



# Discourses on Colour



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Wydanie I



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## The cultural unit *black* in the Old Testament

### 1. Cultural units and colour terms

The semiotic thinking of Umberto Eco gives the possibility to treat colours, including basic colour terms (BCT), prototype terms (PT – Rosch 1972; 1973; Wierzbicka 1990, e.g. *darkness, coals*), rivals of prototypes (RP, e.g. *raven, shadow, ebony, apple of the eye*), and terms for the basic features of the prototypes (TBFP, e.g. *obscurity*), as forming a cultural unit.

When one utters a colour term, one is not directly pointing to a state of the world (process of reference), but, on the contrary, one is connecting or correlating that term with a cultural unit or concept. The utterance of the term is determined, obviously, by a given sensation, but the transformation of the sensory stimuli into a percept is in some way determined by the semiotic relationship between the linguistic expression and the meaning or *content* culturally correlated to it (Eco 1985: 160).

For the challenges and the development of the idea of colours as a cultural unit, see Almalech 2017a.

My approach is linguo-semiotic, which differs from the main issues in the methodological dispute on colour naming and categorization developed in the last forty years. However, the methodological paradigm of Berlin and Kay (1969), its development in WCS, as well as the paradigm of their critics



(Conclin 1973; 1986; Saunders and van Brakel 1988, etc.; Wierzbicka 2008) bears on the development of the knowledge on colour as a cultural unit. The current linguo-semiotic approach also differs from the method of van Leeuwen (2011) and Kress and Leeuwen (2002).

The approaches of all three (Berlin and Kay, their critics, and Kress and van Leeuwen), will be considered, however, in the current discussion, though with great respect for the three scholars' paradigms, none of them is individually sufficient to decode the wealth and characteristics of the original (Hebrew and Greek) verbal colour language (Almalech 2017b), Bible translations and interpretations. The main issues in the dichotomies Universality–Relativity, Synchrony–Diachrony will not be discussed here in details because this requires greater depth and breadth than can be extended here.

## 2. The cultural unit Black presented by basic colour terms (BCT)

### 2.1. Lexical meaning and appearance

The BCT *black* שָׁהוֹר [shahor] and its derivatives have three outstanding features:

- In the entire Hebrew Old Testament, it occurs only 9 times – Lev. 13:31; 37; Zech. 6:2; 6; Song. 1:5; 6; 5:11; Job 30:30; Lam. 4:8. This includes adjectives, nouns, verbs, and diminutives.
- The root produces an antonym of black – *dawn, morning*. Each of the words *dawn* and *morning* is usually associated with light. Biblical Hebrew has few other words for *dawn* and *morning*, therefore *black* provokes speculations.
- The word formatives derived from the root of *black* are semantically extremely unusual in view of the fact that the root is what is common in the significance of all the derivatives; in other words, “the root generally carries the main component of meaning in a word” (Crystal 2008: 419).



A Hebrew root contains only consonants. The forms of the root are identified by the consonants in a stable sequence, separated by a vowel. Postfixes and prefixes are parts of derivational mechanisms. Reduplication is a usual morphological tool to derive diminutives from the root.

According to Gesenius (1996 [1865]: 1051-1052) there are three versions of the root Shin-Het-Reish שָׁהַר: “1. PAAL *to break, to break forth*; PIEL *to seek, to seek carefully*, poetic; 2. *to be or become black*; 3. *to fascinate, to enchant*”. For Gesenius (1052) *dawn, morning* שָׁהַר [shahar] is a derivate from version 1., which means “the dawn breaks forth the darkness of the night”. It is possible to speculate that these versions of the root present homonymy in an ancient language, but Gesenius’s opinion is that there is a logical connection we can follow. Thus, he partly rejects the homonymy interpretation.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Clines (ed. 1993-2011) and his associates have added more meanings of the root: *look carefully for; magic, power; vb. bewitch, charm*, as noun, *sorcerer*; vb. *laugh*; vb. *long; darkness; compulsion, force; youth, prime of life*.

Clines (2011: 326) notes the ambiguity of שָׁהַר [shahar]:

[...] *dawn, morning twilight, morning grey* sometimes emphasis on its light (e.g. Isa. 8:20 *They will have no (light of) dawn*, i.e. they will remain in darkness unless שָׁהַר II *magic* or שָׁהַר IV *compulsion* Eccl. 12:6), other times on its greyness and lack of brightness (e.g. 1 Chr. 2:2).

According to Brenner (1982: 49), *black* שָׁהַר [shahor] appears in the exilic and the post-exilic periods (after the 6th century BC), while *red* and *white* appear in the monarchic period (10-6 c. BC.) In science the prevailing view is that the final text of the Pentateuch was written in the exilic and the post-exilic periods. However, the late emergence of *black* seems strange because in Leviticus 13 *black* is available. Anyway, Brenner accepts the adjective *dark colour, darkened, dark brown* or *black* חוּם [hum] (Gen.



30:32; 35; 40) as the earlier BCT for *black*, to be later supplanted by שָׁחֹר [shahor].

Brenner counts the appearances by parts of speech and in sum – שָׁחֹר [shahor] appears 9 times (1982: 95). She reviews the information on the etymology and reference of the Hebrew BCT:

Etymologically שָׁחֹר [shahor] seems to be fairly opaque, which is another indication of its primariness. Gradwohl points out that שִׁחֹר [shihur] means ‘coal’ in Aramaic and in Syriac. Therefore, he concludes, the basic meaning of שָׁחֹר [shahor] is derived from שִׁחֹר ‘coal’ and denotes the ‘colour of coal’. He also maintains that the root Shin-Het-Reish שָׁחֹר in Hebrew is a loan from Aramaic, although the ‘colour’ signification as such is original to Hebrew [...]. שָׁחֹר [shahor] is common to the stock of both Hebrew and Aramaic. [...] According to him (Tur-Shinai 1967) both roots שָׁחֹר and קָדַר (*be dark; darkness*) basically signify ‘to burn’, and the colour term שָׁחֹר [shahor] primarily refers to the colour of burnt objects. [...] This wider definition entails references to a range of colours from ‘ash-grey’ to ‘black’ proper. As such, its scope is wider than that of ‘black’, or שָׁחֹר [shahor] in Modern Hebrew, where *brown* חוּם [hum] and *grey* עָפֹר [afor] cover sections that in OT Hebrew are inclusive to the שָׁחֹר [shahor] scope (Brenner 1982: 96-97).

All authors, starting with Gradwohl (1963) and Fronzaroli (1969), clearly indicate the Semitic character of *black* שָׁחֹר [shahor], along with the extensive use of all of the meanings of the root. All situate the reference of שָׁחֹר [shahor] between *dark brown* and *black*.

This brief overview of the most significant authors aims to outline the problem with the low frequency and lexical meaning of the BCT *black* שָׁחֹר [shahor].

There are two important directions – evaluation of the low frequency and of the extended semantics of the root in order to mark the fact that one root contains the BCT *black* and the RP (Rival for prototype) *dawn, morning*.



## 2.2. The frequency

The BCT and its derivatives appear 9 times in the whole Hebrew Bible. Actually, frequency is an element of contextual semantics, but it is worth mentioning here for the semiotic value of statistics.

2 appearances שָׁחַר [shahor]: Leviticus 13:31; 37.

4 appearances שְׁחֹרָה [shehora]: Song of Solomon 1:5; שְׁחֹרֶת [sharhoret] Song of Solomon 1:6; שָׁחַר [shahor]: Job 30:30; שְׁחֹר [shehor]: Lament. 4:8.

1 appearance *fem., pl.* שְׁחֹרוֹת [shehorot]: Song of Solomon 5:11.

2 appearances *masc., pl.* שְׁחֹרִים [shehorim]: Zachariah 6:2; 6.

Frequency has an important semantic, cultural, and communicative value. Bankov, forthcoming) presents his own English translation of Umberto Eco's point on statistics.

Still, this is the only place (and only in the Italian version of the book) where the expression “statistical constancy” is used, and obviously this exact formulation was necessary to unlock the hermeneutic circle. [...] An encyclopedic competence is based on cultural data, which is socially accepted on the basis of the statistical constancy of its occurrence (Eco 1979: 18, transl. Bankov, 2017: 121; 119).

Eco's treatment and Bankov's interpretation are quite useful for the evaluation of the low frequency of the BCT black:

Statistical constancy” is the key notion of the quote. The regularities of social life were creating habits in our worldviews which were as important as the habits that derived from our sensorimotor experience (in some cases called energetical interpretants). The semiotic process was the same, and in both cases the habit or final logical interpretant was a temporary arrest for semiosis. Those arrests are the foundation of culture and our overall shared



encyclopedic knowledge. [...] most importantly, the encyclopedic model of culture based on the principal of the statistical constancy of the occurrence of cultural units. (Bankov 2017: 120-121)

If we take statistical constancy as a criterion for the cultural unit colour, it would appear that the BCT *black* is completely inessential to the biblical Hebrew worldview, i.e. the ‘habits that derived from our sensorimotor experience’, ‘culture and our overall shared encyclopedic knowledge’.

I must underline that I completely agree with both opinions – Eco’s contention and Banov’s interpretation. Thus, what is wrong with the BCT *black* in the Hebrew Bible? Maybe anti-Semitic authors are right:

[...] the lack of imagination that is so obviously clear in the Old Testament that we have examples of it in verse after verse – nowhere nuances, no colours. According to this author, the reason for this was clear: “The one invisible God arose from the characteristic Jews soul – the ratio without imagination [...]” (Scholem 1979: 84).

Scholem cited a book from 1946, but such an opinion gained ground in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Actually, the facts are quite the opposite. The low frequency of the BCT *black* is a sign of the extraordinarily intentional use of every word in the Old Testament.

Scholem’s explanation of the low frequency of the BCT in the OT is also acceptable:

It is certainly true that, with the overthrow and conquest of idol worship, of the painted idol, an element of the abstract, distance and transcendence was asserted in the precepts of the Mosaic law and in the prophetic concept of God which denied the delight in colours of the world of nature. The prohibition of pictorial image was without doubt one of the most revolutionary steps in the history of mankind, and the revelation it showed envisaged a realm somewhat in opposition to the enchanted and imaginative



world of nature, which is not altogether happily described in the expression “lack of imagination or poverty of colour”. (1979: 85)

### 2.3. The extended semantics of the root

Of all derivatives from the root, it the antonym *dawn, morning* שָׁהַר [shahar] and *black* שָׁהוֹר [shahor] that is the limelight.

Jewish culture includes Kabbalistic speculations on letters and colours.

The speculation on the extended semantics of the root has no Kabbalistic/esoteric character, at least because in Kabbalah black colour is ascribed to the last, tenth Sephirah. Also, all the ten Sephirot “could be seen in the form of spiritual lights” (Scholem, 1979: 102). In Kabbalah the Sephirot are “light that is too dark to shine”; Dark is described as “darkness is the fullness of light that blinds the eye. If this light is called darkness, it is not because it is really dark, but because no creature, neither angel nor prophet, can stand it or comprehend it” (Scholem, 1979: 103). Finally, Kabbala is a kind of philosophy, influenced of neo-platonic mysticism (Scholem 1979: 102, ff). In this context the tenth Sephirah, Malkhuth “is the blackness (the black *par excellence*), the lack of light that gains colour only from the irruption of other lights” (Scholem 1980: 67).

The hypotheses for the extended semantics of the root:

#### Hypothesis 1

1. The facts about the Hebrew root for the BCT *black*, Shin-Het-Reish שָׁהַר force us to consider that Shin-Het-Reish realized in the Old Testament both the macro-bright-white and macro-dark-black sides (macro-dark contains *black, blue, green, indigo*, etc., and macro-light contains *white, red, yellow, rose*, etc. discussed in earlier stages of the colour dispute (see Turner 2004 [1966], Conklin 1973, Wierzbicka 1996: 318), which does not make them false. It is a different stage in the development of the of Basic Colour Categories (BCC) and the BCT classification, pointed



by Kay and associates (Kay *et al.* 2009, Kay & Maffi 1999), where the macro-categories are macro- *black, white, red, grue, etc.*)

2. Macro-dark-black is a BCT and macro-bright-white is a PT (*dawn*).
3. The contextual semantics of the BCT *black* is not rich, see 2.6.
4. However, the mystical, esoteric imagery of the four coloured horses in Zechariah 6:2; 6 and the NT Book of Revelation is rich in meanings as to achieve the effect of reconciling them with a lack of specific meaning.
5. The white meanings of the root Shin-Hat-Reish שחר are well developed, with multiple uses.
6. Derivatives from the BCT root for black in Hebrew, Shin-Het-Reish שחר, imply both macro-dark-black and macro-bright-white presences through this root in the text of the Old Testament. The evidence shows great superiority – quantitative and qualitative – of the macro-bright-white presences in the Old Testament of words derived from the root Shin-Hat-Reish שחר, from which the only BCT for black in Hebrew derives.

### Hypothesis 2

Whether the Bible is the word of God or not, the root Shin-Het-Reish שחר is a challenge if we compare its meanings with data from modern physics. Today, from physics we know that visible matter, made of atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons and several types of elementary particles is only 5 percent of the universe. A quarter is dark matter, and 70% – dark energy. Dark matter is unknown as a structure, but it is known that it has elementary particles that interact very weakly with visible matter. This allows dark matter to pass through all the known visible structures, including through the Earth and the human body. According to this theory the five percent visible matter “swims in a soup” of dark matter. So dark matter is a sort of parallel world that always accompanies the bright, visible matter. It turns out that the root Shin-Hat-Reish שחר with its meanings can be used to name the coexistence of bright and dark matter. This claim cannot be explained by any linguistic theory. According to the Stoics, the



name must correspond to the nature of what it names. Socrates persuades Cratylus that a name cannot capture the true nature of the object it names, because until we find the appropriate name for its essence, the object itself has already changed. Therefore, the names of things do not have any similarity, analogy, or accordance with the objects for which they are names. Plato develops in a dialogue a “fold” philosophy of language, which fully corresponds to the modern understanding that the linguistic sign is unmotivated and arbitrary (Plato, *Cratylus*).

It seems strange that the root, which forms the main BCT *black* in Hebrew, contains the theory of relativity and its most advanced development in the science of physics.

#### **2.4. The macro-metaphorics of the root related to the ‘white’ meanings of Shin-Het-Reish שחר**

The speculations on the extended semantics of the root Shin-Het-Reish שחר are based on the meanings described in scholarly monographs and dictionaries: *dawn, morning; youth, prime of life; to break, to break forth; to seek, to seek carefully, poetic; to be or become black; to fascinate, to enchant; look carefully for; magic, power; vb. bewitch, charm, as noun – sorcerer; vb. laugh; vb. long; darkness; compulsion, force.*

The root שחר allows a very special type of transmission between light and darkness, between black and white. This refers to the worldview and to the culture interwoven into the language. On the ‘white’ side, *dawn* designates the complex sign of light – light as the future with the meaning of ‘youth’. Sunrise is at once an iconic sign, sign-index, and sign-symbol of light. Also, *dawn* can be both a metaphor and a metonym of light in a cognitive perspective. The notion of sunrise embeds the category of ‘time-future which is bright’. On the other hand, the root names the BCT for black in Hebrew – as an adjective, and as a verb, i.e. both are predicates (the adjective needs one argument, expressed by a noun, and the verb needs two arguments – subject and object). From yet another angle, there are the



meanings marking the relationships ‘man-man’ and ‘man-outer world’ indicating the activity of a human being – *to search, look carefully for; to fascinate, to enchant; magic, power; vb. bewitch, charm, vb. laugh; vb. long*. Thus, in this transmission between light and darkness, human relations are situated somewhere between black and white. Here one can find the secondness of these macro-meanings, including causal relations – these human properties cause change in the world and in oneself. We may find here morality, and warning, and man’s right to free choice. The question is what we seek, what we strive for, what we are laughing at – the light of dawn or the blackness of darkness, the evil morally distorted past or the good of the coming future.

In the context of the Jewish perception of language, with the letters and light as first-created substances, this root presents in a three-dimensional space a heavenly, first-created idea of multilateralism, in semantic and perceptual terms richer than the idea of dialectics. In the Jewish view, it is also accepted that not every lexical structure is implemented in three-dimensional space, as a material combination of letters in the speech and language we call Hebrew. Many combinations of letters remain at an ideal, heavenly level. The reasons for this are many. One of them is the inability of human beings to deal with multiple semantic layers of a root. In this sense, Shin-Het-Reish is a good example of the depth of ambiguity in the earthly representations of the heavenly possibilities and realities.

The root is represented as a transmission containing light, darkness and important human qualities in the system of language. Its different meanings can gain a secondary use, which will be called micro-metaphors, depending on the particular context.

### **2.5. The micro-metaphorics of the root related to the ‘white’ meanings of Shin-Het-Reish שחר**

Some of the occurrences of *dawn* שַׁחַר [shahar] reaffirm the macro-metaphorics of the root – they are signs of ‘better future and respect for



moral values'. Obviously, it has bearing on individuals and groups of people – municipality, economic units, states and their institutions. See e.g. “With the coming of *dawn*, the angels urged Lot, saying, Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished” (Genesis 19:15 NIV); Eccl. 11:10 marking the *youth/dawn of life* with שָׁהַר [shahar]; high moralality among the Jews (Nehemiah 4:15) and the opposite – total lack of morality among the twelve tribes (Jud. 19:25). *Dawn* שָׁהַר [shahar] serves as the background for bad stories with a strong moral appeal and lesson – the persecution of Samson (Jud. 16:2); Job cursing his own birthday (Job 3:9). It is also mentioned in the context of God-Father as Creator: Job 38:12; Isa. 8:20, Am. 4:20, etc.:

He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth – the LORD God Almighty is his name (Amos 4:13 NIV).

Hebrew offers a rich set of tools to express *dawn* – from lexems [nogàh], [neshef], [zerah] to descriptive phrases – *light of the morning* [or boker]. It should be emphasized that the choice of a word for a given context is a very important and significant aspect of the biblical text.

Finally, *dawn* שָׁהַר [shahar] is chosen of all the opportunities in Hebrew in the description of the fall of a shining archangel – Lucifer. It is a metaphor, with the king of Babylon preached by Isaiah: “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the *dawn*! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!” (14:12 NIV).

The examples of the micro-metaphorics of the Hebrew white aspects of the root, *dawn* שָׁהַר [shahar] offer rich contexts of involvement, which explore both the blackness of the outgoing night and the effulgent coming day. This is not the case with the BCT *black*.



## 2.6. The contextual semantics of the BCT

The statistics is 9 appearances for the whole OT:

1. Medical instruction – 2 appearances: Lev. 13:31; 37: adj. שָׁחֹר [shahor].
2. Human skin – 4 appearances: Song of Solomon 1:5: fem. שְׁחֹרָה [shehora]; 6 fem. dimin. שְׁחֹרְחֹרֶת [sharhoret]; Job 30:30: vb. שָׁחֹר [shahor]; Lam. 4:8 שְׁחֹר [shehor].
3. Human hair – once: Song of Solomon 5:11: fem., pl. שְׁחֹרוֹת [shehorot].
4. Horses – 2 appearances: Zech. 6:2; 6: masc., pl. שְׁחֹרִים [shhorim].

The Septuagint started the tradition to translate in Lam. 4:8 *black* שְׁחֹר [shehor] as *soot*. Most of the translations follow it. The noun phrase is מִשְׁחֹר קִשָּׁךְ [hashah mi-shehor], lit. *dark like black, darker than anything black*. The word קִשָּׁךְ [hashah] presents the most frequent root for derivation of the Prototype Terms (PT) – *dark, darkness, be or become dark*.

Their appearance is *blacker than soot*, They are not recognized in the streets;  
Their skin is shriveled on their bones, It is withered, it has become like wood  
(Lam. 4:8 NAU).

Now their visage is *blacker than soot*; they are not recognized in the streets.  
Their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood (Lam.  
4:8 NRS).

The Vulgate decision is *coals* for שְׁחֹר [shehor] and the BCT *black* for the Hebrew *dark* קִשָּׁךְ [hashah]: *HETH denigrata est super carbones* (VUL)] ‘blacker than coal’. Polish translation is *Pociemniał ich wygląd na węgiel* ‘darkened their appearance on coal’ (BTP).

The Czech and Bul-II translations are among the exceptions that adhere exactly to the Hebrew original without decrease in the quality of the translation, respectively: *Ale již vzezření jejich temnější jest než černost*



‘darker than any blackness’ (Czech); and *по-тъмно от всичко черно* ‘darker than anything black’ (BUL-II).

The Septuagint and the Vulgate rearrange in a mirrored order the places of the basic colour term (BCT) and the prototype term (PT). Despite the differences of word order in many languages – in Hebrew the modifier is placed after the modified – it is not a strong factor here because we have the proposition/conjunction *than/from* -מִ [mi-].

The linear order in Lam. 4:8 is:

Hebrew	Indo-European languages, starting from the Septuagint & the Vulgate
PT → BCT	BCT → PT
<i>dark</i> דָּשָׁח [hashah] ‘dark’ → black	<i>black</i> דָּשָׁח [hashah] ‘dark’ → <i>soot/coal</i>
שְׁחֹר [shehor] ‘black’	שְׁחֹר [shehor] ‘black’

Finno-Ugric languages (partly) follow the Septuagint tradition – *blacker than soot* (FIN), *blacker than my age visage* (HUN) – and also rearrange in a mirrored order the places of the BCT and the PT.

Verses 7 and 8 are one unit – verse 7 is white-red, positive, and 8 is black, negative. This opposition corresponds to the findings of Turner, who revealed similar opposition in Ndembu culture for three colours. The opposition in a religious aspect has two colour codes – if the colours are red and white, they are in opposition, if there are three, the opposition is white + red opposed to black (Turner 2004 [1966]).

One third of all the nine uses of the BCT *black* in the Hebrew Bible are in the Song of Solomon. Twice for the *skin* of the beloved *Shulamit*: fem. שְׁחֹרָה [shehora] (1:5) and fem. dimin. שְׁחַרְחֹרֶת [sheharhoret] (1:6), and once for the *locks/curls* of the beloved king *Solomon* (5: 11) fem., pl. שְׁחֹרוֹת [shehorot].

Assuming the hypothesis that the beloved Shulamit (the name is feminine of Solomon) is the Queen of Sheba, we will need to remember that she is the queen of Ethiopia. This means that there are two uses of the BCT



compared to the Rival for prototype (RP). Black people are present in the Hebrew Bible in several places, including the prophet Zephaniah (1:1). For details, see Almalech (2015).

*Kebrā Nagast* or *The Glory of the Kings* is a 14th-century account of the origins of the Emperors of Ethiopia from the love between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. It is considered a historically reliable work for the Solomonic line of rulers of Ethiopia. It also contains an account of how the Ark of Covenant came to Ethiopia after the son of Solomon and Queen of Sheba, Menelik I, visited Jerusalem. The book tells the story of the conversion of the Ethiopians to the “Lord God of Israel”.

The visit of Queen of Sheba is described in 1 Kings 10:1-13. Even the style of the account conveys the unusual relationship between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, marked by mutual respect and love. In the Song of Solomon it is declared: ‘I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar’ (1:5), and ‘Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me’ (RWB). RWB is the most truthful one to the Hebrew original. Most of the translations use for the diminutive *dark* or *swarthy* שְׁחֹרְחֹרֶת [sharhoret], which is an understandable decision, because every diminutive signifies a lower quality of the baseline concept.

Over the centuries, Judaism developed a negative attitude towards the Queen of Sheba. It reached a peak in Kabbalistic Zohar, where she is identified with Lilith, the first wife of Adam, the one who became the wife of Satan, the mother of all demons, etc. See Scholem (1978: 358-359). Melamed gives a reliable explanation of the phenomena:

In I Kings 1:10 and II Chronicles 9, she is presented not only as a rich woman with excellent abilities as a ruler and a diplomat, but a wise woman who tries Solomon with riddles. In short, she contradicts all the gender and skin-colour stereotypes that would develop later. Perhaps it was no wonder, then, that the Sages had trouble relating to her, and so ignored her almost completely. [...] Such a combination of an independent, clever woman who tested King Solomon, crossing the accepted gender boundaries, and a daughter



of Sheba son of Cush besides, necessarily aroused in the Sages such overwhelmingly negative associations that they identified her with Lilith, though there is no basis whatever for such an identity in the two biblical versions of the encounter. Such associations belong to another, later cultural mentality (Melamed 2005: 56).

The Bible itself treats the Ethiopians very positively. Amos 9:7 is of great interest. Ethiopians are identified with Israel and this supports the thesis of the special status of Ethiopians as children of the One God.

As Hartley notes appropriately, “in high circles beauty is associated with *ruddy* אָדוּם, *shiny* צָה or *glowing* זָכָךְ complexion” (Hartley 2011:76). Moreover, beauty is marked by the red-white in the Song of Solomon “my beloved is *white* צָה and *ruddy* אָדוּם” (5:10), just one verse before the third blackness is used in the book as a sign of beauty: “his locks are wavy, black as a raven” (5:11). The same colour syntagm is used in Lamentations 4:7 – “Her Nazirites were *brighter than snow and whiter than milk. They were more ruddy in body than rubies, Like sapphire in their appearance.*” Maybe the order of this structure *black* and *dark* in the next verse (4:8) is reverted in PT → BCT imitating verse 7 in an icon style, despite the fact that in verse 7 the Hebrew order is more complicated: TBFP (‘brighter’) → PT (‘snow’) + BCT (‘whiter’) → PT (‘snow’) + BCT (‘ruddy’ אָדָמוֹ) → RP (‘rubies/corals’). King David is described as *ruddy* (1 Samuel 16:12 אָדָמוֹ). In any case, beauty is a red-white unit composed with conjunction.

The ambiguity in colour language can be traced when after the white-red beauty we face Isaiah’s famous opposition ‘red is sin – white is pureness’: “Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (Isa. 1:18 NRS)

The *black*, masc., pl. שְׁחֹרִים [shehorim], horses in Zechariah 6:2; 6 are an element of one of the most mystical, indecipherable and unresolved symbols. They are important not only for the symbolism of the Old Testament, but also because in the New Testament they are reactivated and



reproduced (Rev. 6:2-8). I made an attempt to decode this symbol in Almalech 2006: 292-306. The process of decoding includes using the definition *spirits of heaven* רוּחוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם [ruhot ha-shamaim], offered in Zech. 6:4-5: “I asked the angel who was speaking to me, “What are these, my lord?” The angel answered to me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world””.

In the Hebrew translation of Revelation 6:2-8, *spirits of heaven* רוּחוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם [ruhot ha-shamaim] are called *spirits of Elohim* רוּחוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים [ruhot ha-elohim]. *Heavenly/heavens* הַשָּׁמַיִם [ha-shamaim] functions as a substitute for the name of God, and the word הָאֱלֹהִים [ha-elohim] is a fundamental constituent of the 72 names of God. The word *spirits* רוּחוֹת [ruhot] is plural from רוּחַ [ruah]. In Hebrew רוּחַ [ruah] means *wind*, if the word is in the feminine. The same word, רוּחַ [ruah], accepted as masculine, is an element of the term *Holy Spirit* רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ [ruah ha-kodesh], i.e. the masculine רוּחַ [ruah] is *spirit*, the feminine רוּחַ [ruah] is *wind*. Both, [ruhot ha-shamaim] and [ruhot ha-elohim] do not die when “sitting/standing before the Lord”. This feature is not inherent to man (even Moses cannot survive if he stands before God, Ex. 33:18-23) but only to beings of the archangel level. Defined as *spirits of heaven* black, red, white and gray horses are special archangelic creatures. As far as the horse is a symbol of movement, of war, of royalty, luxury and beauty, these creatures fight against weak people – both in the OT and the NT. The colours of the horses remain encrypted. Their only identification is with the directions of the world in Zec. 6:6 – North, East, etc. – but this is an unsatisfactory decoding.

### **2.7. Semio-osmosis. Black ↔ Dark. Translation as a criterion and a semiotic value**

Translators give BCTs for all 9 uses of the BCT in Hebrew. BCTs are context independent. To express *black/blackness* with a PT is possible but PTs as *black* are context dependent.



Translators equalize BCTs and PTs in a few cases. There are plenty of roots which signify the prototype of black – *dark, darkness, be or become dark; dim, gloom, mist, dusk, obscure, opaque*. These are Het-Shin-Haf, Kuf-Dalet-Reish, Kaph-Mem-Reish, Ayn-Vav-Phe, Aleph-Phe-Lamed, Ayn-Reish-Bet, Nun-Shin-Phe, Ayn-Reish-Phe, Ayn-Mem-Mem. *Dark* and its derivatives are used about 1000 times. Maybe this is the reason why the BCT is used only 9 times.

The example given above with Lam. 4:8 shows that cognitively, linguistically and culturally *dark* and *black* could be equal, not just contextual synonymes. This is possible in inter-linguistic translation, but it usually happens within the frame of the source language. Job uses with an equivalent sense and poetic power both black and dark to express one state of mind and body. The prophet Job is one of the masters of Biblical poetry and poetic parallelism.

The equation conducted by Job in Hebrew proves that this cognitive and cultural process is useful in translation – literal or by substitution.

In Hebrew the order is *Become dark* כֹּדֵר [koder] (Job 30:28) → *Become black* שָׁחַר [shahar] (Job 30:30).

In some translations (NIV, NIB) the order is *Blackened* כֹּדֵר [koder] (Job 30:28) → *grows black* שָׁחַר [shahar] (Job 30:30):

I go about *blackened* כֹּדֵר [koder], but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry for help (Job 30:28 NIV).

My skin *grows black* שָׁחַר [shahar] and peels; my body burns with fever (Job 30:30 NIV).

The equalization between the BCT and PTs is a process which can be called Semio-osmosis. “Osmosis is the spontaneous net movement of solvent molecules through a semi-permeable membrane into a region of higher solute concentration, in the direction that tends to equalize the solute concentrations on the two sides” (Wikipedia). This metaphor is appropriate here because translators try to equalize the sense of the two languages. The



ultimate goal of the semio-osmosis is equalization of the content between target and source language. The septum/membrane that the translators must overcome is the different worldview and grammar between the two languages.

The ultimate effect of the semio-osmosis is keeping the original meaning, according to the cultural habits and linguistic parameters of the carriers of the target language. Semio-osmosis occurs between Hebrew and translations and it passes on the vehicle of the prototypes, their most typical features, and some culturizations of *black*. For example, most of the English translations (e.g. KJV, NKV) propose *go about mourning* or *go about in gloom* for קֹדֶר [koder], instead of *go about blackened*.

The final goal of semio-osmosis is the highest possible equality of texts. In this sense, accommodation and semio-osmosis are opposite processes. In fact, the authors of the key translations adhere more to semio-osmosis despite inter-linguistic asymmetry, dissymmetry, different worldviews, cultural differences and traditions.

Job demonstrates that there is intralinguistic semio-osmosis by the equalization between the PTs (*become dark* קֹדֶר [koder] in Job 30:28) and the BCT (*become black* שָׁהַר [shahar] in Job 30:30). Obviously, this is based on cultural and cognitive foundations. That is why intralinguistic semio-osmosis is a fact in Job's Hebrew. Equalization between BCTs and PTs in translations is interlinguistic semio-osmosis, but in the case of Job 30:28-30 it is strongly motivated by the equalization in the source language.

Other examples for the replacement of the Hebrew *dark* (signified with different roots) with Indo-European *black* include:

Exodus 10:15 (*dark*, root Het-Shin-Haf): *the land was black* NRS; *земля почерня* 'the land went black' BUL-I, but *darkened* NAU; NAS; KJV, and *devoured* NIB; NIV.

Lamentations 4:1: (*dark*, root Ayn-Mem-Mem): 'went black gold' – Polish (BTP *szcerniało złoto*) and Bulgarian (BUL-I *почерня златото*).

1 Kings 18:45 (*dark*, root Kuf-Dalet-Reish): *the sky grew black* (NIB, NAS, NAU, NRS, NKJ, RWB, etc.).



Jeremiah 4:28 (*dark*, root Kuf-Dalet-Reish): *heavens above be black* (KJV, NKJ, RWB).

## 2.8. A fuzzy BCT, כַּמְרִיר [kamrir], 2 uses (Job 3:5; Lam. 5:10)

The root meaning here is *to be warm, hot*. Three of the four occurrences (Gen. 43:30; 1 Ki. 3:26; Hos. 11:8), all of which are NIPHAL express the emotions of filial attachments, in the latter case those of God to his people. (BibleWorks): “Let darkness and black gloom claim it; Let a cloud settle on it; Let the *blackness* כַּמְרִיר [kamrir], of the day terrify it”. (NAS Job 3:5)

BibleWorks gives one use as *darkness, gloominess* in Job 3:5, but the interpreters prefer *blackness* (KJV, NIV, NIB, NAS, NAU, NRS, NRS, RWB, NAB, French LSG, Spanish LBA). In BUL-II there are 2 uses of the basic meaning of the root *горещ слънчев нек* (‘hot sun heat’), just as in the Russian RST *палющего зноя* (‘burning heat’) and Czech BKR *horkost denní* (‘hotness of the day’). Others choose different interpretations: LXT – γνόφος (‘darkness’), VUL *amaritudine* (‘bitterness’), German LUT, ELB *erschrecken* (‘terrible’), LUO *gräßlich* (‘dreadful’), French TOB, BFC *terrifiante éclipse de soleil* (‘terrifies the eclipses’), Spanish RVA *oscurecimiento del día* (‘darkening of the day’), Italian NRV, IEP – *le eclissi lo riempiano di paura* (‘eclipses make it scary’), BUL-I – *ужасен* (‘terrible’), etc.

The replacement of the Hebrew כַּמְרִיר [kamrir] with *blackness, eclipses* and *darkness*, generally speaking, is related to the loss of light. It is an excellent example of the fuzziness of the logic lying at the basis of naming. For the northern people, the loss of light is an undesirable fact motivating the translation of the Hebrew word. For the people of the Middle East, heat is a more undesirable feature. Finally, both are something *terrible, terrifying, dreadful, bitter*. Thus, geographical particularities can be decoded in these translations. Humboldt’s idea of relativity can be seen here, as in the modern revival of the theory of linguistic relativity, operating with



the precise terms of Humboldt (see Underhill 2009: 57; Humboldt 1971; 1999; Sapir 1921; 1949; Whorf 1984).

The fuzziness in the process of selecting a logical feature to serve the categorization and naming makes it possible to track the emergence of the language of colour as a cultural unit. The lack of light (*blackness, eclipse, darkness*) or an excessive presence of light (*burning heat, red*) become members of the cultural paradigm with similar meanings: *bitterness, terrible, dreadful, and scary*.

Lamentations 5:10 is where we find the other use of the verb in NIPHAL, נִכְמַרוּ [nihmaru]. Now the translators fluctuate between *black* and *hot*: “Our skin was *black like an oven* because of the terrible famine” (KJV).; “Our skin is *hot as an oven, feverish from hunger*” (NIV).

For Lamentations 5:10 the skin is *black* (in KJV, NAU, NRS, RWB, VUL, RST, BUL-II, RVA, NRV, BKR). In BUL-I, it is *red*; connected with the *heat of an oven* or with the *burning* for others (BTP, NIV, NIB, NAS, NAU, NRS, NKJ, LUT, LSG, BFC, etc).

What is interesting here is that the blackness, redness or hotness of the oven comes from an object with a name derived from the Hebrew *light* אֹר [or] – *stove* תָּנוּר [tanur] – but this is the worldview of Hebrew.

Translations actually show the spectrum of meanings that exist in the Hebrew minds for these two uses. They are evidence of the culturalization of colours by associating them with human notions and feelings. The case of כָּמַרִיר [kamrir] shows the fuzziness of colour signs as signifiers of human notions different from colour.

This process of culturalization of colours is limited here only to the BCT. The semantization and culturalization of the prototype for black – darkness – has rich symbolic religious meaning, described in details in Biblical encyclopaedias and dictionaries.



### 3. The cultural unit *black*, presented by Prototype terms (PT) for black

The prototypes of the colour are *darkness* and *coals*. The three Hebrew words for *coals* are used in the contexts related to fire or as burning coals, i.e. red but not black colour. Thus, only darkness presents black colour.

The Hebrew worldview for *darkness* is rich, which by itself is a sign, just as a lack of sign is a sign. Nine roots refer to *darkness*: Het-Shin-Haf חֶשֶׁךְ, Kuf-Dalet-Reish קָדַר, Kaf-Mem-Reish כָּמַר, Ayn-Vav-Phe עוֹף, Aleph-Phe-Lamed אָפַל, Aleph-Reish-Bet עָרַב, Nun-Shin-Phe נִשְׁךְ, Aleph-Reish-Phe עָרַף, Ayn-Mem-Mem עָמַם. The word for *night* לַיְלָה [làila] should be added to these roots, because night is a natural representative of darkness.

#### 3.1. Transcultural isotopy of the cultural unit *black*, presented by *darkness*

Isotopy was presented by Greimas in the context of text disambiguation, but further development and extensions actually led to the different definitions and understandings of the term.

Here I define isotopy in the spirit of the Greek term *isotopy* – ἴσος ‘the same’, τοπος ‘place’. The cultural unit *black*, presented by darkness, is involved in the opposition light/darkness cultured as life/death, good/evil, higher/lower, appearance/disappearance, positive/negative value in different cultures, demonstrated and proved convincingly by Cirlot (2001: 10; 26; 39; 54; 59; 76). The popularity of this semantics and symbolism can be explained by the prototypical nature of light and darkness. In all cultures the meanings of ‘death’, ‘evil’, ‘lower’, ‘disappearance’, ‘negative value’ lead to the ‘the same place’ – the prototype of black – the darkness, and its basic semantics depends on the human senses, perceptions and cultures. One might put forward the hypothesis that the prophets had envisaged the problems in the translation of the BCT and had for thousands of years



intentionally chosen to impart semantics and culture to the PTs for *black*, not the BCT for *black*.

The poor use of the BCT for *black* in the Hebrew Bible and the richness of the terms for *darkness* is intentional prophetic use of “the same place” (darkness), which does not obey the relativism of the different linguistic worldviews. In other words, it always leads to the prototype and its basic semantics, described as “symbol of...” or “metaphor for...”.

The answer to the question of whether the repetition of the number nine that arises here is a coincidence (nine roots are used to refer to *darkness* in Hebrew and the BCT for black [shahor] is used nine times in the whole Hebrew Bible) remains hypothetical. Could it be a prophetic isotopy, which remains at the deepest level of the usage of language?

The Biblical meanings of darkness and light follow this general direction. Here is Eco’s treatment of direction and isotopy:

Indeed, isotopy refers almost always to constancy in going in a direction that a text exhibits when submitted to rules of interpretive coherence, even if the rules of coherence change according to whether what is wanted is to individuate discursive or narrative isotopies, to disambiguate definite descriptions or sentences and produce coreferences, to decide what things certain individuals do, or to establish how many different stories the same deed by the same individuals can generate (Eco 1980: 153).

Darkness is a visual property of an object, which is the same for the cognitive territory and limits of the *homo sapiens*. Thus, darkness becomes a symbol or a metaphor of human perceptions, emotions and notions.

The Bulgarian edition of the *Dictionary of Bible Symbols* (Owen, Grist, Dowling, Shivarov 1992) brings together the data contained in a large number of classical Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias in a most synergistic manner. Thus, the meanings of darkness (dark, gloom) in the Bible include:



1. THE ANTITHESIS of light, which is a symbol of God's holiness, purity, wisdom and glory. The three-day darkness in Egypt is undoubtedly a punishment and a warning, but its effect is primarily in the deprivation of true God's light. A similar suggestion is brought about by the darkness accompanying the earthly death of the God-man: Ex. 10:21 ff.; Matt. 27:45.
2. THE METAPHOR of ambiguity and mystery: III Ki. 8:12 (RI); Job 38:2; Isa. 45:19; Dan. 2:22.
3. THE METAPHOR (spatially oriented) of torments and punishments, whose ultimate expression is hell: Ps. 143:3 [142:3]; Isa. 59:9; Jer. 13:16; Lam. 3:6; Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jud. 1:6; 13.
4. THE SYMBOL of judgment and especially – of God's judgment: Deut. 4:11; Ps. 105:28 [104:28]; Pro. 20:20; Isa. 5:30; Eze. 32:8; Joel 2:2; Am. 5:18; Act. 2:20; Rev. 8:12; 9:2; 16:10.
5. THE METAPHOR of spiritual ignorance and spiritual blindness caused by sin: Ps. 69:23; 82:5 [68:24; 81:5]; Pro 2:13; Isa. 9:2; 29:15; 42:7; 60:2; John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; I John 1:6; Eph. 6:12; I Th. 5:4.
6. THE SYMBOL of the lack of sensitivity among some believers to God's presence: Job 30:26; Ps. 88:6 [87:7]; Isa. 50:10.

(Owen, Grist, Dowling, Shivarov, 1992: 204-205; translation mine)

Actually, these are the basic meanings of the PT *darkness* in the Bible. There are many other uses of the cultural unit *black*, presented by darkness, which are common to Judaism and Christianity. They are encoded in the prototype of black – darkness. We can find them in Proverbs 2. As noted by Nöth, “a different typology of isotopies is proposed by Eco (1984)” (Nöth 1990: 320). For Proverbs 2 more appropriate labels seem to be “summarizing” and “exteroceptive world knowledge” as developments of isotopies, according to Greimas and Courtés (1979) and Rastier (1972):

Greimas and Courtés (1979: 164) development of isotopies as *partial*, and *global* which “play a role in discursive *condensations* or *expansions*, such as in



summarizing” in a further expansion (cf. *ibid.* and Rastier 1972b: 84), the typology of isotopies is extended by *semiological* isotopies (cf. 3.3) to cover iterativities (recurrences) in terms of “exteroceptive” world knowledge (Nöth 1990: 320).

Beyond the data from biblical encyclopedias and dictionaries, the entire context of Proverbs 2 lets the reader understand that the knowledge of God consists in abandoning the ways of darkness and following the paths of light. This is pointed out there in explicit ways (the italics are mine):

#### Proverbs 2

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to *wisdom* and applying your heart to *understanding*, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the *knowledge of God*. For the LORD gives *wisdom*, and from his mouth come *knowledge* and *understanding*. He holds *victory* in store for the upright, he is a shield to those *whose walk is blameless*, for he guards the *course of the just* and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will *understand what is right and just and fair- every good path*. For wisdom will enter your heart, and *knowledge* will be pleasant to your soul. *Discretion* will protect you, and *understanding* will guard you. *Wisdom* will save you from *the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways*. It will save you also from the *adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life*. Thus you will walk in the ways of *good men and keep to the paths of the righteous*. For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; *but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it* (NIV).



### 3.2. God dwells in darkness

While the previous meanings of darkness are motivated cognitively by the best example of black, the case of the darkness, the story of the Ten Commandments begins with the statement that “The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the *thick darkness* where God was” (Exodus 20:21 NIV).

The relationship between the glory of the Lord and the Lord dwelling in darkness is also evident in the consecration of the First Temple of Solomon: “And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, ‘The Lord has said that he would dwell in a *dark cloud*’” (1 Kings 8:11-12 NIV).

*Thick darkness* and *dark cloud* are noun phrases, but they are translations of a single Hebrew word – עֲרַפֶּל [arafel], root Aleph-Reish-Phe.

Gregory of Nyssa builds the so-called Theology of Darkness based on the description in Exodus 20:21. As noted by Liard, “Gregory’s doctrine [views] the noetic ascent as a movement from light to increasing darkness”:

Gregory reminds us of Moses’ encounter with God. First God manifests himself to Moses through *light* (διὰ φῶτος). After this God spoke to Moses through a *cloud* (διὰ νεφέλης). Then Moses saw God in *darkness* (ἐν γνόφῳ). Indeed the ascent is one that begins in light and moves into progressive darkness. Having identified Moses as revealing the master pattern of noetic ascent, Gregory then applies this pattern to us. First we withdraw from false opinions about God; this is a change from dark to light. Next the soul moves from appearances to God’s hidden nature, which is symbolized by the cloud that overshadows all appearances; thus the soul becomes accustomed to beholding what is hidden. Finally, journeying towards higher things and forsaking what can be attained by human nature, everything that can be comprehended the soul penetrates the impenetrable and enters the sanctuary of divine knowledge and is surrounded by the divine darkness (Liard 2004: 177-178).



There are differences of opinion on what is the third level of knowledge (theophany) and approaching God according to Gregory. While Liard (2004) believes it was “getting beyond/above the cloud” (Ex. 24: 16-18; 40:36), Ross (2008) stated the desire of Moses to see God’s glory, having already talked “face to face” with God (Ex. 33:21-23). Finally, Moses understands that strong yearning for absolute intimacy with God can never be satisfied – faith can never be transformed into knowledge.

Gregory of Nyssa did not know Hebrew and was not in contact with Jewish experts in Judaism. His teaching of the knowledge of God does not follow Hebrew words referring to *cloud* in the Bible, nor the Hebrew words placed in context. The biblical text uses seven words for *cloud*. The token [anàn] is used in those moments that are important to the doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa.

The word *darkness* עֲרָפֶל [arafel] is of particular interest because it is used for what Gregory marks as *darkness* (ἐν γνόφῳ). The word *darkness* עֲרָפֶל [arafel] is involved in several fundamental and controversial collisions, which have become subject to multiple interpretations over the centuries. It appears about fifteen times in the original and the translation in all languages oscillates between *darkness*, *gloom*, *dark/thick cloud*. Translation by *darkness*, *gloom* preserves the original status of these names as PTs for *black*, translation as a *thick cloud* transforms it to a rival term for the prototype (RP) in readers’ consciousness and subconsciousness.

The conclusion of Gregory is quite logical (Aristotelian) and cognitively rooted – darkness makes things invisible, ergo apophatic – the light in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) is rational, ergo kataphatic: “In a traditional vein, Gregory takes light to be a symbol of knowledge” (Ross 2008). At Mount Sinai “there is no longer any reliance on the physical senses; indeed [...] at this level sight and hearing shut down. Instead, the vision of God is mediated by the so-called “spiritual senses” [...]” (Ross 2008).

The doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa, being theological, remains in the cognitive and cultural areas of humans. What is new is that he added to the usual semantization of darkness (as a synonym of ‘ignorance’,



‘misunderstanding’, ‘spiritual illiteracy’, ‘ways of not-rightness’, ‘sorrow’, ‘torture’, ‘lack of justice’, ‘mourning’, etc.) the positive meaning of “the higher/highest level of the knowledge of God”. The widespread understanding is that God radiates material and spiritual light, and this is now complemented with the knowledge of God through/into darkness [arafèl].

From the semiotic point of view, darkness gives knowledge without any human sign system. By any sign system, transcendent qualities of God are achieved. Light is connected to human language descriptions of God’s qualities, which in theology is called kataphatic, e.g. ‘love’, ‘almighty’, etc. By defining what God is, we limit the unlimited.

From the linguistic point of view, the word עֲרַפֵּל [arafel] (*thick cloud, darkness, gloom*) is connected to two roots – *to drop, to distil* [araf] and *to be dark* אָפַל [afal] (Gesenius 1996: 819). This explains why in Jewish and Christian mysticism the first created substances, Sephiroth, have drop-like structure, despite the understanding that they are light.

#### **4. The cultural unit *black*, presented by rivals of prototypes (RP) for black**

Biblical RPs are *shadow, deep shadow* (lit. ‘shadow of death’), *black marble, ebony, ink, cumin, raven, black cloud* (form 7 roots), *Ethiopian, black African people*. According to the critics of Berlin and Kay’s system, this type of words signifies colour in many cultures and languages, instead of BCTs. According to TWOT (1980) *the shadow of death* צִלְמָוֶת [tzalmavet] is ‘the strongest word in Hebrew for darkness’.

Generally, black African people, including the Queen of Sheba and Shulamit from the Song of Solomon, are described positively. The raven becomes a marker of beauty in the Song of Solomon 5:1, where the locks of the beloved are *black as a raven’s*. See Almalech (2015).



## 5. The cultural unit black, presented by terms for the basic features of the prototypes (TBFP)

The basic feature of darkness is to make things invisible. This feature is not used explicitly in the symbolism of the Bible. The case is the opposite, for example the TBFPs for green (all plants) – *fresh*, *moist* and *leafy* quite often involve a feature of the prototypes used as a synonym of green and this brings about the fuzziness of translators' choices in different versions for one Hebrew TBFP-word. Generally, about 20 times Hebrew words for *fresh*, *moist* and *leafy* are translated with the BCT *green* in different languages. There is no such tendency with darkness and coals. At the same time, to make things invisible is the basis of symbolism of darkness by itself, i.e. the basic feature is the implicitly present logical principle for the meanings of darkness in the Bible.

## 6. Conclusions

The cultural unit black is presented in the Hebrew Bible by basic colour terms, prototype terms, rivals of prototypes and terms for the basic features of the prototypes. There are only 9 BCTs, which have a low degree of symbolism. The PTs are used about 1000 times, deriving from 9 different roots and carry the symbolism of the black colour in the Bible. Most frequently, darkness symbolizes negative qualities, but when it comes to the darkness of God as His dwelling place, it becomes the positive “highest level of the knowledge of God”, though it is a mystic one, deprived of any sign system of communication. The RP terms present enough meanings – from “the strongest word in Hebrew for darkness” to the unusual sign for ‘beauty’.

The meanings of the PTs are effective and impactful because they rely on human perception and cognitive frames and the opposition between light and darkness makes them understandable in a universal perceptual and cultural perspective.



The low frequency of BCTs for black is an intentional act by the authors of the Hebrew Bible. It is compensated by the wide use of the PTs.

Statistics, treated semiotically, is an element of the cultural unit *black*. Three of all 9 uses of the BCT are accompanied by RPs, *black people*, *Queen of Sheba*, etc. Thus we note that black can be a sign of beauty, alongside the routine marking of beauty with white and red.

The macro-metaphorics of the root of the BCT *black*, Shin-Het-Reish שחור, includes ‘white’ meanings (*dawn*) which is contextually used in different ways – as blackness and whiteness of light.

Semio-osmosis is a cultural and cognitive phenomenon which allows cultural alignment between translations and intralingual equalization between BCTs and PTs.

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## **Bibles**

BKR – Czech Bible Kralická 1613

BTP – Polish Biblia Tysiąclecia. Wydanie 4. 1965/1984

BUL-I – Bulgarian Protestant Version 1940/1995/2005

BUL-II – Bulgarian Orthodox Version 1992



FIN – Raamattu käännös 1933/1938  
 HUN – Károli (1993)  
 KJV – King James Version 1611/1762  
 LXT – Septuaginta Rahlfs'  
 NAB – The New American Bible  
 NAS – New American Standard Bible 1977  
 NIB – New International Version  
 NIV – New International Version 1984  
 NKJ – New King James Version 1982  
 NAU – New American Standard Bible 1995  
 NRS – New Revised Standard Version 1989  
 RWB – Revised Webster Update 1995  
 VUL – Latin Vulgate  
 WTT – Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 1990

**Abbreviations:**

adj. – adjective

Act. – Acts

Am. – Amos

Chr. – Chronicles

Dan. – Daniel

dimin. – diminutive

Deut. – Deuteronomy

Eccl. – Ecclesiastes

Eph. – Ephesians

Ex. - Exodus

Eze. – Ezekiel

fem. – feminine

Gen. – Genesis

Hos. – Hosea

Isa. – Isaiah

JSOT – Journal for the Study of the Old Testament



Jud. – Judges

Ki. - Kings

Lam. – Lamentations

Lev. – Leviticus

lit. – literary

masc. – masculine

Matt. – Matthew

OT – Old Testament

NT – New Testament

pl. – plural

Pro. – Proverbs

Ps. – Psalm

Song. – Song of Solomon

Th. – Thessalonians

Rev – Revelation

vb. – Verb

WCS – World Color Survey

Zech. – Zechariah