Gift-giving as God's instrument to influence Israel's History

Lexical Semantics as a basis
for a theological and cultural approach to the Biblical texts[1]

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1. COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS (CA)

1.1. Meaning

According to CA's theoretical principles[2], the „meaning" of a lexeme is the result of the sum and the interaction of specific „distinctive features" (also called „semes") that compose the semantic value of the lexeme itself. These „distinctive features" directly result from an interactive net of paradigmatic and oppositional sense-relations within a group of lexemes. The „meaning" of a lexeme, thus, is not an isolated feature thereof, since it rather expresses the result of dynamic sense-relations between the given lexeme and its lexical background. Within such a framework, moreover, a clear-cut distinction exists between the notions of „meaning" and „contextual use of the meaning". The contextual usage of the „meaning" is thus qualified mainly by extra-linguistic elements (i.e. by contextual and narrative aspects), whereas the „meaning" of a lexeme is only qualified by linguistic elements.

1.2. Functional Languages

In order to guarantee both the linguistic nature and the theoretical coherence of the results, the paradigmatic oppositions between the lexemes must be investigated within homogeneous linguistic structures, called Functional Languages (FL). A FL is in fact an area of the language, which is characterised by being „synchronic", „syntopic", „synphasic" and „synstratic". A FL, in other words, represents a linguistic unit that is homogeneous according to temporal,

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1   This article is based on a paper read to the XIX IOSOT Congress, Ljubljana (July 2007).
2   An exhaustive description of CA's theoretical principles can be found in Coseriu 1971; 1971a; 1978 as well as in Orioles 2004. As far as CA's application to Ancient Hebrew is involved, see for instance Fronzaroli 1993, Zatelli 1995; 2004, Zanella 2010.

dialectal, stylistic and sociolinguistic aspects.[3] FLs must be considered as a necessary heuristic tool of CA, since they are the essential prerequisite (a) for the classification and the analysis of the oppositional relations within a group of lexemes, and (b) for the final identification and the description of their meanings. As far as the present paper is concerned, for instance, the paradigmatic oppositions between the lexemes שֹכֶר „reward, recompense", שׁחד „bribe" and כפֶּר „substitutive gift" are specifically analysed within the FL called „Standard Poetical Hebrew"[4].

2. SEMANTIC DATA CONCERNING THE LEXEMES שׁחד ,שׁכֶר AND כפֶּר

The aim of this paragraph is to provide a sample of the semantic analysis of the lexemes שׁחד ,שֹכֶר and כפֶּר with with specific reference to Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3 and Isa 45:13. These three verses do not obviously represent the whole set of textual data I have been working with[5]. The reference to these verses must indeed be considered as an example of the research procedures. The conclusions I will draw in this paper obviously result from the complete investigation of all passages where the three lexemes occur. Going into details, first of all the linguistic analysis of the lexemes שׁחד ,שֹכֶר and כפֶּר will focus on the syntagmatic relations between each lexeme and its specific lexical background (§ 2.1.). Secondly, the study will investigate the paradigmatic-oppositional relations between the three lexemes, in order to reconstruct and define their respective meanings (§ 2.2.).

2.1. Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3 and Isa 45:13

Within the poetical language of the Bible, the lexemes שֹכֶר ,כפֶּר, and שׁחד occur rather frequently[6]. Their occurrences are also characterised by a shared contextual and narrative milieu, which might be exemplified by Ezek 29:19,

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3   As far as AH is concerned, 12 specific FLs have been identified: see in this regard Zatelli 2004: 139–142.

4   See Zatelli 2004: 140: „Poetical Language: 2Kg 19:21–35; 2 Sam 22–23:7; Classical Prophets; Lam; Prv; Prv; Ps (except late ones); [Jer, Ez and Lam are chronologically exilic, whereas Hag, Zac, Mal, Joe, Isa 40–60 and probably Prv 1–9, 30–31 are chronologically late; however the language of these texts is considered typologically Early Biblical Hebrew]".

5   For an exclusive analysis of all the occurences of the three lexemes as well as for the study of their paradigmatic relations with the other members of the lexical field of the substantives of „gift" see Zanella 2006a; 2010.

6   Going into details, in the Standard Poetical Language the lexeme שֹכֶר is attested in 13 occurences, the lexeme שׁחד is attested in 12 occurences and the lexeme כפֶּר is used in six occurrences.

Isa 43:3 and Isa 45:13. After a quick look at the general context of the passages, I will use the text as primary source to investigate the most important sense relations between the three lexemes under analysis and their specific lexical backgrounds.

2.1.1. Ez 29:19.20 – שׂכר

לכן כה אמר אדני יהוה הנני נתן לנבוכדראצר מלך־בבל את־ארץ מצרי [...] והיתה שׂכר לחילו:

פעלתו אשר־עבד בה נתתי לו את־ארץ מצרים [...]:

„And so spoke the Lord YHWH: behold, I give Nabuchadrezzar king of Babylon the land of Egypt [...] and *it (the land of Egypt) will be a* שׂכר *for his army, his recompense* (פעלה)[7], for which he has worked[8]; I give him the land of Egypt [...]"

Ezek 29 refers to Nabuchadrezzar's campaign against Tyre: this military action is understood as the response to a request to God. Whether this campaign was successful or not[9], this is not the issue of the present paper. As far as the semantic analysis of the lexeme שׂכר is involved, the following two data are indeed relevant. (a) Firstly, the lexeme under analysis is used in syntagmatic relation with the lexeme פעלה („recompense")[10]. The lexemes שׂכר and פעלה occur together also in Jer 31:16, Isa 40:10; 62:11[11]. In Ezek 29:19, moreover,

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7 My emphasis.

8 The translation here proposed is also confirmed by Zimmerli 1979: 716: „Als seinen Lohn, um den er gearbeitet hat". According to this translation, the pronominal syntagm בה („for it"), referring to the substantive פעלה „recompense", must be understood as the indirect object – with ב of price – of the verb עבד „to work". See in this regard Zimmerli 1979: 717: „בה [...] sich zweifellos auf פעלתו zurückbezieht". Moreover, according to Koehler-Baumgartner 1983: 731 the verb עבד with the preposition ב would have the specific meaning of „dienen für (um zu erwerben)".

9 According to Eichrodt 1970: 409, for instance, the reference to Nabuchadrezzar's recompense might be due to pure irony: „can Ezekiel really have believed that Yahweh had incurred the legal debt of wages to the instrument he had employed, like an earthly monarch who has to pay the mercenaries he has hired?" The question is obviously a rhetorical one, which hides „an ironical critique of the difficulties which disturbed the faith of his [*Ezekiel's*] contemporaries". It is also true, as Eichrodt notices (1970: 410), that „such a piece of irony [...] would bring out still more strongly the cool and nonchalant way in which the Lord of the world can control the mightiest nations by merely moving a finger".

10 The word פעלה is here used with reference to a recompense, not to a work: see once again, for instance, Zimmerli 1979: 717 „פעלה bezeichnet in der Tat in Jer 31₁₆ und 2 Ch 15₇ die Arbeitsmühe, die einen Lohn (שׂכר) einträgt. Das folgende בה, in dem ein ב-pretii zu finden ist, rät aber noch dazu, hier die ungleich häufiger belegte Bedeutung Lohn (par. שׂכר) zu finden".

11 Jer 31:16: כי יש שׂכר לפעלתך („because there is a שׂכר for your work"); Isa 40:10 and 62:11: הנה שׂכרו אתו ופעלתו לפניו („behold, His שׂכר is with Him, His recompense is before Him").

such a relationship is characterised by a specific syntactical construction: the lexeme פעלה („recompense") might be considered as an apposition of the lexeme שכר. This syntactic construction is thus relevant also from a semantic point of view, since the value of the substantive פעלה („recompense") would be used to explain the value of the lexeme שכר. (b) Secondly, in the general context of the verse, the relative clause אשר־עבד בה („for which he has worked") would seem to suggest that this gift is given as consequence of a specifically required action and *because* of it. One might then assume[12] that the lexeme שכר denotes here a kind of reward, a recompense that, instead of an ordinary wage (result of a contract) is given only to those actions that are judged as commendable. The text itself, furthermore, clearly highlights that this gift is deliberately given by God after a detailed evaluation of the whole situation: Ezek 29:18, in fact, points out that ושכר לא היה לו ולחילו מצור („and yet had he no שכר, nor his army, from Tyre"). Here God notices, in other words, that Nabuchadrezzar's campaign would have deserved a reward. This is the very reason why (see לכן-„therefore", v.19) God decided to give him a שכר-gift.

2.1.2. Isa 43:3 – כפר

כי אני יהוה אלהיך קדוש ישראל מושיעך נתתי כפרך מצרים כוש וסבא תחתיך:

„For I am YHWH your God, the holy one of Israel, your Saviour, *I give Egypt as your* כפר, *Cush and Saba in exchange for you*"[13].

Isa 43:1–7 represents a good example of an oracle of salvation[14]. Going into details, Isa 43:3 patently confirms the content of Ezek 29:19: for the salvation of His people, God is prepared to pay whatever price is necessary[15]. This kind of gift is precisely referred to, here, by the lexeme כפר. As far as the syntagmatic analysis of the lexeme כפר is involved, the following two data are relevant.

(a) A first important datum is the relation between the lexeme כפר and the preposition תחת („in place of, instead of, in exchange for"). The preposition is

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12 In the light of the syntagmatic data one might merely assume what the semantic value of a lexeme could be. In a further phase of the research the paradigmatic analysis – through the study of the semantic oppositions between the lexemes – will confirm or deny these preliminary assumptions.

13 My emphasis.

14 See for instance Elliger 1978: 281.295.

15 See McKenzie 1968: 49; Elliger 1978: 270. In this regard, as Westermann 1969: 118, points out, „what is most important for the understanding of the verses is that it is here taken for granted that God, the God of vanquished Israel, is at work in the great political changes [...] which revolved round the liberation of Israel".

also attested at v.4b[16], which echoes the content of Isa 43:3. The syntagmatic relation between the lexeme כפר and the preposition תחת is found also in Prov 21:18, where it is stated that the wicked (רשע) is a כפר for the righteous (צדיק), and, at the same time, that the transgressor (בוגד) is *instead of* the upright (תחת ישרים). This specific relation between the lexeme כפר and the preposition תחת might suggest that the lexeme under analysis refers to a gift given instead of something else, a kind of substitutive gift.

(b) In Isa 43:3 this assumption is actually strengthened by the parallelism between the syntagms כפרך („your כפר") and תחתיך („at your place, in exchange for you"): this parallelism is so patent that one might argue that the two terms are actually interchangeable and that the usage of the syntagm תחתיך („at your place, in exchange for you") instead of כפרך („your כפר")[17] might be due to a stylistic need, to a *variatio*.

2.1.3. Isa 45:13 – שחד

אנכי העירתהו בצדק [...] הוא-יבנה עירי וגלותי ישלח לא במחיר ולא בשחד אמר
יהוה צבאות:

„„I have aroused him (Cyrus) in righteousness [...] he shall build my city and he shall let go my captives, *not for a price, not for a* שחד"[18], said YHWH of hosts".

Isa 45 is a hymn to Cyrus: through his military expansion towards the Middle East, the king of Persia conquered Babylon and subsequently freed the captive Israelites from the Babylonian exile. Because of his merits Cyrus is seen by Isaiah as the anointed of God[19]. As far as the semantic analysis of the lexeme שחד is involved, the following data are relevant:

(a) the lexeme under analysis occurs in a specifc syntagmatic relation with the lexeme מחיר („price"). The syntagm לא במחיר ולא בשחד („not for a price, not for a שחד") highlights also a parallelism between the uses of the two substantives[20]. From a paradigmatic point of view, such a relation might also imply an opposition between the two lexemes. In fact, the מחיר („price") is normally given as a wage, as a concrete and planned response to the

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16 ואתן אדם תחתיך ולאמים תחת נפשך: „and I will give lands (reading אדמות instead of אדם) at your place (תחתיך) and people in exchange for you (תחת נפשך)".

17 See also LXX, υπερ σου, and VULG, *pro te*.

18 My emphasis.

19 See in fact v.1, where Cyrus is called „the anointed of YHWH".

20 The syntagmatic relation between the lexemes שחד and מחיר is identified in two other occurrences of the *corpus* of AH: Mic 3:11 (Standard Poetical Hebrew) and in 1QHᵃ VI:20 (Poetical Language of Qumran).

acknowledgement of the fulfilment of specific actions, whereas the gift[21] referred to by the lexeme שחד would be given to *require* the fulfilment of some actions, to *persuade* the recipient to act in a particular way, namely to do what the sender wants.[22]

(b) The gift referred to by the lexeme שחד would thus be used as a means of influence, persuasion or request.

(c) In the general context of the verse, furthermore, the syntagm בצדק „in righetousness" expresses an evaluation of Cyrus' actions: the Persian King has acted in an honest, upright and spontaneous way.

2.2. Paradigmatic oppositions:
towards the identification of meanings of the lexemes שחד, שׂכר, and כפר

The following figure (Fig.1) illustrates the paradigmatic-oppositional relations that have been identified between the three lexemes under analysis. These data, obviously, do not result from the sole analysis of Isa 43:3; 45:13 and Ezek 29:19, but they are grounded on the whole set of paradigmatic data concerning the lexemes שחד, שׂכר, and כפר within the Standard Poetical Language[23].

Common Semantic Feature	Markedness	Lexeme	Distinctive Feature
GIFT	Markedness according to the *function* of the gift	כפר	(given instead of something else, as substitution)
		שחד	(given as means of persuasion, influence and request)
		שׂכר	(given as consequence of a specifically required action)
	Markedness according to the *reason* of the gift	כפר	Not available
		שחד	(not given for worthy actions, but in order to accomplish the sender's will)

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21 The lexeme שחד is understood as a kind of „gift" also by the Greek and the Latin translations: the Hebrew syntagm לא במחיר ולא בשחד corresponds in fact to the Greek one ου μετα λυτρων ουδε μετα δωρων and to the Latin one *non in pretio neque in muneribus*.

22 The fulfilment of YHWH's will is in fact highlighted by the clause „he shall build my city and he shall let go my captives"; the obvious reference of these words is the final liberation of the Israelites and the end of the Exile, made possible by Cyrus's campaigns against Babylon.

23 The complete analysis is available in Zanella 2010.

		שׂכר	(given as recompense for worthy actions, in exchange for good work)

Fig. 1: Paradigmatic relations between the lexemes כפר, שׁחד, and שׂכר within the Standard Poetical language

Let us go into details. As fig. 1 clearly shows, the oppositional relations between the lexemes כפר, שׁחד, and שׂכר actually reflect two kinds of markedness, according namely to the function and to the reason of the denoted gift. On the one hand, the paradigmatic oppositions based on the *function* of the gift involve all the lexemes under analysis, and allow the identification of the distinctive features „(gift) given as means of persuasion, influence and request" and „(gift) given as consequence of a specifically required action". These senses respectively qualify the meanings of the lexemes כפר, שׁחד, and שׂכר. On the other hand, the paradigmatic relations grounded on the *reason* of the gift involve only the lexemes שׂכר and שׁחד and they allow the identification of the distinctive features „given as recompense for worthy actions, in exchange for good work" and „not given for worthy actions, but in order to accomplish the sender's will", which respectively qualify the meanings of the lexemes שׂכר and שׁחד. In the light of such paradigmatic relations it is finally possible to deduce the distinctive features qualifying the meanings of the three lexemes under analysis, as it is shown by Fig. 2.

STANDARD POETICAL LANGUAGE		
Lexeme	**Distinctive Features**	**Meaning**
כפר	(*gift* given instead of something else, as substitution)	„substitutive gift"
שׁחד	(*gift* given as means of persuasion, influence and request) AND (not given for worthy actions, but in order to accomplish the sender's will)	„bribe"
שׂכר	(gift given as consequence of a specifically required action) AND (given as recompense for worthy actions, in exchange for good work)	„reward, recompense"

Fig. 2: The lexemes כפר, שׁחד, and שׂכר, their distinctive features and their meanings

3.0. DRAWING CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE LINGUISTIC RESULTS

The results above displayed and analysed refer to the „meanings" of the lexemes שׁחד, שׂכר, and כפר: they represent, therefore, formal linguistic data. One might argue that the semantic analysis has thus achieved its aim. It might also be argued, however, that the „meaning" of a word cannot be reduced to the sole analysis of paradigmatic and linguistic relations, and that it *must* also entail specific and concrete references to cultural aspects[24]. I would not disagree with this perspective, and I would also add that the quest for a wider notion of meaning involving also cultural aspects is not inconsistent with CA's theoretical status.[25] In this regard, in fact, I take the position that CA, as theory, can be used as an objective basis, a reasonable „text-based" starting point, from which could be drawn cultural (e.g. anthropological or theological) conclusions[26].

3.1. A link between CA's results and extra-linguistic aspects: the „contextual analysis"

The attempt to use CA's results as basis for further investigations certainly represents a theoretical challenge for CA as well as for its future scientific role in the field of Jewish Studies. In order to accept this challenge, the necessary first step is to find a heuristic link between the linguistic data provided by CA and the cultural aspects linked to the lexical stock under analysis. In this regard, I would argue that a first useful attempt might consist in the „contextual analysis" of the lexemes. As it has been noticed, the contextual use of the meaning of a given lexeme is indeed qualified by extra-linguistic elements. In other words, the study of the „contextual use" might be a useful heuristic tool to link the linguistic specificity of the paradigmatic datum to the wide-spectrum perspective typical of a cultural interpretation. The study of the „contextual use of a meaning" would in fact consist in the analysis of the narrative aspects qualifying the use of the linguistic meanings, and it would be characterised by the constant reference to the text and to its context. As I am going to illustrate, the „contextual" analysis of the lexemes שׁחד, שׂכר, and כפר in Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3; 45:15 would seem to bring interesting results, since it allows to obtain the following data that are displayed by the following figure (Fig. 3):

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24 See van der Merwe 2004; 2006 and van Steenbergen 2002; 2002a.
25 According to van Steenbergen 2002, Componential Analysis should indeed be considered as a mere heuristic tool for Cognitive Semantics.
26 See Zanella 2006b.

Lexeme	Verse	Designative Contextual Considerations
שׂכר	(Ezek 29:19)	The gift is given by God.
		The gift is given to an emperor – Nabuchadrezzar.
		The gift consists in the land of Egypt.
		The gift is given as recompense for Nabuchadrezzar's actions (i.e. the campaign against Tyre), which positively influenced Israel's History.
		The gift witnesses the active role played by God in Israel's History.
כפר	(Isa 43:3)	The gift is given by God.
		The gift is probably given to an emperor or to a king.
		The gift might be a kind of reward, and it would be given *because* of the accomplishment of a specific action.
		The gift consists in the lands of Egypt, Cush and Saba.
		The gift is given in order to save and to redeem Israel[27].
		The gift witnesses the active role role played by God in Israel's History.
שׁחד	(Isa 45:13)	The gift is *potentially* given by God, but is actually *not* given.
		The gift is *potentially* intended for an emperor – Cyrus.
		The gift probably consists in lands, cities of nations.
		The gift is given to affect the course of the History (i.e. to influence the actions of a conqueror) to Israel's advantage, in order to save Israel.
		The gift witnesses the active role played by God in Israel's History.

Fig. 3: Contextual considerations concerning the use of the meanings of the lexemes כפר, שׁחד, and שׂכר in Ezek 19:19; Isa 43;3; 45:13

To sum up, in the light of these data, the following five conclusions might be deduced: (a) the sender of the gifts called שׁחד, שׂכר, and כפר is God. In the case of the lexeme שׁחד, moreover, God is merely a potential sender: He decides not to give such a gift, or better, He does not want to give it. The gift referred to by the lexeme שׁחד is not given, nor is it accepted. (b) The recipient of the שׂכר-gift and

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27 This aim is evident in God's words at vv. 1f.: „I have redeemed you, I have called you by name" and „I am with you".

the שחד-gift is an emperor (i.e. respectively Nabuchadrezzar and Cyrus). It might be assumed that also the recipient of a כפר is an emperor. (c) The three gifts consist in nations or cities. (d) The three gifts witness the active role played by God in Israel's history. (e) God would give such gifts with the following aims: in order to recompense and thank the recipient for his actions (which correspond to the divine requests and/or plans), in order to persuade the recipient to act in a specific way, as well as in order to redeem the people of Israel.

3.2. Some theological conclusions concerning the lexemes שחד, שׂכר, and כפר

Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3 and Isa 45:13 share many narrative as well as conceptual similarities. From a narrative point of view, indeed, these verses more or less implicitly deal with massive modifications of the geopolitical and military order in the ancient Middle East. Such changes obviously happen to affect also the course of the History of Israel, so that they must *find* an ideological justification and / or a theological explanation. This very explanation is clearly highlighted by the results of the contextual analysis, and consists in the following three points:
(a) In general, God Himself plays a concrete role in the political evolution of the ancient Middle East. (b) In particular, the crucial moments of the History of Israel are entirely in the hands of God. (c) The gift is a concrete instrument that God uses to interact with the most powerful historical protagonists (e.g. Nabuchadrezzar vs. Tyre and Cyrus vs. Babylon) in order to achieve His aims (i.e. the protection, the salvation, and the redemption of the people of Israel).
The ideological perspective here provided reflects a clear theological basis: these verses actually convey a theory of history, namely a theological perspective on the historical events of the people of Israel[28], where gift-giving patently plays a crucial role.

3.2.1. The gift as God's powerful instrument to influence the History of Israel

The gift thus represents a concrete means that God uses to influence the course of the History of the people of Israel. To sum up: the land of Egypt is given by God to Nabuchadrezzar as recompense for his campaign against Tyre (Ezek 29:19); important nations (Egypt, Cush, and Saba) are explicitly offered instead of Israel and to its advantage (Isa 43:3); God himself declares that He is prepared to use this kind of gift, which is to be understood as a concrete demonstration of His eternal love toward His people[29]. The end of the Babylonian exile itself

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28 See for instance Fried 2004: 373f. See also Vieweger 1996: 595f., who interestingly notices that this theological perspective is supported and justified also by the use of typical forensic concepts and lexemes, such as כפר.

29 See in this regard Vieweger 1996.

could *theoretically* have been influenced by a gift (Isa 45:13). Within this specific background, the gift plays without a doubt a crucial theological role. From an anthropological perspective, the potent mechanism of gift-giving and its concrete efficacy are based on a successful combination of *obligation* and *reciprocity*[30]. First of all there is an obligation to give, to receive, and to return gifts. Such an obligation, secondly, generates mutual exchanges and causes *reciprocity*, namely the quest for an answer, the necessity of giving back, of re-acting. The binding need for a „countergift" is indeed a typical feature of gift-giving. Especially in archaic cultures, moreover, such a compulsory reciprocity can be considered as a constitutive feature of many social, economic and political interactions. Significantly, the extraordinary power of gift is not a secret in the Bible, and it is brilliantly highlighted e.g. by Prov 17:8: the gift (שחד) is there described as a precious stone (אבן חן) in the sight of ist owner. In this regard, Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3, and Isa 45:13 go even further, since they show that the owner of a gift might also be God Himself, proving that the gift is a powerful instrument also in the hands of God. In Ezek 29:19, Isa 43:3 and Isa 45:13, moreover, the gift is also used as ideological instrument to justify and to explain massive political changes which would otherwise appear to be dangerously out of the divine control. To sum up, whether it is given by God or by mankind, the gift represents a resourceful means of influencing, reinforcing, and building complex social and political systems, providing at the same time an ideological justification of their existence. Especially in those cases where God is the sender, furthermore, the gift can be used as a way to explain, to justify as well as to found a specific theological perspective on the History of Ancient Middle East (viz. of Israel).

3.2.2. The not given שחד: some considerations about God's incorruptibility

A second interesting datum resulting from the analysis of the texts concerns the peculiar nature of the gift referred to by the lexeme שחד, which, as I am going to argue, is likely to have a theological relevance. The texts show that the שחד-gift could have been given and accepted, but it did not happen. The „potential" character of the שחד-gift is linked to the very nature of this gift. The paradigmatic analysis has indeed demonstrated that the meaning of the lexeme שחד is qualified by the distinctive feature „not given for worthy actions, but in order to accomplish the sender's will". This seme directly results from the opposition with the seme „given as recompense for worthy actions, in exchange for good work", qualifying the meaning of the lexeme שכר. Thus, it might be

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30 In this regard the bibliography is wide: some essential notions about gift-giving can be found in Mauss 1924; Benveniste 1969 (Section II: „Donner et prendre" [63–121]); Schrift 1997. As far as a recent and exhaustive analysis of gift-giving in Ancient Israel is concerned, see Stansell 1999.

argued that the שׂכר-gift represents the concrete result of a positive evaluation of human actions: the action is judged as „good", and the שׂכר-gift is *consequently* given. In the case of the lexeme שׁחד, on the other hand, the specific reference to „the sender's will" would imply that the evaluation of the recipient's behaviour is secondary, if not missing. Through the שׁחד-gift, in fact, the recipient's behaviour is *influenced*, not evaluated. The שׁחד-gift, in other words, is used to bribe someone. Let us look once again at the texts, which actually confirm this result. On the one hand (Ezek 29:19) God gives Nabuchadrezzar a gift (i.e. the land of Egypt) because he thought that Nabuchadrezzar's actions (i.e. his campaign against Tyre) were laudable, since Nabuchadrezzar actually accomplished in fact God's plans. On the other hand (Isa 45:13), God categorically refuses to give Cyrus a gift (a bribe) to convince him to fight against Babylon. It is interesting to note that *theoretically* Cyrus could have been bribed to free the Israelites from Babylon[31]. The theological weight of this conclusion becomes more pregnant if we write it with a question mark: could Cyrus have been bribed to free Israel from Babylon, accomplishing God's plans? The question is of course a rhetorical one: the answer is obviously negative. The main reason for that is that the sender of the שׁחד-gift should be God Himself. The complete analysis of the occurrences of the lexeme שׁחד in Standard Poetical Hebrew provides indeed a detailed list of the people, who could possibly be involved in this kind of gift. Senders of a שׁחד-gift happen to be סוררים וחברי גנבים („rebels and companions of thieves", Isa 1:23); חטאים („sinners", Ps 26:9): in other words, the sender of such a gift is a רשע („wicked one", Prov 17:23). It is also consequently stated that only righteousness and sincerity (הלך צדקות ודבר מישרים, Isa 33:15) will allow to despise this kind of bribe[32]. In the light of this: if we admit that there is even the slightest possibility that God bribes, this would imply the admission that God is by nature corrupt. By virtue of His omnipotence, however, God does not need to be corrupted nor to corrupt. A further reason is that in the case described by Isa 45:13 a bribe was not even necessary. According to the text, in fact, Cyrus has acted בצדק („in righeousness"): this textual specification actually represents an evaluation of Cyrus' actions. This specification is indeed enough to explain why the שׁחד-gift was not given. The righteousness of Cyrus' behaviour did not actually require any bribe: Cyrus' actions might have required a שׂכר-„recompense", perhaps, but not a שׁחד-„bribe". To conclude, the „potential" character of the שׁחד-gift is actually the result of an implicit and careful thought about God's incorruptibility. This kind of reflection actually emerges elsewhere and often in the Bible: a

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31 This might have been theoretically possible: a שׁחד-gift can in fact be used to form new alliances between kings as well as to cause betrayals – see for instance 1 Kgs 15:19; 2 Kgs 16:7.8.
32 See also Ps 15:5.

confirmation that God does not accept any שחד-gift is found for instance in
Deut 10:17:

כי יהוה אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים האל הגדל הגבר והנורא אשר
לא־ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד:

„For YHWH your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords, the great, the mighty
and the terrible God, who is not partial and takes no שחד"[33].

Similar considerations are also echoed by the late languages of the Bible[34], Ben
Sira'[35] as well as by Qumran Hebrew[36].

4.0. CONCLUSION

The application of CA to the lexemes שכר, כפר, and שחד, together with a further
interpretation of the linguistic data with reference to extra linguistic (i.e.
narrative and contextual) aspects, achieved two main results: (a) on the one hand
it confirmed the great relevance of gift-giving in the Bible, its texts and its
culture, as powerful instrument of an ideological justification of Israel's History;
(b) on the other hand it led to the theological conclusion that God is
incorruptible. Did we really need CA to draw such conclusions? The answer to
this question is not the thesis of the present paper, which just aimed at
demonstrating that it is possible to use CA as a means of obtaining theological
and cultural data with a positive and objective result.

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        303–316.

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33 In other verses (e.g. Exod 23:7–8, Deut 16:19), moreover, it is stated that the righteous ones as
   well cannot accept the שחד-gift.
34 See 2 Chr 19:7, Job 15:34.
35 See Sir 38:15.
36 See e.g. 1QH^a VI,20.

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Abstract:

After an introductory description of the essential theoretical notions of the semantic theory known as „Componential Analysis of Meaning" (CA), the first section of the paper focuses on the semantic relations between three members of the Lexical Field of the substantives of „gift"[37] in Ancient Hebrew (AH)[38]. The three lexemes are שחד, „bribe", שכר „reward", and כפר, „substitutive gift"; their semantic relations are investigated within the prophetical/poetical language of the Hebrew Bible. The second section of the paper attempts to draw some conclusions concerning the theological/cultural value of the gifts referred to by these three lexemes in the light of linguistic results. At the end of the paper the following interpretation is proposed: gift-giving plays a key role as ideological instrument used to explain, to justify as well as to found a theological perspective on Israel's History.

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37 See Zanella 2010.
38 The AH *corpus* includes Biblical Hebrew, Hebrew of Ben Sira' and Qumran Hebrew.