

In Esther 3:3, the royal order consists of bowing before Haman the Agagite and paying homage to him (cf. v. 2). In Qoheleth 8:5, the obedience to the king's command is encouraged as it provides prosperity and success; in this passage the term occurs in absolute case (*hammiṣwà*), being coreferential to the previous expressions *pi melek* 'king's command' (v. 2), and *dəbar melek* 'king's word' (v. 4).

2.2 Royal regulation

Frequently, and increasingly in later layers of language, the term refers to more complex regulations, typically issued by kings and intended to enforce a policy, with special reference to the religious domain and cultic matters. In 2 Chronicles, David is depicted as the prime example of the reformer who organizes the clergy.[72] Moreover, the usage of regulation formulas punctuates the description of the celebrations of Passover at Jerusalem during the kingdoms of Hezekiah (2 Chr 30) and Josiah (2 Chr 35: 1-18):

  – *bəmiṣwat Dawid wəgad ḥozer hammelek wənatan hannabiʾ* 'according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet' (2 Chr 29:25)
  – *kəmiṣwat Dawid* 'according to David's command' (2 Chr 35:15)
  – *kətorat Mǒšè ʾiš kətorat Mǒšè ʾiš hàʾĔlǒhim* 'according to the teaching of Moses, the man of God' (2 Chr 30:16)
  – *biktab Dawid melek Yiśraʾel ubəmiktab Šəlǒmǒ bənǒ* 'as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son' (2 Chr 35:4) [73]
  – *kəmiṣwat hammelek* 'according the king's command' (2 Chr 29:15; 35:10)
  – *kakkatub bəsepēr Mǒšè* 'as it is written in the book of Moses' (2 Chr 35:12)
  – *kəmiṣwat hammelek Yǒšiyyahu* 'according to the command of king Josiah' (2 Chr 35:16).

According to de Vries, the Chronicler does not dispute the prime authority of Moses as cult founder,[74] but he is concerned about establishing David's authority, especially "because there was no clear consensus in postexilic Israel about a continuing role for David's successors."[75] The Chronicler intends to express the idea that the Davidic line's duty was simply to carry out the regulations that David laid down.

---

[72] See 2 Chr 8:14.15. Interestingly enough, there is an overlap between the expression *miṣwat Dawid* and *miṣwat Mǒšè* in this particular usage (compare 2 Chr 8:13.14). It is important to highlight the summarizing effect of the authorization formula *kĕmiṣwat Mǒšè*, that turns out to be put in operation when some specific mode or repository of revelation needs to be mentioned (2 Chr 8:13). The reference is equal to the entire corpus of laws regulating the sacred festivals in this case; see de Vries 1988: 621.

[73] The Chronicler appeals to a document concerning the Levitical preparation of *Pesaḥ* written by David and then actualized by Solomon.

[74] According to Williamson, "we may confidently assert that the Chronicler had the Pentateuch before him in its final and completed form"; see Williamson 1976: 361.

[75] See de Vries 1988: 631-632; according to the Chronicler's understanding, moreover, inspiration was not limited to figures that were commonly identified as "prophets"; direct communication with God is ascribed also to the founding kings of the Davidic dynasty; see Japhet 1993: 46; Petersen 1977.

Such regulation formulas occur also in Nehemiah with a comparable function; they are put into operation to highlight that the legitimate performance of liturgical duties, established by David, was faithfully implemented by Solomon and his descendants:

– *bəmiṣwat Dawid ʾiš haʾĔlọhim* 'according to the command of David the man of God' (Neh 12:24).
– *kəmiṣwat Dawid Šəlọmọ̀ bənọ* 'according to the command of David, and of Solomon his son' (Neh 12:45).[76]

The Chronicler depicts king Hezekiah with special emphasis as the champion of the restoration of the cult at the Jerusalem Temple.[77] A royal decree issued by him and dispatched by his messengers is called *miṣwat hammeleḵ* (vv. 6-9):

> (23)   2 Chr 30:6.8
> *wylkw hrṣym bʾgrwt myd hmlk wśryw bkl yśrʾl wyhwdh wkmṣwt hmlk lʾmr bny yśrʾl šwbw ʾl YHWH ʾlhy ʾbrhm yṣḥq wyśrʾl wyšʾl hplyṭh hnšʾrt lkm mkp mlky ʾšwr …* (8) *ʾth ʾl tqšw ʿrpkm kʾbwtykm tnw yd lYHWH wbʾw lmqdšw ʾšr hqdyš lʿwlm wʿbdw ʾt YHWH ʾlhykm wyšb mkm ḥrwn ʾpw*
> 'So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, *according to the command of the king* which was: 'O people of Israel, return to YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria … (8) Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were but yield yourselves to YHWH and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve YHWH your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you.'

Hezekiah's *miṣwà* reported in this text turns out to be tantamount to a strong appeal to the people of the old Northern Kingdom, which by that time had become a province of Assyria, to join their brothers at Jerusalem for celebrating *Pesaḥ* together. The text of the decree must be regarded as a heartfelt exhortation rather than an order, owing to the fact that the people of the North were not actually his real subjects. Verse 6 contains a kind of conflation: the letters (*ʾiggərọt*) are said to be "from the king and his princes" (*miyyad hammeleḵ wəśarayw*); the message dispatched, nevertheless, is spoken according "the king's command" (*uḵəmiṣwat hammeleḵ*). Japhet thinks that this fact reflects the Chronicler's attitude towards the kingdom, and the reported decree itself must be regarded as "an outstanding example of the Chronicler's literary methods and theological positions."[78] Namely, on the one hand, the narrative highlights the collegial nature of the kingdom's administration by mentioning the princes; on the other hand, it is meant to restate Hezekiah's function and authority.

---

[76] See Blenkinsopp 1988: 350.
[77] Hezekiah's restoration of the temple in Chronicles (missing in the books of Kings) makes him another temple builder, long with David and Solomon, and his celebration of Passover (also missing in Kings) is treated at length (2 Chr 30); see French 2017: 148-154.
[78] See Japhet 1993: 941.

2.3 Will

Besides kings, fathers as well can transmit instructions to sons as an expression of their will,[79] especially before death. Such instructions are regarded by the posterity as a *miṣwà*:

> (24)   Jer 35:16
> *ky hqymw bny yhwndb bn rkb ʾt mṣwt ʾbyhm ʾšr ṣwm whʿm hzh lʾ šmʿw ʾly*
> 'Indeed, the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have carried out *the command of their father* which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to me.'

Jonadab's command to his sons consists actually in not drinking wine (*lblty štwt yyn*, v. 14), and it can be conceptualized either as uniplex entity,[80] or as a multiplex entity.[81] Remarkably, the verb *qwm* (H/1 hiqṭil) is used for the action of complying with the father's instructions in this passage[82] instead of the more obvious *šāmaʿ ʾel* or *ʿāśà*.

3. Peripheral sense-nodules: polysemy as a window on diachronic change

A group of later attestations witnesses a remarkable development in the pattern of usage of *miṣwà*, which have a strong impact on its reading and may be regarded as signals of an ongoing change in its semantics.

As I have observed before, a typical feature of deverbal nouns is to inherit the valency frame slots of their source verbs.[83] In BH *ṣwh* (0/2 qiṭṭel) exhibits a very large range of different syntactic constructions,[84] which can be traced back to two main valency frames: on the one hand, it is used as a three-argument verb, requiring an *actor* (or agent), viz. the human or divine person in control who performs the action of commanding; an *addressee*, viz. the person to whom the order is directed; and a *patient*, vz. the action to be performed that is the object of the command. On the other hand, *ṣwh* (0/2 qiṭṭel) is attested as a two-argument verb, with the surface deletion of the object, meaning 'to give orders'.[85]

Concerning nouns derived by syntactic derivation, participants are normally expressed in BH by governed nouns or pronominal suffixes. The nominal complements of *miṣwà* point exclusively to the agent in SBH1, namely to the subject provided of animacy who issues the command. Expressions such *miṣwat YHWH, miṣwat hammelek* or *miṣwat Yĕhonadaḇ* must be thus read as "the command which YHWH/the king/Jonadab had issued." This compact trend will undergo some variation in LBH1. A few examples of the usage of the term in the book of Nehemiah are particularly telling. They attest a remarkable shift in the arguments expressed on the surface as governed nouns, affecting the reading of *miṣwà* in the direction described below.

---

[79] The verb *ṣwh* as well can take on a similar reading, compare Gen 49:29.33; 50:16; Isa 38:1.

[80] See MT *miṣwat ʾăḇihem* (Jer 35:14, 16) and *miṣwat Yĕhonadaḇ* (35:18).

[81] See MT *ʾet kol miṣwôtāyw* (Jer 35:18).

[82] Compare Jer 35:14 *hwqm ʾt dbry yhwndb bn rkb* "the commands of Jonadab son of Rechab have been fulfilled"; for the meaning of *qwm* H/1 hiqṭil, see *HALOT*, 8302 "to take out," "to keep," when the verb selects as objects *daḇar, nẹder, bərit, šəbuʿà*.

[83] See Panevová 2014: 7-11.

[84] Clines lists 23 of them, see *DCH* 7: 94-102.

[85] See, for example, Gen 49:33 *wykl yʿqb lṣwt ʾt bnyw wyʾsp rglyw ʾl hmṭh* "when Jacob finished commanding (giving instructions to) his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed."

3.1 Obligation, duty

Semantically speaking, the shift from 'command' to 'obligation' or 'duty,' verifiable in some late uses of the noun *miṣwà*, is quite understandable and can be accounted for in terms of *converseness*. The category of converseness, borrowed from the science of symbolic logic, is used by semanticians to name a subclass of oppositeness implying a mirror-image relation between a pair of lexical items, called thus *converses*. Cruse describes converses as *relational opposites*,[86] which refer to the same relationship from reversed points of view. Converses may imply reciprocity (as *friend* or *mate*)[87] or asymmetry (as *doctor* vs. *patient* or *teach* vs. *learn*).

Operations of permuting the arguments of a pair of converses can help appreciate the sense-relation at stake; the sentence "Tom *sells* his car to Sam," for example, entails logically the sentence "Sam *buys* Tom's car"; that being the case, we can safely consider *sell* and *buy* converses. If we apply such a test to the sense-nodules ascribable to *miṣwà*, it is clear that an expression like "the king's command to the people" logically entails its reversed counterpart "the duty of the people towards the king"; in the first wording the action is regarded from the point of view of its actor (the king), in the latter case from the point of view of its recipient (the people). I can affirm, therefore, that the meaning "command" underwent a conceptual re-analysis developing the converse sense, of 'duty.'[88] Concerning *miṣwà*, such a shift occurs on the level of the semantic micro-structure of the noun, yielding the phenomenon of auto-converseness. LBH1 mirrors the beginnings of this semantic development. A clear example of this converse sense-nodule is attested in the following passage:

> (25)   Neh 10:33
> *whʿmdnw ʿlynw mṣwt ltt ʿlynw šlšyt hšql bšnh lʿbdt byt ʾlhynw*
> 'We also lay upon ourselves *the obligation* to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God.'[89]

The shift in perspective is further emphasized by the verbal selector *ʿmd* (H/1 hiqṭil) *ʿl* 'to lay upon.'[90] It is important to point out that the sense-nodule 'obligation' would play a central role for the further semantic development of the term in post-biblical layers of Hebrew language, mostly within the halakhic-rabbinic discourse tradition.

4. Remarks on the semantic range of miṣwà in the Mishnà

The increase in the frequency of the lexeme *miṣwà* already observed within LBH1 is further witnessed by the Mishnà, as the following table shows:

---

[86] See Cruse 1986: 231; see also König 2011: 331.
[87] In these cases, we can speak of auto-converseness.
[88] See Rainer 2005.
[89] Among modern translation, some mirror the shift here highlighted, compare: "we have laid upon ourselves obligations" (RSV; NJPS); "we also placed ourselves under obligation" (NASB); and "we recognize the following obligations" (NJB); others opt for circumlocutory phrases as: "we hereby undertake the duty" (NEB); and "we assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands" (NIV).
[90] See *DCH* 6: 474, 8b.

	Singular	*Plural*	*TOT*
SBH1	1.72	3.54	5.27
LBH1	5.16	3.75	8.91
MH	7.36	1.45	8.81

Table 1 – Frequency ratio (normalized per 10,000 words)[91]

The readings 'religious duty,' and 'religious requirement' ends up prevailing in Mishnaic Hebrew.[92] This phenomenon is evident above all in the productive discourse, while in quotations from the Scripture, the SBH main meaning 'commandment' (in the plural) still stands, albeit considerably marginal.[93] For the present survey, I have collected the following examples, emerging from the syntagmatic analysis,[94] which clearly demonstrate how the auto-converse reading already found in LBH1 texts has become fully lexicalized in the Mishnà as the most salient meaning of the *miṣwà*.

> (26)   *m. Yebam.* 4.5
> *Mṣwh bgdwl lybm lʾ rṣh mhlkyn ʿl kl hʾḥyn lʾ rṣw ḥwzrym ʾṣl hgdwl wʾwmʾ lw ʿlyk mṣwh ʾw ḥlwṣ ʾw yybm*
> *Tlh bqṭwn ʿd šygdyl wbgdwl ʿd šybwʾ mmdynt hym wbḥrš wbšwṭh ʾyn šwmʿym lw lʾ ʾwmryn lw ʿlyk mṣwh*
> 'A. It is *the duty of the oldest (surviving) brother* to enter into levirate marriage. B. If he did not want to do so, they pass in turn to all the other brothers. C. If they all did not want to do so, they go back to the oldest and say to him, 'Yours is the duty!' (Neusner)

This passage is quite remarkable. The precepts concerning the levirate marriage, formulated in Deut 25: 5-10, do not include any special mention of the oldest brother as the specific recipient of the commandment of marrying the brother's childless widow. This context seems to trigger the reading 'the proper/perfect way of fulfilling a religious duty'[95] which could be related to the further development of the term in rabbinic Hebrew pointing to the sense-nodule 'meritorious deed'.[96]

> (27)   *m. Yebam.* 12.6
> *Wnqrʾ šmw byśʾ byt ḥlwṣ hnʿl mṣwh bdyynyn wlʾ mṣwh btlmydym rʾ yhwdh ʾwʾ mṣwh ʿl kl hʿwmdym šm lwmr ḥlwṣ hnʿl ḥlwṣ hnʿl ḥlwṣ hnʿl*
> L. And his name shall be called in Israel: 'The house of him who has had his shoe removed' (Deut 25:9)—it is *the duty of the judges*, and not *the duty of the disciples* [so to name him]. M. R. Judah says, 'It is *the duty of all bystanders* to

---

[91] The noun occurs 158 times in MH, 132 in the singular and only 26 time in the plural, see appendix.

[92] See Jastrow, *s.v.*; the noun also became an antonym of *rəšut* in its reading "optional deed", "act spread from self-determination", cf. *m.Pes.* 6.2; *m.Makk.* 2.7.12; *m.Betz.* 5.2.

[93] See, for example, *m.Qid.* 4.14; *m.Hor.* 3.3; *m.Men.* 9.7.

[94] See Appendix.

[95] Cf. also *m.Yebam.* 12.6: *mṣwt ḥlyṣh* "the proper way to carry out the rite of *ḥaliṣà* (is as follows)".

[96] The noun *miṣwà* will pass to designate any act of human kindness, such as the burial of the body of an unknown person (*mẹt miṣwà*, see m.Naz. 6.5; 7.1).

say, 'The man whose shoe has been removed! The man whose shoe has been removed! The man whose shoe has been removed!". (Neusner)

This passage refers to a particular aspect of the rite of *ḥaliṣà*, by which the surviving brother could evade the obligation of the levirate marriage. The ceremony involves the widow making a declaration, taking off a shoe of her brother-in-law, and spitting on the floor. This rite also implies the stigmatization of the refusal to fulfil this religious duty; the person in question will be given a title with which it will be recognized by the whole community. A quite relevant aspect of this passage is that the noun *miṣwà* governs a Pph with the preposition *ʿl* indicating the subject on whom the duty falls. This is the same construal that is found in Neh 10:33 and 11:23, which has no other parallel in BH.

> (28)   *m.Yoma* 8.4
> *htynwqwt ʾyn mʿnyn ʾwtm bywm hkypwrym ʾbl mḥnkyn ʾwtm qwdm (l)šnh wqwdm štym bšbyl šyhw rgylym lmṣwt*
> 'A. As to children, they do not impose a fast on them on the Day of Kippur. B. But they educate them a year or two in advance, so that they will be used to doing *the religious duties*.' (Neusner)

> (29)   *m.ʾAḇot 2.1*, 2b
> *zhyr bmṣwh qlh kmṣwh ḥmwrh šʾyn ʾth ywdʿ mtn śkrn šlmṣwt*
> 'Be meticulous *in a small religious duty* as in a large one, for you do not know what sort of reward is coming for any *of the various religious duties*.' (Neusner)

This semantic shift is also accompanied by a significant change in the syntagmatic pattern of usage of the word, namely in its valency frame. In the repeated discourse (viz. in quotations from the Scripture), the genitive or the pronominal suffix governed by *miṣwà* encodes exclusively the actor who issues the commandment (mostly YHWH); in the productive discourse, on the other hand, the genitive complement points normally either to the subject of the obligation or to its recipient. The following examples show both cases respectively:

> (30)   *m.Suk.* 2.7
> *my šhyh rʾšw wrwbw bswkh wšwlḥnw btwk hbyt, byt Šmy pwslyn wbyt Hll mkšyryn (…) ʾmrw lhm byt Šmy mšm rʾyh ʾp hn ʾmrw lw ʾm kk hyth (lw) nwhg lʾ qyymth mṣwt sukh mymyk*
> 'A. He whose head and the greater part of whose body are in the *sukkah*, but whose table is in the house. B. The House of Šammai declare invalid. C. And the House of Hillel declare valid. (…) E. Said the House of Šammai to them, 'Is there proof from that story? But in point of fact they did say to him, 'If this is how you act, you have never in your whole life fulfilled *the religious requirement of dwelling in a sukkà*!" (Neusner)

> (31)   *m. Pes.* 3.7, 1c
> *Hhwlk lšḥwṭ ʾt pshw wlmwl ʾt bnw wlʾwkl sʿwdt ʾyrwsym bbyt ḥmyr wnzkr šyš lw ḥmṣ btwk hbyt ʾm ykwl lḥzwr wlbʿr wlḥzwr bmṣwtw yḥzwrn*
> 'He who goes to slaughter his *Pesaḥ* lamb, to circumcise his son, or to eat the betrothal meal at his father-in-law's house, and remembers that he has

left some leaven in his house, if he can go back and remove it and go on to do his religious duty (*lmṣwtw*), let him go back and remove it.' (Neusner)

Concluding remarks

The data collected for this paper have shown that from Biblical to Mishnaic Hebrew the noun *miṣwà* underwent a semantic shifting which can be accounted for in terms of *auto-converseness* from the meaning of 'commandment', mostly applying to commandment originated in God and disclosed through the Mosaic teaching, to the meaning of 'religious duty'.

This semantic shift, however, must not be regarded as an innovation peculiar to the Rabbinic Hebrew; its arising can be traced back to the Late Biblical Historical-narrative language. The lexeme *miṣwà* is a good example of how a peripheral sense of a polysemic word in a given linguistic stratum can be the vector of an extensive diachronic change.

Abbreviations

BH	Biblical Hebrew
SBH	Standard Biblical Hebrew
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
ABH	Archaic Biblical Hebrew
SBH1	Standard Biblical Hebrew – Historical-narrative language
SBH2	Standard Biblical Hebrew – Poetical language
SBH3	Standard Biblical Hebrew – Language of Hosea
LBH1	Late Biblical Hebrew – Historical-narrative language
LBH2	Late Biblical Hebrew – Poetical language
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew

BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an appendix containing the biblical Aramaic*. CD-ROM edition. Oxford: Clarendon, 1906.
DCH	Clines, David J. A., ed. *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014.
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: The New Koehler-Baumgartner in English*. Subsequently revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm with Assistance from Benedikt Hartmann, Zeʾev Ben-Hayyim, Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, and Philippe Reymond. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. CD-ROM edition. Leiden: Brill, 1994-2000.

NASB	*New American Standard Bible*.
NEB	*The New English Bible*.
NET	*The NET Bible*. Version 1.0. Biblical Studies Foundation.
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
NIV	*The Holy Bible: New International Version*.
NJB	*New Jerusalem Bible*.
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*.
NKJV	*New King James Version*.
RSV	*Revised Standard Version*.

References

Arambarri, Jesús. 1990. *Der Worstamm „hören" im Alten Testament. Semantik und Syntax eines Hebräischen Verbs*. Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk.

Avishur, Yitzhak. 1972. "Pairs of Synonymous Words in the Construct State and in Appositional Hendiadys in Biblical Hebrew." *Semitics* 2: 7-81.

Baroni, Marco. 2008. "Distributions in text." In *Corpus Linguistics. An International Handbook*, ed. by Anke Lüdeling, and Merja Kytö, vol. 1, 803-821. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 29.1. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. 1988. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press.

Cohen, Shaye J.D. 2007. "The Judaean Legal Tradition and the Halakhah of the Mishnah". In *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. by Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, 121-143. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Cruse, D. Alan. 1986. *Lexical Semantics*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Cruse, D. Alan. 2000. "Aspects of the Micro-structure of Word Meaning." In *Polysemy. Theoretical and Computational Approaches*, ed. by Yael Ravin, and Claudia Leacock, 30-51. New York: Oxford UP.

De Vries, Simon J. 1988. "Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107: 619-639.

Fox, Michael V. 2009. *Proverbs 10-31*. The Anchor Bible 18b. New Haven/London: Yale UP.

French, Blaire A. 2017. *Chronicles Through the Centuries*, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Geeraerts, Dirk, and Gitte Kristiansen. 2019. "Variationist Linguistics." In *Cognitive Linguistics. A Survey of Linguistic Subfields*, ed. by Ewa Dąbrowska, and Dagmar Divjak, 133-158. Berlin-Boston, MA: De Gruyter.

Grondelaers, Stefan, Dirk Speelman, and Dirk Geeraerts. 2007. "Lexical Variation and Change." In *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, ed. by Dirk Geeraerts, and Hubert Cuyckens, 988-1011. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Houtman, Cornelis. 2000. *Exodus*, vol. 3. Leuven: Peeters.

Hurvitz, Avi. 1972. *The Transition Period in Biblical Hebrew, A Study in Post-Exilic Hebrew and Its Implications for the Dating of Psalms*. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute [Hebrew].

Hurvitz, Avi. 1995. "Continuity and Innovation in Biblical-Hebrew. The Case of Semantic Change in Post-exilic Writings." In *Studies in Ancient Hebrew Semantics*, ed. by Takamitsu Muraoka, 1-11. Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series 4. Leuven: Peeters.

Japhet, Sara. 1993. *I & II Chronicles*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press.

Jastrow, Marcus. 1903. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. 2 vols. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Jenni, Ernst. 1968. *Das hebräische Piʿel. Syntaktisch-semasiologische Untersuchung einer Verbalform im Alten Testament*. Zürich: Evz Verlag.

Joüon, Paul, and Takamitsu Muraoka. 2006. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Subsidia Biblica 27. Rome: Biblical Institute Press.

König, Ekkehard. 2011. "Reciprocals and Semantic Typology: Some Concluding Remarks." In *Reciprocals and Semantic Typology*, ed. by Nicholas Evans, Alice Gaby, Stephen C. Levinson, and Asifa Majid, 329-340. Typological Studies in Language 98. Amsterdam-Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

Kuryłowicz, Jerzy. 1936. "Dérivation lexicale et dérivation syntactique." *Bulletin de la Société linguistique de Paris* 37: 79-92.

Kuntz, J. Kenneth. 2004. "Hendiadys as an Agent of Rhetorical Enrichment in Biblical Poetry, with Special Reference to Prophetic Discourse." In *God's Word for Our World*, ed. by Simon J. De Vries, Harold J. Ellens, Deborah L. Ellens, Rolf P. Knierim, and Isaac Kalimi, vol. 1, 114-135. New York: T and T Clark.

Levine, Baruch A. 2000. "הוצמ." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. by David E. Green, vol. 8, 505-514. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Liedke, Gerhard. 1997. "הוצ." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by Ernst Jenni, and Claus Westermann, trans. by Mark E. Biddle, vol. 2, 1062-1066. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Lillas-Schuil, Rosmari. 2006. "A Survey of Syntagms in the Hebrew Bible Classified as Hendiadys." In *Current Issues in the Analysis of Semitic Grammar and Lexicon*, ed. Lutz Edzard, and Jan Retsö, 79-99. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Moore, Carey A. 1971. *Esther*. The Anchor Bible 7b. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Netzer, Yael. 2013. "Quantifier." *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. by Geoffrey Khan, Shmuel Bolozky, Steven Fassberg, Gary A. Rendsburg, Aaron D. Rubin, Ora R. Schwarzwald, and Tamar Zewi, vol. 3, 311-315. Leiden-Boston, MA: Brill.

Neusner, Jacob. 1991. *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. London-New Haven, CT: Yale UP.

Panevová, Jarmila. 2014. "Contribution of Valency to the Analysis of Language." In *Noun Valency*, ed. by Olga Spevak, 1-17. Studies in Language Companion Series 158. Amsterdam-Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

Petersen, David L. 1977. *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles*. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.

Propp, William H.C. 2006. *Exodus 19-40, The Anchor Bible 2a*. New Haven-London: Yale UP.

Rainer, Franz. 2005. "Semantic Change in Word Formation." *Linguistics* 43 (2): 415-441.

Rofé, Alexander. 2002. "The Book of Deuteronomy: A Summary." In *Deuteronomy, Issues and Interpretation*, 1-13. London-New York, NY: T and T Clark.

Sáenz-Badillos, Angel. 1993. *A History of the Hebrew Language*, English trans. by John Elwolde. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Strack, Hermann L., and Günter Stemberger. 1992. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, English trans. by Markus Bockmuehl. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Vergari, Romina. 2021. *Toward a Contrastive Semantics of the Biblical Lexicon. The Nouns of "Rule and Regulation" in Hebrew Historical-narrative Language and their Greek Equivalents*. Topografie immateriali 2. Firenze: SEF.

Vivian, Angelo. 1978. *I campi lessicali della separazione nell'ebraico biblico, di Qumran e della Mishna: ovvero, applicabilita della teoria dei campi lessicali all'ebraico*. Quaderni di Semitistica 4. Florence: Istituto di linguistica e di lingue orientali.

Weinfeld, Moshe. 1972. *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Weinfeld, Moshe. 1991. *Deuteronomy 1-11*. The Anchor Bible 5. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Weiser, Artur. 1962. *The Psalms*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press.

Williamson, Hugh G.M. 1976. "The Accession of Solomon in the Books of Chronicles." *Vetus Testamentum* 26: 351-361.

Zatelli, Ida. 1978. *Il campo lessicale degli aggettivi di purità in ebraico biblico*, Quaderni di Semitistica 7. Florence: Istituto di linguistica e di lingue orientali.

Zatelli, Ida. 1995. "Functional Languages and Their Importance to the Semantics of Ancient Hebrew." In *Studies in Ancient Hebrew Semantics*, ed. by Takamitsu Muraoka, 55-63. Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series 4. Louvain: Peeters.

Zatelli, Ida. 2004. "The Study of the Ancient Hebrew Lexicon. Application of the Concepts of Lexical Field and Functional Language." *KUSATU* 5: 129-159.

Appendix: Distribution of miṣwà in MH

The noun *mṣwh* occurs 158 times, according to the following distribution:

TOT	MH
bmṣwh	1
bmṣwtw	1
hmṣwh	3
hmṣwt	6
hmṣwwt	3
kmṣwh	1
kmṣwth	1
kmṣwtw	5
kmṣwwtn	2
kmṣwwtw	10
lmṣwh	2
lmṣwt	3
lmṣwwt	2
mṣwh	54
mṣwht	1
mṣwt	32
mṣwtn	5
mṣwtw	1
mṣwwh	1
mṣwwt	10
mṣwwtk	1
mṣwwtn	3
mṣwwtw	1
šlmṣwt	1
šmṣwh	1
šmṣwwt	1
šmṣwwtw	3
wmṣwh	1
wmṣwt	1
wmṣwwt	1
TOT	**158**

Singular forms (132)

m.Ab. 2.1(x3); 4.2(x5); 4.11
m.Bek. 1.7(x11); 8.6(x2)
m.Ber. 1.1(x3)
m.Betz. 5.2(x2)
m.BQ. 2.10(x2)
m.Ed. 5.3
m.Hor. 2.4(x2); 2.6
m.Hul. 7.2; 12.4(x2)
m.Ket. 4.3
m.Makk. 1.7(x2); 2.7(x2); 3.4; 3.15(x2)
m.Meg. 2.6(x3); 4.8
m.Meg. 1.3(x5); 3.7; 9.7; 10.2; 10.4; 10.9(x3)
m.Naz. 6.5(x2); 7.1
m.Neg. 14.4(x4); 14.10
m.Nid. 10.1
m.Par. 11.9(x2); 12.4
m.Pes. 3.7; 6.2(x3); 10.3(x2)
m.Qid. 1.7(x3); 1.9(x3)
m.RH. 3.3(x2)
m.San. 7.1(x5); 8.1
m.Shebu. 2.3(x2); 3.6(x4); 3.8
m.Sot. 8.7(x2)
m.Suk. 2.4; 2.7; 4.4(x2)
m.Yeb. 2.3(x2); 2.8; 3.2; 3.4; 4.5(x3); 5.2; 12.1; 12.6(x4)
m.Yom. 6.1
m.Zeb. 2.3(x5); 6.7(x5); 12.5(x2)

Plural forms (26)

m.Yad. 4.7(x2)
m.Nid. 6.11(x2)
m.Ker. 1.1
m.Hul. 12.4
m.Men. 9.7; 3.7; 5.7
m.Hor. 1.1; 3.3(x2)
m.Ab. 2.1
m.Makk. 3.15
m.San. 8.1
m.Qid. 1.7(x2); 4.14
m.Ned. 2.2; 3.11(x2)
m.Meg. 1.9
m.Yom. 8.4
m.Bik. 4.2
m.Maʿaś. 5.11
m.Ber. 2.2

Syntagmatic analysis of the singular forms

   Singular forms: 132 (CS 36; PS 32; AS 64)

1. Attributive function

Adjectives

ḥmwr 'heavy, important, stringent' (*Ab*. 2.1)
ql 'light, minor, easy' (*Ab*. 2.1; 4.2; *Hul*. 12.4)

Quantifiers

kl 'all, every' (*Qid*. 1.7x3; 1.9; *Makk*. 3.4; *Hor*. 2.6)
ʾḥt 'one, a' (*Ab*. 4.11; *Men*. 3.7; *Makk*. 3.15)

Pronominal suffixes

3rd singular masculine (*Bek*. 8.6; *Men*. 1.3x5;10.9x2; *Zeb*. 2.3x5; 6.7x5; *Meg*. 2.6x2; *Yom*. 6.1; *Pes*. 3.7)
3rd singular feminine (*Yeb*. 5.2)
3rd plural masculine (*Ber*. 1.1x3; *Ed*. 5.3; *Zeb*. 12.5x2; *Neg*. 14.4; *Par*. 12.4)

   Reference: the offerings (*Ber*. 1.1x3; *Zeb*. 2.3x5; 6.7x5; *Zeb*. 12.5x2; *Men*. 1.3x5; 10.9x2); the faithful one (*Pes*. 3.7); the two goats of the Day of Kippur (*Yom*. 6.1); birds (*Neg*. 14.4); daḫar (*Meg*. 2.6x2); the ceremony of the ḥaliṣà (*Yeb*. 5.2); mayim (*Ed*. 5.3; *Par*. 12.4); the father (*Bek*. 8.6)

Nominal complements

Governing nouns or adjectives

ʾisur 'band, prohibition'
ʾswr mṣwh 'a prohibition on account of a commandment' (*Yeb*. 2.3x2; 3.2; 3.4)

baʿilà 'sexual intercourse'
bʿylt mṣwh 'the sexual intercourse of mịṣwa' (*Nid*. 10.1)

hepṣed 'loss, damage' (antonym of śakar 'salary, reward')
hpsd mṣwh 'the loss in carrying out a religious duty' (*Ab*. 2.1)

zahir 'observant'
zhyr bmṣwh qlh 'meticulous in a small religious duty' (*Ab*. 2.1)
(zhyr) kmṣwh ḥmwrh 'meticulous in large religious duty' (*Ab*. 2.1)

milḥamà 'war'
bmlḥmt mṣwh 'a war subject to religious requirement' (*Sot*. 8.7x2)

meet 'dead one'
mt mṣwh 'a corpse of mịṣwà' (*Naz*. 6.5; 7.1)

śakar 'salary, reward' (antonym of *hepṣed* 'loss, damage')
śśkr mswh 'reward of religious duty' (*Ab.* 4.2)

šəḇuaʿ 'oath'
bšbwʿ mṣwh 'oath involving religious duty' (*Shebu.* 3.6)

šəya(y)r 'remnant, relic'
šyry mṣwh 'he residue of the requirement' (*Men.* 9.7; *Neg.* 14.10)

šaluaḥ 'messenger, agent'
šlwḥy mṣwh 'agents engaged in a religious duty' (*Sukk.* 2.4)

taglaḥat 'hair cutting'
btyḡht mṣwh 'cutting the hair for a religious duty' (*Naz.* 6.5)

Governed nouns

ʾezuḇ
mṣwt ʾzwb 'the requirement of the hyssop' (*Neg.* 14.4; *Par.* 11.9x2)

ben 'son'
wmṣwwt bnw 'and the requirement of (redeeming) his son' (*Bek.* 8.6)

gəʾullà 'redemption'
mṣwwt gʾwlh (*Bek.* 1.7)

ḥăliṣà 'rite of removing the shoe'
mṣwwt ḥlysh (*Bek.* 1.7x2; *Yeb.* 12.1; 12.6)

yom
mṣwt hywm 'the religious duty of the day' (*RH.* 3.3x2)

yəʿidà 'designation, appointment, testimony'
mṣwwt hyʿydh (*Bek.* 1.7)

yibun 'levirate mariage'
mṣwwt hyybwn (*Bek.* 1.7x2)

lulaḇ 'lulav'
mṣwt hlwlb (*Suk.* 4.4)

neḥĕnaqim
mṣwt hnḥnqym 'religious requirement of the strangulation' (*San.* 7.1)

neheĕragim
mṣwt hnhrgym 'religious requirement of the decapitation' (*San.* 7.1)

nisqalim
mṣwt hnsqlym 'religious requirement of the stoning' (*San.* 7.1)

niśrapim
mṣwt hnśrpym 'religious requirement of the burning' (*San.* 7.1)

nəṭilà
mṣwt nṭylh 'the requirement of removing [the sinew of the hip]' (*Hul.* 7.2)
pədiyyà | pədayyà 'redemption'
mṣwt pdyyh (*Bek.* 1.7x2)

qali
mṣwt qly 'requirement of roasted grain' (*Men.* 10.4)

ʿărabà
mṣwt ʿrbh 'the requirement of the willow (branch)' (*Suk.* 4.4)

ʿăripā̄ 'breaking the neck'
mṣwt ʿryph (*Bek.* 1.7)

ʿẹṣ ʾerez
mṣwt ʿṣ ʾrz 'the religious requirement concerning the cedarwood' (*Neg.* 14.4)

ʿăśè
mṣwt ʿśh 'positive commandment' (*Shebu.* 2.3x2; *Hor.* 2.4; *Qid.* 1.7x2)

sukkà
mṣwt swkh 'the religious requirement of dwelling in a sukkah' (*Suk.* 2.7)

ʿomer
mṣwt hʿwmr 'the requirement of the ʿomer' (*Men.* 10.2; 10.9)

śərẹpā̄
mṣwt śryph 'religious requirement of burning' (*San.* 7.1)

Governed Pph

With the preposition *b*
mswwh blʾtʿśh 'negative commandment' (*Hul.* 12.4; *Hor.* 2.4; *Makk.* 3.4)
mṣwt hywm bšwpr 'the *miṣwà* of the day applies to the *šofaʾ*' (*RH.* 3.3)
šmṣwwt hywm bḥṣṣrwt 'the *miṣwà* of the day applies to the trumpets' (*RH.* 3.3)
mṣwh bgdwl 'the religious duty for the oldest [surviving brother]' (*Yeb.* 2.8; 4.5)
mṣwh bdyynym 'the religious duty for the judges' (*Yeb.* 12.6)
mṣwh btlmdym 'the religious duty for the disciples' (*Yeb.* 12.6)

With the preposition *byd*
mṣwh byd gwʾl 'a religious duty in the hand of the avenger of the blood' (*Makk.* 2.7)

With the preposition *ʿl*
šmṣwwtw ʿl ʾbyw 'the requirement of redeeming him [the father] falls upon his father' (*Bek.* 8.6)
wmṣwwt bnw ʿl yw 'the requirement of redeeming his son falls on him' (*Bek.* 8.6)
mṣwh ʿl kl hʿwmdym 'the duty of all bystanders' (*Yeb.* 12.6)
wʿlyk mshwh 'the religious duty is yours' (*BM.* 2.10)

With the preposition *mn*
mṣwh mn htwrh 'a religious duty enjoined by the *Ṭorà*' (*BM.* 2.10)

Relative clauses

With the verb *ktb*
Kl miṣwh šktwb btwrh 'each commandment which is written in the *Tọrà*' (*Hor.* 2.6)

2. Predicative function

Miṣwà as a subject
qdm 'to advance, precede, be first, take precedence' (*Bek.* 1.7x4)
grr 'to draw' (*Ab.* 4.2)
tlh qal passive 'to depend on' (*Qid.* 1.9)
nhg 'to apply' (*Qid.* 1.9)

Verbs governing miṣwà as a direct object

bṭl 0/2 'to abolish' (*Shebu.* 3.6; 3.8)
grr 'to draw' (*Ab.* 4.2)
qwm 0/2 'to fulfil, carry out, execute' (*Suk.* 2.7; *Shebu.* 3.6; *Men.* 10.4; *Hul.* 7.2)
ʿśh 'to do' (*Qid.* 1.9x2; *Makk.* 1.7x2; 3.15x2; *Ed.* 5.3; *Ab.* 4.11; *Par.* 12.4)

Verbs governing miṣwà as an argument or adjunct

kwn T/2 *lšm* 'to intend for the sake of' (*Bek.* 1.7)
ḥyym mšwm/mšm 'to be liable on grounds of/by virtue of' (*Betz.* 5.2x2)
qrb k 'to offer according to (its requirement)' (*Men.* 1.3x5; *Zeb.* 2.3x5; 6.7x5)
rwṣ b 'to run after' (*Ab.* 4.2)
qdm l 'to advance, precede, be first, take precedence' (*Bek.* 1.7x4)
ḥzr b 'to return to, to go on to do' (*Pes.* 3.7)
śrp N/1 k 'to burn according to (its requirement)' (*Zeb.* 12.5x2)

Syntagmatic analysis of the plural forms

>   Plural forms: 26 (CS 6; PS 1; AS 19)

1. Attributive function

Adjectives/participles

ʾămurọt battọrà 'written in the Tọrà (*Hor.* 1.1; *Nid.* 6.11x2)
ḥămurọt 'heavy, important, stringent' (*Hul.* 12.4)

Quantifiers

kl 'all, every' (*Maʿaś.* 5.11; *Bik.* 4.2; *Meg.* 1.9; *Ned.* 3.11x2; *Qid.* 1.7x2; *San.* 8.1; *Hor.* 1.1; 3.3; 9.7)
šlš 'three' (*Men.* 5.7)
ʾrb ʿ 'four' (*Men.* 3.7)

Pronominal suffixes

1ˢᵗ singular (*Qid.* 4.14, quotation from Gen 26:5)

Reference: The pronoun refers to *YHWH*.

Nominal complements

Governing nouns or adjectives

ʾḥt 'one' (*Hor.* 3.3)

rgyl l 'be used to' (*Yom.* 8.4)

ʿwl 'yoke' (*Ber.* 2.2)

ḥyyb b 'liable to' (*Bik.* 4.2; *Nid.* 6.11x2)

ḥwmr ʿl 'ritual restriction' (*Hul.* 12.4)

Governed nouns

ʾb 'father' (*Qid.* 1.7)

bn 'son' (*Qid.* 1.7)

ʿăśè̀ 'positive commandments' (*Ker.* 1.1)

2. Predicative function

Verbs governing miṣwot as direct object

ʿśh 'to do' (*Ned.* 3.11)
šmr 'to keep' (*Qid.* 4.14).
rbh H/1 hiqṭil 'to make many' (*Makk.* 3.15)
ṭʿn 'to require' (*Men.* 5.7)

Verbs governing miṣwọt as an argument or adjunct

bwʾ ʿl 'to transgress' (*Meg.* 1.9; 9.7)
ʿbr ʿl 'to transgress' (*Ned.* 2.2)

Glottodidattica

Language Teaching