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THE UNDERWORLD OR ITS RULER?
SOME REMARKS ON THE CONCEPT OF SHEOL
IN THE HEBREW BIBLE[1]

Abstract

The literature on the eschatology of the Hebrew Bible has adopted the assumption that *she'ol* means the underground realm inhabited by the dead. However, in most cases the word allows for dual interpretation: the underworld or the death deity. In favor of the latter speak the passages describing Sheol in terms of a voracious demon. This study therefore has three main objectives: (1) the reconstruction of the meaning of the word *she'ol* by means of the statistic linguistics; (2) the analysis of two major semantic complexes utilized in the descriptions of Sheol – the topomorphic and the anthropomorphic one; (3) the presentation of additional arguments in favor of the anthropomorphic interpretation of Sheol.

The eschatology of the Hebrew Bible [HB] at times employs the concept of Sheol – most often in the phrase "to descend to Sheol". In Numbers 16:30-33 Korah is said to be engrossed by earth and cast into Sheol, in Genesis 37:35 Jacob utters that he would descent in grief after his son to Sheol, whereas in 1 Samuel 2:6 Yahveh is described as the sole disposer of life and death, the one who casts into Sheol and brings up from Sheol. The traditional interpretation of these and other passages explains that Sheol is a grim and desolated land below, occupied by the dead who continue their colorless existence irrespective of their earthly conduct. Contrary to this exposition however, the HB supports the

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[1] The initial version of his paper has been published as: W. Kosior, *The Topomorphic and Anthropomorphic Metaphors of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible (Topomorficzna i antropomorficzna metaforyka Szeolu w Biblii hebrajskiej)*, in: K. Pilarczyk (ed.), *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich*, vol. V, Kraków 2010, pp. 27-45.

descriptions of Sheol which suggest that it is something more than just a place. Psalm 49:16 praises Elohim who is said to ransom one's soul from the hand of Sheol, Proverbs 27:20 acknowledges Sheol's insatiability whereas Isaiah 5:14 depicts Sheol as a gargantuan monster. One is left with a question concerning the nature of Sheol – is it an underworld populated by the grim shades of the deceased or a demonic creature with a special taste for the dead?

This problem has been addressed by numerous academic works but although both types of the descriptions of Sheol have been acknowledged, there is a vivid preference for the topomorphic understanding of this term. The scholars usually resort to one of the three main approaches. According to the first one, the word "Sheol", along with "Gehennah" denotes the underworld inhabited by the dead or their souls. The demonic descriptions of Sheol are ignored and some go as far as to identify Sheol with "hell" understood as the place of eternal torment designed for the notorious transgressors.[2] As stated by the second approach, Sheol is a place sometimes described as a supernatural entity. Even then however, it is just a literary tool of presenting various impersonal phenomena in the poetic parts of the HB. Moreover, although the ancient Near Eastern texts provide some support for the demonic interpretation of Sheol, the comparative material is believed to be unsatisfactory.[3] The third approach presents the least "traditional" interpretation. Accordingly, Sheol is usually understood as a place and only sometimes anthropomorphized. Yet, contrary to the second option, the literary parallels are considered to be sufficient to hypothesize about Sheol as one of the chthonic deities of the era.[4] Although each of the group takes a different

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[2] E.g.: entry: *Hölle*, in: F. Rienecker, G. Maier (eds.), *Lexikon zur Bibel*, Brockhaus 2008, (CD-ROM). B. Reckie, entry: *hell*, in: B.M. Metzger, M.D. Coogan (eds.), *Oxford Bible Companion*, New York, Oxford 1993, pp. 277-279. Entry: *Sheol*, in: G.W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, Grand Rapids 1995, p. 472.

[3] G. Gerleman, entry: *Sheol (Totenreich)* in: E. Jenni, C. Westermann (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Band II, Zurich 1976, pp. 838-841. J.H. Walton, V.H. Matthews, M.V. Chavalas (eds.), *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, IVP Academic 2000, (CD-ROM).

[4] E.g.: J. Blenkinsopp, *Judah's Covenant with Death (Isaiah XXVIII 14-22)*, "Vetus Testamentum", vol. 50, 2000, pp. 472-483. A. M. Fiske, *Death: Myth and Ritual*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion" vol. 37, no. 3, 1969, pp. 249-265. H. M. Barstad, entry: *Sheol*, in: K. van der Toom, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., Leiden – Boston – Köln, 1999 [DDD], pp. 768-770.

stance towards the anthropomorphic interpretation of Sheol, they share the basic assumption concerning the inherent priority of the topomorphic meaning. Accordingly, the "default" interpretation of Sheol is that of the underworld, whereas any other has the status of a poetic cleverness aimed at evoking the religious imagination. On the other hand however, there are several arguments against the status quo. Firstly, the presence of the anthropomorphic descriptions supports the hypothesis of the Sheol-demon rather than refutes it. Secondly, the peripheries of the HB often convey more ancient and original ideas and the "flamboyant" accounts of Sheol may in fact recall some primeval traditions.[5] Last but not least, most of the passages quoted from the biblical sources are ambiguous on the linguistic level and allow for both topomorphic and anthropomorphic interpretation.

In sum, the view supported by the scholarly literature needs some rectification as the anthropomorphic potential of Sheol seems to be underestimated. This problem shall be addressed in three steps. Firstly, in order to bring the basic meaning of *she'ol* closer, it is crucial to brush it down from later semantic layers that have aggregated over the course of centuries. This task shall be accomplished by means of the statistical and hermeneutical methods which aim at recovering the meaning basing on the quantitative linguistic data and philological analysis.[6] Secondly, the collected evidence shall provide the basis for the elucidation of two elemental sets of metaphors employed in describing Sheol: the topomorphic and the anthropomorphic one.[7] Thirdly, some arguments for the hypothetical priority of the anthropomorphic metaphors of Sheol shall be presented basing on the findings supported by cognitive psychology.

The etymology of *she'ol* is at least unclear. Some scholars derive the word either from the root שׁול denoting "being low" or from שׁלה

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[5] For an excellent study on the problem of the inner-biblical reiterations of particularly cumbersome material see: A. Shinan, Y. Zakovitch, *From Gods to God. How the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends*, Nebraska University Press 2012.

[6] For the classical employment of the method see: R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes*, Zürich 1958. For an example of a modern application see: R.D. Bergen, *The Role of Genesis 22:1-19 in the Abraham Cycle: a Computer-Assisted Textual Interpretation*, "Criswell Theological Review" vol. 4, no. 2, 1990. It also needs emphasizing that the findings presented in this paper hold true as long as it is assumed that the Biblical Hebrew constitutes a coherent linguistic unit.

[7] See: G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*, University of Chicago Press 1980.

conveying the idea of "being silent". Some others propose שאה carrying the meaning of "withering" and "stiffing". The root supplemented by the suffixed *lamed* would form a construction describing certain state or condition, analogically to the root כרמ ("to dress vines") and its derivate, *karmel* ("garden"). Accordingly, *she'ol* would transmit the idea of a place of deterioration and waste. Finally, the word is explained by means of the root שאל meaning "to inquire" and as such is utilized in the context of contacting the deceased in Deuteronomy 18:11 and 1 Chronicles 10:13.[8] The doubtful etymology of the word along with the fact that s*he'ol* is never preceded by a definite article[9] suggests its foreign origins. Some additional support for this hypothesis comes from the ancient Near Eastern literary materials. For example, the Akkadian plates mention the name *shuwalu* or *suwala* in reference to a deity responsible for ruling the abode of the dead. As such it might have been loaned by the Hebrews and incorporated into their early belief system.[10]

The word appears 66 times in the HB.[11] According to the Masoretic vocalization of the biblical text there are two forms: the full (שאול)

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[8] W. Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament including the Biblical Chaldee*, Boston 1844, p. 1033; HALOT 4658, 4661. TWAT, p. 902. Despite the dissemination of the latter proposal, there are at least three arguments against its validity. (1) The instances of שאל in the sphere of the hypothetical biblical necromancy are few and far. This means that the root cannot be treated as conveying this specific meaning. Moreover, (2) its utilization in the context of "asking the dead" seems to be a relatively late idea, contrary to the *she'ol* itself which is most probably of ancient origins. Finally, (3) even if there is some linguistic connection between the two, the direction seems to be the opposite to what is generally suggested in the literature. Respectively, it might be the name of Sheol itself which affected the choice of the particular word in regards to "asking" the dead.

[9] As suggested by the masoretic vocalization of the prepositional phrases.

[10] P.S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol. Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament*, Illinois 2002, p. 78. E. Lipiński, *Suwala*, in: O. Drewnowska-Rymarz (ed.), *Here and There Across the Ancient Near East. Studies in Honour of Krystyna Łyczkowska*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 115-121. Idem, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics*, vol. 2, Leuven 1994, pp. 31-33. L.B. Paton, *The Hebrew Idea of the Future Life. III. Babylonian Influence in the Doctrine of Sheol*, "The Biblical World", vol. 35, no. 3, 1910, p. 160.

[11] The calculations have been executed by means of the search module of Bible-Works 8.0 and on the basis of the 4th edition of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Accordingly, the results presented in this study may deviate from the data supplied by other treatises. Questionable is for example the instance in Isaiah 7:11 traditionally vocalized as *she'alah* but due to the semantic parallelism of the sentence usually emended to *sheo'lah* (and as such counted in the present study). Accordingly, v. 11b reads: "deep to Sheol, exalted to the above". Cf. P.S. Johnston, ibidem, p. 71 footnote number 6. Entry: שאול, TWAT, p. 903.

and the defective one (שאל). The *plene* dominates as it occurs 58 times, whereas the defective form appears 8 times: thrice in Genesis, twice in Numbers and once in 1 Kings, Job and Psalms. Notwithstanding the orthographic variant, *she'ol* is usually considered to be masculine as its morphological form lacks any indications like the final *heh* or *tav* which would suggest otherwise. This is the case in 55 instances which do not provide any additional information in regards to the grammatical gender. In 2 occurrences (Job 26:6; Hosea 13:14)[12] the masculinity of the word is explicitly acknowledged by the respective adjectives and verbs. Peculiarly enough however, 9 times is *she'ol* utilized as if it were a feminine noun. Such situation takes place in: Deuteronomy 32:22; Job 11:8; Psalms 86:13; Proverbs 27:20; 30:16; Canticles 8:6 and Isaiah 5:14; 14:9; 38:18.[13] If to rely on the morphology of the word exclusively, then *she'ol* should be treated as of masculine gender whereas the usages in feminine would be a deviation, utilized probably for the stylistic purposes.[14] On the other hand, the number of feminine instances seems to be high enough to challenge the assumption of the exclusively masculine nature of *she'ol*. By and large, it is next to impossible to arbitrate which grammatical gender should be considered as "default".[15]

The repartition of the word is uneven and concentrates in the so called poetic and prophetic books (Fig. 1). In the scope of the whole HB *she'ol* only once occurs directly in the narrative section – this is the case in

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[12] Hosea 13:14a reads: "from the hand of Sheol I will ransom them, from death I will redeem them". Here the grammatical gender of *she'ol* is unspecified, whereas in v. 14b the Masoretic tradition reads "where is your destruction (Heb. *qatavkha*), [o] Sheol". Given the consonantal form, the alternative, feminine reading (*qatavekh*) is also plausible. All citations from the HB are presented in author's translation unless stated otherwise. The square brackets indicate the words introduced in translation, the curly brackets – the words translated freely, the soft brackets – additional remarks. The priority of the translations was to maintain the inherent ambiguity of the text.

[13] The first three of these instances together with Isaiah 14:9 share the idea of *she'ol* being deep and below, whereas the latter speak of "her" in highly anthropomorphic terms.

[14] Against this assumption is the fact that the conjectural gender of the toponyms in the Semitic languages is in most cases feminine. For the discussion see: E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, Peeters Publishers 2001, pp. 235-242.

[15] The issue of the grammatical gender of *she'ol* is particularly relevant in regards to the languages which differentiate between masculine and feminine inflections. For example, according to the traditional usage in Polish, *she'ol* inflects as if it was (1) a masculine noun (2) denoting a place. This clearly shows how the assumptions concerning the ontological status of the term are transmitted in its grammatical qualities.

Numbers 16:30-33 describing the horde of Korah being devoured by earth and brought down to Sheol.[16] Apart from this instance, Sheol is always mentioned indirectly: either by means of the poetic style of the passage or by the utilization of the word in reported speech.

Gen	Num	Deut	1 Sam	2 Sam	1 Kgs	Job	Ps	Prov	Qoh	Cant
4	2	1	1	1	2	8	16	9	1	1
6%	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	12%	24%	14%	2%	2%

Is	Ez	Hos	Am	Jon	Hab.
10	5	2	1	1	1
15%	8%	3%	2%	2%	2%

Fig. 1. The repartition and percentage of *she'ol*
in particular books of the HB

The 66 instances of *she'ol* collected in the above-presented matrix can be furthermore divided into two main groups. The word occurs either in an isolated form or as a part in prepositional, genitive and attributive constructions. Of particular interest here is of course the latter as it sheds some light on the qualities of Sheol and more specifically – utilizes either anthropomorphic or topomorphic metaphors in its description. The group of the prepositional phrases is obviously the largest one and the most evenly distributed. *She'ol* appears with the plethora of prepositions in phrases like *'el she'ol*, *min she'ol* or *le-she'ol*. Neither of those however determine the status of the object – it can be both a place or a person as well as some more abstract idea.[17] In 11 occurrences *she'ol* appears as *she'olah* and as such has the meaning of "to Sheol" analogically to *'artzah* ("[towards] earth") or *baytah* ("[towards] home"). The distribution is concentrated in four books: Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 44:29; 44:31; Numbers 16:30; 16:33; Psalms 9:18; 141:7; Ezekiel 31:15; 31:16; 31:17. What is unique about these phrases is that in the Biblical Hebrew the suffixed directional *heh* accompanying the destination point never gets attached to a personal name of a person.

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[16] Note especially the parallelism in v. 30: *u-patztah ha-'adamah 'et peyha u-bal'ah 'otam* and *ve-yardu chayim she'olah*. The verbs applied to *'adamah* may support the anthropomorphic interpretation of *she'ol* as well.

[17] E.g. *ba-'Asher* meaning "at Asher's [place]" (1 Kings 4:16) or *be-'eynayha* – "in her eyes" (Genesis 16:4). Of question is however the statistic frequency of such prepositional phrases in comparison to those containing the name of a place.

Thus from the grammatical perspective, *she'olah* cannot refer to anything else than a toponym. In other words, in each and every instance it conveys the topomorphic meaning thus precluding the possibility of the anthropomorphic understanding.

24 times *she'ol* occurs as an element of a genitive or attributive phrase. The repartition of the construction is uneven, yet it is possible to distinguish four main clusters: Psalms, Isaiah, Job and Proverbs – analogically as in the case of the general distribution of *she'ol*. 19 of those instances can be divided into three semantic arrays conveying respectively: (1) the idea of being deep or underneath, (2) topomorphic and (3) anthropomorphic meaning (Fig. 2).[18]

depth		topomorphism		anthropomorphism	
phrase	amount	phrase	amount	phrase	amount
שאול תחתיה	2	שערי שאול	1	יד־שאול	3
עמקי שאול	1	שאול מזבל	1	פי שאול	2
עמקה משאול	1	שאול ביתי	1	שאול נפשה	1
שאול מטה	1	חבלי שאול	2	בטן שאול	1
				קשה כשאול	1
				ערום שאול	1
total	5	total	5	total	9

Fig. 2. The word *she'ol* in the phrases divided into the semantic clusters

In terms of sheer numbers the amount of anthropomorphic descriptions is significant. Sheol is either described by means of human qualities (ערום, Job 26:6; קשה, Canticles 8:6) or attributed with the elements of human anatomy: womb (בטן, Jonah 2:3), hand (יד, Psalms 49:15; 89:48; Oz 13:14) or throat (נפש,[19] Isaiah 5,14) and mouth (פה, Psalms 141:7;

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[18] The unclassified are respectively: מצרי שאול (Psalms 116:3), תוך שאול (Ezekiel 32:21), בדי שאל (Job 17:16) and דרכי שאול (Proverbs 7:27). The problematic *chevley She'ol* (2 Samuel 22:6 and Psalms 18:6 parallel to *chevley mavet* in v. 5) is usually rendered as "the cords of Sheol". Here it is classified as topomorphism on the basis of the meaning of *chevel* as "territory" (e.g. Joshua 17:5). Still one has to keep in mind the broad semantic range of the term allowing for different interpretations. BDB 2773-2780. HALOT 2312-2323. TWOT 592-595.

[19] Although the primary meaning of the Hebrew *nefesh* has been connected to its onomatopoeic qualities, the biblical usage witnesses to a broad semantic range including "soul", "person", "gullet" and "breath". L.B. Paton, *The Hebrew Idea of the Future Life. I. Earliest Conceptions of the Soul*, "The Biblical World" vol. 35, no. 1, 1910, pp. 8-20. C.A. Briggs, *The Use of* נפש *in the Old Testament*, "Journal of Biblical Literature" vol.

Isaiah 5:14[20]). Sporadically is Sheol described topomorphically as having gates (שערים, Isaiah 38:10), being a house (בית, Job 17:13) or a dwelling (מזבל, Ps 49,15).[21] The category conveying the meaning of "being deep and below" can very well refer to both a place and a demon and as such has no differentiative potential; for sure however, it places Sheol underneath the earth. In sum, whereas most of the occurrences of *she'ol* are isolated, whenever it appears in juxtaposition, its meaning is rather anthropomorphic than topomorphic.

44 times *she'ol* occurs in a sentence as a subject or object juxtaposed with a verb and these are concentrated accordingly in Psalms (9 times), Isaiah (7 times), Job (5 times), Proverbs and Ezekiel (4 times each). There are 24 verbs which appear with *she'ol*. From among, 19 can be divided into three semantic groups[22] – analogically to the division of genitive or attributive phrases (Fig. 3).

depth		topomorphism		anthropomorphism	
verb	amount	verb	amount	verb	amount
ירד	17	צפן	1	פדה	1
שפל	1	עזב	1	עשׂה (חזה)	1
נחת	1	יצע	1	מלט	1
חתר	1	סבב	2	ירה	1
עלה	2			בלע	1
				שׂבע	2
				רחב (נפשׁ)	2
				נצל	1
				דמם	1
				רגז	1
total	22	total	5	total	12

**Fig. 3. The verbs for which she'ol is subject or object divided
into semantic clusters**

16, no. 1/2, 1897.

[20] Isaiah 5:14 reads: ופערה פיה. Formally then it is not a phrase but a sentence, yet the idea of Sheol possessing a mouth is conveyed.

[21] In this context worth noting is the fact that the HB sometimes applies the anthropomorphic imagery to the inanimate architectural objects as is the case in Psalm 24. C. Sulzbach, *Of Gates in the Ground and Castles in the Air: A Case of Biblical Unreal Estate*, "Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament", vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, pp. 266-288.

[22] The remaining 5 (הלכ, נגע, שׁוב, סור and מצא) appear very rarely and convey the general idea of "reaching *she'ol*" without determining its location.

The most numerous group of the verbs convey the idea of Sheol being below: it can be descended to (שׁפל, נחת, ירד) or ascended from (עלה).[23] The number of occurrences along with the very balanced repartition of the verbs in connection with *she'ol* witnesses to its chthonic location. Again, the group of the verbs which describe Sheol in anthropomorphic terms is relatively large in comparison to the remaining ones.[24] There are far too few instances to supply a full-fledged statistics, yet it is still possible to discern two sub-groups. The first one refers to the relation between Sheol, Yahveh and men: Sheol does not praise (ידה) Yahveh but Yahveh can ransom (פדה) from the hand of Sheol whereas men can make a deal (עשׂה חזה) with Sheol and one's *nefesh* can escape (מלט) from Sheol's hand.[25] The second one comprises of verbs which present Sheol as a devouring monster: Sheol enlarges (רחב נפשׁ) her throat, swallows (בלע) but cannot satiate (שׂבע).

In sum, the statistics show clearly that in most cases *she'ol* appears in its isolated form whereas juxtaposed usually conveys the anthropomorphic meaning and the idea of being below, what is witnessed by the phrases like *yad she'ol* or *beten she'ol*. Similar is the situation with the verbs for which *she'ol* is the subject, adverbial or object. In the first case, these are mostly the anthropomorphic metaphors like "Sheol does

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[23] The idea of "going up" by necessity assumes that *she'ol* is below. Worth noting is almost complete lack of the verbs suggesting the opposite notion, i.e. "resurrection". Notwithstanding this scarcity, the sole metaphor of "dying as going down to Sheol" implicitly assumes at least theoretical possibility of "going up". Besides, whereas the phrase "going down to Sheol" might be taken as a trope of dying, the latter itself may be a metaphor for some other mishap. See: P. van Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. An Introduction*, in: P. van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, Leuven 2005, pp. 1-18.

[24] Whereas most academicians insist on the solely poetic purpose of such personification, some emphasize the suggestiveness of the language hinting at the demonic nature of Sheol. As one of the scholars puts it „[w]hile cutting a deal with Death and making a pact with Sheol could be understood as simply metaphors used to disparage the prospects of such alliances, the language is suggestive, sinister and foreboding enough, and contains enough peculiar features, to hint that the allegation goes further than that". J. Blenkinsopp, *Judah's Covenant with Death (Isaiah XXVIII 14-22)*, "Vetus Testamentum" vol. 50, 2000, p. 474. In other words, the utilization of anthropomorphisms seems rather to support the possibility of demonic nature of Sheol rather than to hinder it.

[25] It is worth noting that both עשׂה and רחב appear juxtaposed with חזה and נפשׁ respectively. Of relevance here is the fact that the Homeric Iliad (15.187-193) tells of a primeval lottery in which Hades was granted the reign over the underworld. J.N. Bremmer, DDD, pp. 382-383.

not praise (ידה) you" (Isaiah 38:18[26]). In the second, *she'ol* is generally the target of moving downwards, while in the third it is an addressee of some action. The most evenly represented idea of Sheol refers to it being deep or underneath, not differentiating however in regards to its anthropomorphic or topomorphic qualities. The most sure linguistic indication of the topomorphic status of *she'ol* is the presence of the suffixed directional *heh* which occurs only 11 times.

Sheol then, depending on the context may denote both an underworld as well as some demonic being. A question arises, which of them has the chronological priority. In other words, is this the grim land of the deceased which with time is turned into a demon or vice versa – the voracious beast becomes "depersonalized" and its name is attached to the realm of the dead. Given the highly uncertain dates of the closure of particular biblical books along with the possibility of the modifications introduced to the concluded material it is next to impossible to answer this question basing on the literary methodology alone. However, some additional insight into the problem comes from the sphere of psychology. Various research conducted by the scholars interested in human cognitive development clearly shows that people have the tendency to perceive, describe and interpret the abstract phenomena in anthropomorphic categories. This trait is particularly visible in the early stage of the intellectual progress, e.g. the children's tendency to attribute volitional qualities to the celestial orbs. The dominant yet not exclusive factor behind this process is the perceived movement of the particular object and the hypothetical assumption that mobility equals life.[27] This tendency to attribute anthropomorphic qualities to inanimate objects remains in the adult life as well and is transferred to the level of language. Well known is now classical experiment conceived and executed by F. Heider and M. Simmel at the end of the first half of the XX century.[28] The

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[26] In this case *she'ol* might be a metonymy for its inhabitants analogically to *shammaym*. Cf. A. Shinan, Y. Zakovitch, ibidem, pp. 48-51.

[27] U. Bronfenbrenner, P.A. Morris, *The Bioecological Model of Human Development*, in: R.M. Lerner (ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology*, vol. I, Wiley 2006, pp. 793-803. J.E. Opfer, S.A. Gelman, *Children's and Adults' Models for Predicting Teleological Action: The Development of a Biology-Based Model*, "Child Development", vol. 72, no. 5, 2001, pp. 1367-1381.

[28] F. Heider, M. Simmel, *An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior*, "The American Journal of Psychology", vol. 57, no. 2, 1944, pp. 243-259. For a review of the recent research elaborating on the Heider's and Simmel's experiment and on the issues of the perceptual causality and animacy in general see: B.J. Scholl, P.D. Tremoulet, *Perceptual Causality and Animacy*, "Trends in Cognitive Sciences", vol. 4, no. 8, 2000,

participants were presented a several minutes length animation of mov-
ing geometrical figures and asked afterwards to supply a description of
what they had seen on a screen. Even the most "moderate" subject who
strived to support a non-animistic description, could not but slip out
the acknowledgement of the large triangle's personality.[29] Additional
support for the central place of anthropomorphism among the other met-
aphors inherent to human mind comes from the sphere of evolutionary
psychology. According to the conception of the so called hyperactive
agency detection, the species' perception is naturally "tuned" to recog-
nize animate objects against the inanimate background. The system is
very delicate and tends to attribute life to the lifeless objects as well.
From the evolutionary perspective however it is much safer to mistaken
a stick for a snake rather than other way around – although the former is
more energetically expensive.[30]

This human tendency to anthropomorphize the surrounding phenom-
ena finds its particular realization in the idea of Sheol. The processes
of dying allow to portray death as "the violent assault and carrying off
of the victim by a monstrous being" what eventually leads to the emer-
gence of "a death god or of the daemonic assistant of such a baleful
deity."[31] At the same time, the animization of death allows for affecting
it and thus – at least to some extent – controlling it by means of the rit-
ual.[32] Accordingly, Sheol would be primarily a lickerish monster who
devours the dead. The latter nevertheless are believed to somehow con-
tinue their existence, so Sheol has to have its underworld domain inhab-
ited by the deceased. Finally, the land itself becomes independent and
takes over the name of the ruler. Some additional insight comes from the

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pp. 299-309. For a broad discussion of the anthropomorphism from the psychological
and ethnographic perspectives see: N. Bird-David, *"Animism" Revisited: Personhood,
Environment, and Relational Epistemology*, "Current Anthropology", vol. 40, no. 51,
1999, pp. 567-591. P. Boyer, *What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontolo-
gy and Cultural Representations*, "The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute",
vol. 2, no. 1, 1996, pp. 83-97.

[29] F. Heider, M. Simmel, ibidem, p. 246. Worth noting is the fact that even the au-
thors themselves have not managed to avoid the anthropomorphic descriptions when
referring to the experiment.

[30] J.L. Barrett, *Why would anyone believe in God?*, Lanham 2004, pp. 32-34. Cf. K.
Gray, D.M. Wegner, *Blaming God for Our Pain: Human Suffering and the Divine Mind*,
"Personality and Social Psychology Review" vol. 14, no. 1, 2010, pp. 7-16.

[31] S.G.F. Brandon, *The Origin of Death in Some Ancient Near Eastern Religions*,
"Religious Studies", vol. 1, no. 2, 1966, pp. 220.

[32] Ibidem, p. 224.

Greek translation of the HB. In most instances LXX renders the Hebrew *she'ol* as *hades*.[33] The latter conveys very similar set of problems: (1) depending on the context it can denote both the underworld and its ruler; (2) apart from several occurrences in the archaic literature the word is generally absent in later mythical elaborations; (3) the clues concerning the hypothetical cult of Hades are scarce.[34] It is thus possible that the choice of this particular word to translate *she'ol* was motivated by the will to sustain the ambiguity of the term.

If to juxtapose the above collected anthropomorphic data coming from various biblical books, then an image of a chtonic supernatural entity emerges. Sheol would accordingly be an insatiate deity residing underneath, craving for human life but at the same – time prone to negotiations and eager to receive ransom for the dead.[35] Still however, the data concerning Sheol in the HB is scattered and fragmentary. Thus it is very unlikely that they witness to one coherent image of Sheol. On the contrary, the laconic references are most probably puzzles coming from totally different sets – various traditions describing Sheol by means of anthropomorphic and topomorphic metaphors.

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[33] Thrice it is translated as *thanatos* with the latter usually employed to transpose the Hebrew *mot* denoting either "death" or Mot – an ancient chthonic deity. Worth noting is that the Greek literature has the preference for *hades* rather than *thanatos*. P.W. van der Horst, entry: *Thanatos*, in: DDD, pp. 854-855.

[34] J.N. Bremmer, entry: *Hades* in: DDD, pp. 382-383. See also the author's assertion that *hades* had initially denoted a place and only later its ruler.

[35] In fact, the anthropomorphic descriptions of both Sheol and Gehennah emerge in the rabbinic literature. See for example a picturesque description of Sheol swallowing the uncircumcised in Shemot Rabbah 19:4. W. Kosior, *Brit milah. Some Remarks on the Apotropaic Meaning of Circumcision in Agadic Midrashes (Brit mila. Uwagi o apotropaicznym znaczeniu obrzezaniu w midraszach agadycznych)*, "The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture" vol. 4, no. 1, 2013, pp. 113-115. In regards to the semantic evolution of *ge'ben hinom*, from a landfill up till abode of the dead see: G. Barkay, *The Riches of Ketef Hinnom*, "Biblical Archaeological Review" vol. 35, no. 4-5, 2005, pp. 22-35, 122-26.

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PODZIEMNY ŚWIAT CZY JEGO WŁADCA?
KILKA UWAG O KONCEPCJI SZEOLU
W HEBRAJSKIEJ BIBLII

W piśmiennictwie dotyczącym eschatologii Biblii hebrajskiej przyjęło się założenie, iż *sze'ol* oznacza podziemną krainę zamieszkiwaną przez zmarłych. Tymczasem większość przypadków zastosowania tego słowa pozwala na jego dwojaką interpretację: jako zaświatów bądź jako bóstwa śmierci. Na rzecz tej drugiej przemawiają dodatkowo fragmenty opisujące Szeol w kategoriach żarłocznego demona. Niniejsze studium ma zatem trzy podstawowe cele: (1) rekonstrukcję znaczenia słowa *sze'ol* za pomocą metody statystyki językowej; (2) analizę dwóch podstawowych kompleksów znaczeniowych zastosowanych w opisach Szeol – topomorficznego i antropomorficznego; (3) prezentację dodatkowych argumentów na rzecz antropomorficznej interpretacji Szeol.