

JOURNAL OF NORTHWEST SEMITIC LANGUAGES

VOLUME 49/1

2023

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Department of Ancient Studies

Stellenbosch University

The *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
(ISSN 0259-0131) is published half-yearly

JNSL is an accredited South African journal. It publishes peer reviewed research articles on the Ancient Near East. As part of the *peer review policy* all contributions are refereed before publication by scholars who are recognised as experts in the particular field of study.

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Department of Ancient Studies
Stellenbosch University
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SOUTH AFRICA
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*Szabolcs-Ferencz Kató (University of Pretoria / Protestant Theological
Institute of Cluj-Napoca)*

BAAL AND THE BAALS IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

ABSTRACT

The identity and function of Baal and the baals in Hos is a much-discussed issue in the Hebrew Bible. The lexeme occurs in three chapters (Hos 2; 11; 13) and is probably alluded to in Hos 9:10. But who is this Baal? Is he the storm god, a cipher for any foreign deity venerated in Israel, or a canaanized YHWH figure? Is the usage of the word in any way homogeneous? After a brief survey of the positions, I will argue that Baal in Hos 2 seems to be the storm god; the lexeme works as a generic term for the foreign gods in Hos 11:2, and in retrospective discourses (13:1; 9:10) it refers to the Baal cult manifested as bull images. However, even the storm god Baal of Hos is very different from his Canaanite counterpart. Baal in Hos 2 is merely a fertility god without any political or warrior functions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the biblical narrative, Baal assumes a prominent place among the foreign gods in Israel's history. During the time of wandering in the wilderness, the people of Israel joined themselves to Baal-Peor (Num 25:3; Hos 9:10) and shortly after the conquest they began to "worship the Baals" (Judg 2:11). Ahab erected an altar/temple to Baal, and Hos and Jer often complained about the worship of Baal – until King Josiah "cut off the remnant of Baal" (2 Kgs 23; 2 Chr 34; Zeph 1:4). Baal seems to have played a very important role for the biblical writers, and even the extra-biblical record shows the influence of Baal in the region. From the pre-monarchic period, 22 out of 89 theophoric toponyms contain the element *b'l* (Green 2003:278).¹ Similarly, 17 out of 376 theophoric personal names contain the element *b'l* (Golub 2014:630).²

The main question is *who is this entity named Baal*, referred to so often in the Hebrew Bible? It would be easy to identify him with the storm god

1 For a list of the Baal toponyms, see Na'aman (1999:140) and Levin (2014:208-216).

2 Interestingly, from the Iron Age II the Baal-names are totally absent in Judah (Golub 2017:25).

who, in the Levant, also bears the name Baal. In many cases that would be accurate. However, this question becomes more difficult to answer since the Semitic root *b'l* means “craftsman” or “labourer” (Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2015:203), or even “husband” “owner” and “lord” (Halayqa 2008:251-252), and in some cases it is used as a divine appellative for a god. Accordingly, its meaning is not always restricted to a specific god. Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible the plural form of the noun “the Baals” is used: הַבַּעַלִּים (Judg 2:11, 13; 10:10; 1 Sam 7:4; 12:10; Jer 7:9; 11:13, 17; 12:16; 19:5; 2 Chron 17:3; 24:7; 34:4 etc.) denoting any of the foreign gods as opposed to YHWH. Moreover, in the use of a divine appellative like *b'l*, the ancient writers and readers did not necessarily make a strict distinction between concepts such as title of honor, divine appellative, or divine name, as modern readers do. In the case of “the Baals”, even in the generic polemics against the gods, there may be a hint of the worship of the storm god. In many cases the language can be very fluid, and by using the polysemy of a word, writers can develop poetic devices in order to give emphasis to their ideas. This is the case, as we will see, in some passages in Hos. Therefore, every occurrence of the name must be evaluated to determine the intention of the text. In a short paper like this there is neither time nor space to explore all aspects of the question, thus this article will focus on a single literary unit, namely Hos, where the name Baal appears most often in proportion to the size of the book.³

According to the superscription, Hos was a prophet in Israel at the end of the 8th century. However, the book contains many references to Judah and themes that would make sense in the postexilic period (e.g., the restoration Hos 2:1-3, monotheism Hos 13:4), which show clearly the literary growth of the writing. Since Hos is a multi-layered prophetic book containing the largest percentage of occurrences of the term Baal, it suits our purposes to use it as a case study for an investigation of the term Baal, to help us understand its use in the entire Hebrew Bible.

2. *HOS 2*

Hosea refers to the name of Baal in three chapters: 2; 11; 13. The most extensive is ch. 2, which is a well-developed allegory of YHWH's relationship to Israel. In this metaphor, YHWH is the husband and the people are the wife of YHWH, who was cheating on her husband with Baal (and in pl. with the baals). Based on the fact that the lexeme בַּעַל appears in the plural, many assume a DtrH usage of the word, where the baals were

3 Statistics generated by Logos Bible Software. Hos is followed by Judg and Kgs.

foreign gods who led Israel astray (Wolff 1976:48; Daniels 1990:99; Abma 1999:113-114; Dearman 2001, 2010:124-125; Kakkanattu 2005:48-49; Wyatt 2005:77; Keefe 2008:32; Chung 2010:168-169). Given this usage in the DtrH, a postexilic reader of the book would surely have understood the text in this way (Ben Zvi 2005:281). However, one must consider other interpretations as well when determining the original intention of the text.

Many point to v. 18, where YHWH announces: “That you will call Me Ishi And will no longer call Me Baali”.⁴ Here the text employs the literary device of antanaclasis and builds on the polysemy of the name Baal,⁵ which can mean both lord and husband. In the allegory, YHWH is the baal, the husband of the people, but also baal in the sense of lord, the high God of Israel. This relationship is contaminated though, and therefore YHWH put an end to it. He is no longer *baal*, but *ishi*. Based on this observation, many argue that the Baal of Hos 2 is not a different deity but a contaminated Yhwh figure, which absorbed many traits of the Canaanite fertility gods (Rudolph 1966:68; Kinet 1977:115-116, 125, 180; Jeremias 1994:441-446; Kratz 1997:13-14; Irwin 1999:169-177; Pfeiffer 1999:11-12; Albertz 2003:371; Rudnig-Zelt 2006:12-13; Na’aman 2015:243; Hubler 2020). According to this theory, Baal was not worshipped per se, but his influence infiltrated the official YHWH religion. Hos would argue against this false concept of YHWH.

Kelle (2005:164-166, 199-200) offers a different explanation: he completely denies the religious character of the chapter and suggests instead a political reading. According to Kelle, the baals are political allies of Israel during the Syro-Ephraimite war, namely the Aramean Rezin and other anti-Assyrian parties. One of his key arguments is that the baals are called “lovers” in Hos 2, and in Hos 8:9 these lovers are political allies of Ephraim vis à vis the Assyrian threat (Kelle 2005:121).

A fourth interpretation is to be found in many works, namely that Baal is identical to the Canaanite storm god (Weider 1993:108; Hentrich 2004; Day 2010:206; Kató 2019:92-100; Stahl 2021). However, to properly identify the baal(s) of Hos 2, one must examine three fundamental factors that play a significant role in any theory that is proposed: the plural of the baals; the position of the baals in relation to YHWH; and their gifts to the people.

4 Bible quotations are according to NAS.

5 “Antanaclasis is the repetition of the same sign, word, or expression, each time with a different meaning”. For a thorough classification of the so called “wordplays” and for this type, see Noegel (2021:164-171).

After considering these factors, we will be able to better understand the identity of Baal in Hos 2.

2.1 *The plural of the baals*

In Hos 2, the wife of YHWH has a single husband and many lovers (vv. 7, 9, 12, 14-15) which are also called baals. In this scenario, the baals/lovers can substitute for YHWH, and play a similar role as YHWH does with the adulterous woman. Moreover, they have feasts (v. 13), incense is burned to them (v. 15), and they provide fertility.⁶ This makes it hard to posit a human being behind the name Baal. However, due to this observation, we ruled out only one possible explanation. The name Baal may still refer to a plurality of gods, YHWH, or the storm god. In favour of the first option is that in other chapters idols appear generally in the plural form (4:17; 8:4; 13:2; 14:9). Such use of the lexeme baal for gods is evidenced by North-West Semitic Inscriptions (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995:182-183) and Mesopotamian texts (Schwemer 2001:502). Many deities (Marduk, Melqart, etc.) from Mesopotamia through Ugarit (*KTU* 1.2 I 45; 1.3 I 1-4) to the Levant, are addressed as lords (*CAD* 2:193), whereas the noun rarely appears in the plural⁷ but more often in the singular denoting different deities. Even in the case of the North-West Semitic Baal, most scholars assume that the original name of the storm god was Haddu/Hadad, and the divine appellative only became a proper name at a later stage (Niehr 2003:23; Levin 2014:217).⁸ Nevertheless, this Baal had

6 Kelle (2005:261-264) explains this, based on the fact that in the context of Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty-treaties, sacrifices were made to the gods of the superior kingdom as a sign of loyalty. He interprets the preposition לְ from the phrase תִּקְטִיר לְהֶם (v.15) as a לְ “of cause or motive (‘because of’, ‘for the sake of’) or accompaniment (‘with’)”. However, in the instances where לְ appears in this sense (2 Sam 18:5; Isa 15:5; 16:7, 11; Jer 22:10), it is never about sacrifice, and with the “לְ of accompaniment” (Lev 26:5; Num 15:24; 1 Kgs 22:34; 1 Chron 29:11) are always action abstracts (*Handlungsabstrakta*) (not persons!) introduced, which specify the modus of the action. Cf. Jenni (2000:95-97); Kató (2019:72-73).

7 E.g., *KAI* 19:3; *NP* 87:2.

8 Pettinato (1980) draws attention to some pre-Ugaritic attestations of Baal, where ^d*ba-al* in a god-list and anthroponyms and toponyms appear denoting a separate deity. For his thesis, see Herrmann (1999a:132), Levin (2014:217). Schwemer hints however, that there is no evidence of a cult of this deity, and in these cases, Baal can denote the personal god of the worshipper (2001:502-504).

local manifestations determined by toponyms: e.g., in Ugarit *b'l špn*, *b'l ugrt* (KTU 1.27 4; 109 11. 16; 1.119 3), *b'l hlb* (KTU 109 16 4.728 1-2) who receive sacrifices separately. But in some cases, the Baal deities seem to appear in the plural form as well (*b'lm* KTU 1.39 9; 1.87 20; 1.41 18, cf. KTU 1.119 6).⁹ Thus, many local baals derive their power from Baal of Sapun (Smith 2012:230) and can be addressed as baals in the plural.

2.2 *The position of the baals in relation to YHWH*

The phenomenon of the local manifestation of a god is widely known in the ANE. Even the Hebrew Bible lists some of the baals: Baal-Peor (Num 25:3), Baal-Berit (Judg 8:33; 9:4) Baal-Zebub (2 Kgs 1:1-3, 16), etc.¹⁰ The use of the baalim of Hos also reflect this concept. However, as already mentioned, the lexeme *b'l* can be a title of honour and so stand for YHWH in these names as well. In addition, the inscriptions of Kuntillet Ajrud attest similarly to local manifestations of YHWH: YHWH from Teman and YHWH from Samaria (Insc. 3.1:2; 3.6:6; 3.9:1; 4,1.1:1.2)¹¹ and if so, the baalim can still be contaminated YHWH manifestations.

Hos 2:10 contains a very important hint as to the identity of Baal, where the noun baal appears in the singular: “And lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal”. If in this case Baal means a foreign god, he could only be a single deity and not many different gods. The noun cannot refer to a specific deity and *more* gods at the same time. To solve this problem, one is compelled either to assume that the noun is not used homogeneously in the chapter, or to identify this baal with a specific deity. In the latter case, the storm god would be the strongest candidate for the role. This would explain why the foreign gods are addressed as baals and not with other generic terms. Furthermore, by using the term baal the text is enhanced by the different meanings of the noun: lord, husband, and the divine name. YHWH is lord, but this does not mean that he is addressed as baal (2:18 MT), for in the context of Hos 2 he is the husband of Israel. His rivals are baals too, thus in name at least, husbands as well. However, they are not

9 For these texts and their interpretation, see Kató (2019:78-82); Hundley (2022:160-162).

10 The name Baal-Zebub (Lord of the Flies) is mostly understood as a dysphemism of the title Baal zebul, the prince Baal. However, Tångberg (1992) by considering the association of the flies in the ANE text, proposes that Baal Zebub was a “Baal figure with some kind of fly ornament that signifies the apotropaic and healing function of the deity” (1992:296).

11 The texts from Kuntillet Ajrud are cited according to Meshel (2012).

legitimate husbands of Israel, they are only paramours, intruders in the relationship. Here the text plays ironically with Baal's name and brings another sense of the noun into play (Kató 2019:94). Baal is lord, but cannot be a husband, only a lover.

Hos 2:18 (MT) makes the term baal taboo. YHWH cannot be addressed as baal anymore but as אֱלֹהִים. If baal denotes any foreign gods, the avoidance of a generic term would not essentially affect the cults of the other deities. They can still be addressed and venerated in several ways. The restriction only makes sense if it substantially refers to a foreign cult. These observations do not directly link the identification of the baals in Hos 2 with the storm god, but they clearly point us in this direction. To gain certainty we must draw a portrait of these baals and look at their gifts and what they provide for the people. In order to do so, I will examine how these motifs function in Ugaritic texts.

From a methodological point of view, it should be stressed that the Ugaritic corpus, both temporally (LBA) and geographically, attests to a source from a specific kingdom and not the entire Canaanite religion from the first millennium per se. However, some of the important gods in Ugarit (e.g., El, Ashera, Baal, Dagan etc.) are also known to have played a major role in the region called Canaan in various texts, and therefore the assumption of cultural continuity and interchange cannot be avoided (Pitard 2002:253-255). Beyond that, while we have only a few sources of the deities venerated in Canaan, the Ugaritic texts offer a vast background for these gods concerning ritual, mythic and epic texts. A comparison, therefore, seems appropriate in the case of the baals.

2.3 *The gifts of the baals*

In the allegory of Hos 2, many gifts from the baals are listed: bread, water, linen, wool, oil, grain, new wine, vine and fig tree, gold, and silver. It is remarkable that in this very long list, all the elements except precious metals are related to agriculture and depend on the land's fertility and favourable weather. Therefore, the baals who provide these things primarily ensure the fertility of the land and rainfall.¹² In short, they seem to be

12 Some of these elements appear in ritual texts as offerings to Baal and other gods. In *KTU* 1.16 III, an unknown worshipper pours out oil as part of a rain-making ritual (Dietrich and Loretz 1978). According to *KTU* 4.728, oil-tax was delivered for Baal of Aleppo (see Pardee 2002:216; cf. Tropper and Vita 1999:310-313). Further, wine is a standard libation offering for the gods (*KTU* 1.41 23 / 1.87 24) and is attested with oil, flour, *dt* (fodder or some type of grain? See Del Olmo

weather gods. Many cognates of these lexemes appear directly in the context of Baal in Ugarit.

KTU 1.16 III 5-9

<i>'n l arš mṯr b'l</i>	Source ¹³ is for the land the rain of Baal,
<i>w l šd mṯr 'ly</i>	and for the field the rain of the Mighty one.
<i>n'm l arš mṯr b'l</i>	Beneficial for the land is the rain of Baal,
<i>w l šd mṯr 'ly</i>	and for the field the rain of the Mighty one,
<i>n'm l ḥṯt b 'n</i>	Beneficial to the wheat in the furrow

This text from the Kirta epic shows clearly how the rain of Baal promotes agricultural production.

KTU 1.4 V 6-7

<i>wn ap 'dn mṯrh b'l</i>	And yet, behold, Baal made his rain abundant, ¹⁴
<i>y'dn 'dn ikt b glt</i>	truly, he made the chariot abundant in the shower of rain. ¹⁵

This section of the Baal Cycle attests to a very illustrative concept, namely that the clouds are the chariot of Baal in which he brings the rain. From this image is derived his title the “cloud rider” *rkb 'rpt* (cf. Herrmann 1999b:704). Riding upon the clouds Baal brings his blessing, the rain, which is as abundant and nourishing as oil and honey (cf. *KTU 1.6 III 6; 12*), and is called the “oil of the earth” (*KTU 1.3 II 39-40*). But these texts,

Lete and Sanmartín 2015:281), emmer and unleavened bread (*ḥt*) in *KTU 1.41 / 1.87* (cf. 1.39 9) as sacrificial materials for different gods, among others, for the *b'lm*. In mythic texts, wine is the drink of the gods in banquet scenes (*KTU 1.3 I; 1.4 III 43-44; 1.114 3-4* etc.). Nevertheless, animal sacrifice is much more common even for Baal: bull, ram etc. (*KTU 1.115; 1.148* etc.). In the context of Hos 2, however, it is about the gifts which the baals give to the women, and not sacrifices offered by the wife. Thus, for our discussion the beneficial power of Baal, illustrated here as gifts, is more important.

13 It is not clear if *'n* belongs to line 5 or 4. I read it based on parallelism in 5-6 at the beginning of line 5.

14 The meaning of the verb is ambiguous. It can mean “to appoint the time” (Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2015:203) or “to make abundant” (Smith and Pitard 2009:558). Both make sense, and both are reflected in the various translations. However, some theophoric names that relate Hadad and the idea of abundance expressed with this root, speak for the former option. For a discussion of the positions and this argument, see Smith and Pitard (2009:557-558).

15 The word *glt* is mostly a metathesis assumed for *tlg* (“snow”). Nevertheless, the form occurs two times more but in broken contexts. Cf. Kató (2019:84 n. 174).

which speak of rain and agriculture, refer not only to Baal but also to his entourage. The three daughters of Baal are Pidray, Talay, and Arsay, translated “Flashy”,¹⁶ “Dewy”, and “Earthy”.¹⁷ Pidray and Talay accompany him on his journey into the netherworld and disappear when Baal is powerless. The daughters of Baal bear in their names meanings that reflect agricultural phenomena, and thus the meaning of the names points clearly to Baal’s relation to these elements (cf. Wiggins 2003). Likewise, the names of Baal’s messengers *gpn w ugr*, “Vineyard” and “Field” also reflect Baal’s influence on agricultural production and goods.

In the Ugaritic texts, Baal plays a prominent role in the fertility of the land. The baals of Hos seem to have had very similar associations except for two facts. Baal is not merely a fertility god in Ugarit: “recent studies have reached consensus that Baal is a warrior and that he was strongly connected with kingship” (Cornelius 1995:162; cf. Niehr 2013:611; Smith 2020). He is called “mightiest of warriors” (*KTU* 1.3 III 1; IV 7-8; VI 25), he has smitten *ltn*, the fleeing serpent (*KTU* 1.5 I 1),¹⁸ has killed Yamm, the sea god (*KTU* 1.2) etc. None of these aggressive traits are present in the baals of Hos 2.

Similarly, Baal acts in the interests of the kingdom. He is invoked when anyone “strong attacks your gate and a warrior the walls” (*KTU* 1.119 27-28). The whole Baal-Cycle is dedicated to the king, Niqmaddu IV; while

16 The etymology of the Pidray’s name is uncertain. Comparing her name with the Arabic *baḍar*, “scattering”, or *badray*, “rain that is before or in the first part of winter”, and interpreting her epithet as “daughter of the light/lightning” (*bt ar*), indicate that it is related as well to some type of moisture (Smith and Pitard 2009:120).

17 Arsay is equated (in an Akkadian god list from Ugarit RS 20.024), with Allatum, a chthonic goddess. Accordingly, her name can point to her connection to the Netherworld since *arṣ* in Ugaritic can also mean Netherworld. However, it is remarkable that Arsay does not follow Baal into the Netherworld with the two other daughters. Here the argument “being that as a netherworld figure there is no point in describing her as descending to the Underworld” (Smith 1994:72 n. 143), falls short in my opinion, and is based on unanswered questions such as “Do the two [Allatum and Arsay] share roles or characteristics beyond those of a netherworldly association? Why is one of Baal’s daughters chthonic in nature?” (Wiggins 2003:97). In the context of a storm god, I tend to understand the name of Arsay simply as a reference to agriculture and farmland.

18 *Ltn* is presumably identical to the biblical Leviathan (Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14; Job 3:8).

there are four Niqmaddus bearing “Haddu”, the other name for Baal, as a theophoric element in their names.¹⁹ Accordingly, the whole dynasty and the kingship stay under Baal’s protection (Smith 1994:90). Moreover, recent studies emphasize the political nuances of the Baal-Cycle, whereas kingship and the foundations of sovereignty for the ruler are questioned in the era of rival kings of the Late Bronze Age (Tugendhaft 2018). Why do the baals of Hos not have these characteristics? The main reason may be the dynastic connection between god and king. While in Ugarit the patron of the kingship is Baal, in Israel this can only be YHWH. In the Northern Kingdom, all theophoric names of the kings that contain a divine name element, and not just a divine appellative, are Yahwistic.²⁰ Even Ahab, who according to 1 Kgs 16:32 erected a Baal-altar in the Baal-temple,²¹ gave his sons Yahwistic names (Ahaziah and Jehoram, 1 Kgs 22:40; 2 Kgs 1:17). Of course, personal names reflect an individual’s personal religiosity rather than the official royal religion. However, given the fact that the charter myth of the Northern Kingdom is the Exodus, and that, according to the Deuteronomistic History, there were YHWH-prophets in Israel linked to the kingship (e.g., Elia, Elisha), Yahwistic king names in Israel may indicate the kingdom’s loyalty to YHWH (cf. Kató 2019:109). If Baal was indeed an intruder into genuine Yahwism, and the kings remained loyal YHWH worshippers, Baal would have had no opportunity to show his warrior side.

The second difference between the baals of Hos 2 and the Ugaritic Baal is the reference to gold and silver as gifts from the baals, which in fact come from YHWH (Hos 2:10). In the myths and epics, there is no special

19 The number of the Niqmaddus is a much-disputed issue in Ugaritology. For a short overview of the positions, see Wyatt (2015:404).

20 Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Zechariah, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea. However, the names of Jeroboam and Ahab are considered theophoric as they contain divinized kinship designations, such as *’āb* (father), *’āh* (brother), and *’am* (father’s brother or uncle), which can reflect early designations of personal gods or divinized ancestors (Albertz and Schmitt 2012:350). Nevertheless, these names do not necessarily indicate that their owners did not venerate YHWH as well. For example, Jeroboam erected two bulls for the god of the Exodus (1 Kgs 12:28), which is believed to be YHWH. For Ahab, see the main text.

21 For this tautologic formulation, see Timm (1982:35). The original text attested to in the LXX presumably witnesses that Ahab introduced Baal as *theos synnaos* into the temple of YHWH, his God.

connection between these precious metals and Baal. They appear in the context of other deities as well, and as general topoi in the case of Baal, signifying richness and wealth (e.g., for the decoration of Baal's palace *KTU* 1.4 V 16-19; 31-35). Divine gifts such as these also appear in Hos 2:10.²²

The analysis of the gifts of the baals in Hos 2 further strengthens the assumption that the baals are indeed local manifestations of the storm god. The elements of Hos 2 appear clearly in the context of Baal. But there is an important difference: the baals of Hos 2 have nothing in common with war or kingship. And so, the Baal of Hos is a “depoliticized” variant of the Canaanite storm god. This role appears even in the syncretistic religion of YHWH. Baal provided fertility for the region, which may be the reason for the popularity and resilience of his cult.

2.4 *Hos 11 and 13*

The other two chapters that attest to Baal are Hos 11 and 13, which look back retrospectively to an earlier time. Hos 11 evokes the mythic past when YHWH first encountered Israel. This is depicted in Hos 2 by another family metaphor, this time by the image of parent-son.²³ In the beginning, when Israel was a child, YHWH found him in the desert.²⁴ Immediately after a short idyll, the people began “to sacrifice to the baals and burn incense to the idols” (11:2). This verse accusing Israel of apostasy, consists of parallelism where the two verbs and the two nouns correspond to each other: to sacrifice/burn incense, to the baal/idols. Nothing more is said about the baals, just that they were recipients of sacrifice; there are no fertility motifs or warrior references. Baal, or the baals, seem to be no more than a cipher for foreign gods, as in the *DtrH*.²⁵ Here the name of Baal appears only as a place name (cf. Andersen and Freedman 1980:54;

22 In an agriculture-based economy all goods depend on agricultural production. In this way one can tentatively establish a connection between gold and silver and the baals. Cf. Kató (2019:99).

23 Most commentators speak of the father-son relationship. However, texts (e.g., *KAI* 24:10; *KAI* 26:2 etc.) show that kings can call themselves mother, father, and brother at the same time. The same also applies to gods: *NAP* 2.5:26; *CTH* 372:20-21 etc., cf. Böckler (2000:362-365); Baumgart (2004:10-11).

24 Some scholars assume a desert tradition without the exodus, where the desert is the place of intimate encounters between YHWH and Israel. This latter is labelled “Fundtradition”. Cf. Bach (1952:25-49).

25 For this literary device, see Noegel (2021:97-113).

MacIntosh 1997:360), but very likely is alluded to in the noun shame (בִּשְׁתָּ) as well. Further, it is striking that the verb אָהַב is used for the worship of this “detestable” god, which recalls the image of marriage and sexual intercourse. So, the text resembles not only Num 25, but Hos 1-3 as well.

In Hos 9:10 Baal is loved, so he is a lover for the people, as in Hos 2. Further, the literary device, the paronomasia, based on Baal’s name, is similar to Hos 2. In Hos 2 the meaning of husband plays a very important role, while the noun “shame” substitutes for the name of the storm god in Hos 9:10.²⁶ This phenomenon is evident whenever personal names in the Hebrew Bible contain the element baal, although in parallel texts baal is substituted with בִּשְׁתָּ (Jerubbaal, Judg 6:32; 7:1 etc. / Jerubbesheth, 2 Sam 11:21 etc.; Eshbaal, 1 Chr 8:33 etc. / Ishboshet, 2 Sam 2:8 etc.; Mephibosheth, 2 Sam 4:4 etc. / Meribbaal, 1 Chr 8:34). Most scholars explain this shift as a dysphemistic correction of the storm god’s name.²⁷ The Baal-Peor tradition, witnessed in Hos 9:10, depicts Baal as YHWH’s first antagonist who made the people detestable. It is noteworthy that the verb אָהַב can allude to some fertility aspect of this Baal. The people loved this god. Many scholars interpret texts like this as evidence for a mythic concept in which the land is imagined as a female being fertilized by the rain – the sperm of the baals (Jeremias 1980:42; Davidson 2007:93; Mweemba 2010:141). Although this motif does not appear explicitly in the

26 Ackerman (2020) wants to see an El-figure behind Baal-Peor based on the *marzeāh*-like feast attested in Num 25:2. However, this theory seems to be very speculative.

27 Some scholars have challenged this *communis opinio* with the argument that the akk. *bāštu* “protective spirit”, respectively the Northwest Semitic **bašt*, is attested to in some theophoric names. In this regard, Hos 9:10 would be a key passage as the oldest evidence for the change from Baal to *bašt*. Cf. Hamilton (1998); Schorch (2000). But in this case, בִּשְׁתָּ would have in Hos 9:10 a positive or a neutral meaning, which is clearly not the intention of the text. It is more likely that the text wants to shame or disempower the name of Baal. Noegel draws attention to such polemical texts – Hos 9:10 among others – which allude to the name of Baal through different synonyms for shame and/or anagrams of Baal, or other literary devices, which he calls “mnemonics of odium” (2015). This means that the element בִּשְׁתָּ is not the sole strategy used to play on Baal’s name by disregarding it. Furthermore, in a recent study Noegel (2022:25-41), suggests that the change from Baal to the noun shame in the baalistic names in Sam, is motivated more by the shameful character/fate of these figures than polemizing with Baal.

mythic and epic world of the ancient Near East (Kató 2019:65-66), the sexual language may hint at similar concepts, and Hos 9:10 could implicitly allude to them through the use of the verb אָהַב. Here, too, there is no sign of the warrior god motifs.

The last important section is ch. 13, where the text recalls the past when Ephraim did evil through Baal and died. In v. 2 the text switches to the present with the adverb “now”. In the present, the community acts as they did in the time of the Baal worship: they cast idols and images, and kissed the calves.²⁸ The kissing of Baal occurs in 1 Kgs 19:18 as well; YHWH shows mercy to those who have not kissed Baal. Although ritual kissing is scarcely attested to in the ancient Near East (Andersen and Freedman 1980:632),²⁹ here the practice is clearly a part of the Baal cult. But why are calves/bulls involved?

The bull is the standard animal associated with the storm god (Schroer 2008:50).³⁰ He has bull horns, stands on a bull, has the head of a bull, etc. (Cornelius 1994:165). These symbols “not only represent procreative power, but also military power (i.e., the ability to destroy an adversary)” (Cornelius 1994:262). Similar associations can also be made with Baal’s bull figure in ancient Israel. However, as we have seen, the political

28 Hos 13:2 is syntactically problematic and hard to decipher. Above all, the sentence הֵם לָהֶם הֵם אֲמָרִים זָבַחַי אָדָם עֲגָלִים יִשְׁקֹון is not clear. Is there evidence of human sacrifice? (Andersen and Freedman 1980:632). For a survey of the proposed emendations, cf. Kató (2019:146-147). However, it is striking that YHWH punishes the people, not for their horrific sacrifices, but for their idolatry. If the text spoke of human sacrifice, in the light of the taboo of murder in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 9:6; Exod 20:13 etc.), one would expect some polemic. Since this is not the case, it is very unlikely that the text attests to any form of human sacrifice.

29 Editorial note: On ritual kissing, see Berlejung, A 2021. Refreshed Cultic Kisses: Forms of Encounter between Gods and Humans, in: Berlejung, A. *Divine Secrets and Human Imaginations: Studies on the History of Religion and Anthropology of the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament* (ORA 42). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 49-65.

30 There are other gods associated with the bull as well, e.g., El is called the bull (El in *KTU* 1.1 III 26; 1.2 I 16.33.36; III 16-17.19 etc). Nonetheless, while in the case of Baal the bull stands for aggressivity, in the epithet of El, fertility traits come to light (Green 2003:207). Cf. Rahmouni (2008:318-319); Day (2010:215-216).

connotations of Baal are missing.³¹ Unfortunately, Hos 13 does not say anything more about the calves, thus their function remains unclear. Given the strong fertility traits of the baals, the bull probably embodies fertility and fecundity more than military power. This domain is reserved for YHWH. In the following verses he is like a lion and a leopard, and a bear robbed of her cubs (Hos 13:7-8). YHWH is responsible for political issues, but Baal is not. Rather, Baal is the emblem of the foreign gods and of idols made by Israel.

3. CONCLUSIONS

After a brief survey of the current research on the name Baal in Hos, four positions were identified: 1) Baal denotes the storm god; 2) Baal is a generic term for any foreign god; 3) Baal is the name of a canaanized YHWH; 4) The baals were political allies of Israel during the Syro-Ephraimite war. In this paper, I have investigated the occurrences of the name in its various contexts. First of all, it can be concluded that Baal is the nemesis of YHWH. In Hos 9:10, 11 and 13, his worship is projected back to the mythic past, right at the very beginning of Israel's history. In the biblical tradition, the story of YHWH and the story of Baal mostly overlap. The *origo* of their antagonism is called Baal-Peor.

From a literary point of view, the polysemy of the lexeme *b'l* is an important factor in the Baal-texts of Hos. The book contains two paronomasias on Baal's name: In Hos 2 the baals are also called lovers, which alludes to the meaning husband from the root *b'l* while YHWH cannot be addressed as lord (*b'l*) anymore for the polemics against the baals. Here interplay the divine name, title of honour for YHWH and the storm god, and the generic meaning (husband) of the word. In Hos 9:10, Baal is substituted in an appellative paronomasia by the noun shame (בִּשְׁתָּה) as in three other Baal-containing names. This literary device reveals the polemics against the storm god.

Another prominent feature of the Baal occurrences is their link to fertility motifs. Hos 2 is full of such references which are explicitly attested to in the Ugaritic literature: rain, oil, grain, etc., and are all gifts of the storm god. This procreative power is displayed in the bull image and in the verb to love

31 Another attestation to the bulls of Baal could be Hos 8: "Surely the calf of Samaria will be broken to pieces". However, the god in question is not named, and the text can foresee the destruction of a YHWH symbol. According to 1 Kgs 12, Jeroboam has erected two calves for the God who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt, i.e., YHWH. For this interpretation, cf. Kató (2019:116-120).

בַּאֵל, attested to in Hos 13:2 and Hos 2; 9:10, respectively. In this regard, the Baal of Hos resembles the Baal of Ugarit. However, there is a very important difference: Baal in Ugarit is a warrior god and the protector of the kingship. The dynasty is protected by him, and he drives away enemies from the gate. These concepts are alien to Hos. A very likely explanation for this difference is that these domains are reserved for YHWH, and he acts valiantly in favour of, or against Israel as he chooses. Thus, the baals of Hos are “depoliticized” pacifists.

Also, not to be neglected is the fact that in Hos 11 and 13 the baals stand in parallel with other nouns meaning idols, molten images, etc., and the wording of these texts is very close to the Dtr. usage of the noun. Accordingly, Hos contains at least three concepts of Baal. In Hos seems to shine through the cult of the storm god practiced in the 8th century BCE. Hos 9:10 reflects retrospectively on the cult of Baal, but here no specific traits of the storm god are thematized, and he is the call name of a past foreign cult. And finally in Hos 11 and 13 the figure of Baal is even more elusive, and is nothing more than an expression with an altered meaning: the title of honor becomes the title of dishonor, not only for Baal, but paradigmatically for all other gods. As I see it, this corresponds by and large to the layers and traditions of the DtrH, where Baal is also sometimes a venerated god and sometimes a cipher for the idols. So, the literary development of the term *b'l* in Hos can be paradigmatic in the Hebrew Bible for the presentation of Baal in other writings. However, at this point more investigation is needed.

To sum up: Hos refers to traditions that can unequivocally be linked to the storm god: fertility motifs, bull images, and a plurality of local manifestations. In an agrarian society it is no wonder that the one who ensured the fertility of the land would have a popular cult. However, this Baal could never dethrone YHWH as the national god. According to the theophoric names of the northern kings, the Israelite dynasties were committed to YHWH. Therefore, the warrior traits of Baal were probably not adopted. Over time this Baal lost his power to make the land fertile, and YHWH took his place as the dominant rainmaker of the region (cf. 1 Kgs 18; Hag etc.) Nonetheless, the erstwhile influence of Baal shows the lasting influence of his name, which has become an appellative for any foreign god. He is the god *par excellence*, the only one who could take up the race with YHWH.

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