



## 'āmā and šiphâ in the Hebrew Bible

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This paper examines the relationship between *šiphâ* and ' *āmā*, the two most frequently used words for female slaves in the Hebrew Bible. A male slave is always called 'ebed, but the root 'bd has no feminine equivalent to designate a female slave in biblical Hebrew. Standard lexicons render *šiphâ* and ' *āmā* in English as "maid" or "handmaid." According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "maid" means either "an unmarried girl or woman especially when young" or "a woman or girl employed to do domestic work," and "handmaid" means "a personal maid or female servant." Both the definitions specify the female gender, but they seem to communicate different nuances regarding the person's age and status of servitude. In the same

way as maid and handmaid, *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* often appear to be used interchangeably in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 30:3–4 provides a good example: “Then she said, ‘Here is my *'āmâ* Billah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.’ So she gave him her *šiphâ* Billah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her.” Billah is called both *'āmâ* and *šiphâ*, but the exact relationship or difference between the two remains unclear. We know little about the cultural background in which these words originated.<sup>1)</sup>

Traditionally, *'āmâ* and *šiphâ* have served source critics as a major criterion to discern the pre-P sources, J and E. This view was maintained by most pioneers of the Documentary Hypothesis, and by the time O. Eissfeldt’s Introduction appeared in the mid-twentieth century, that criterion had been taken for granted.<sup>2)</sup> One of the results of this source-critical implications is that critical efforts to understand these terms have centered on making distinctions between them. However, the alleged source-critical value of these terms, whether one accepts it or not, is oblique to the question of their semantic, dialectic, or functional distinction. Granted, different terms may have originated in different contexts and thereby may carry

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1) How common was it to take a maid as a wife? Exactly what social status would she attain in such a situation? Was a maid taken only as a second wife, a concubine (*pilegesh*), or could she possibly be taken as the first wife? Was it customary for a man to take his wife’s handmaid as a second wife, and if so, what would happen to her former status after the marriage? What social status is granted to the son of a maid? In response to these questions, we can only make conjectures based on a thorough examination of the literary contexts in which *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* are used.

2) See Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 183.

divergent semantic ranges or may refer to disparate customs or cultures. However, it is also possible that a single author might employ synonyms. Different authors may demonstrate a tendency to prefer one term or the other, but this fact does not necessarily prove their semantic difference. In a linguistic culture, the semantic values of words on the synchronic level of usage do not always conform with their philological origin and development on the diachronic level.<sup>3)</sup> Synonyms may develop regardless of their philological origins.

In this paper, I consider whether any difference in meaning between these two words in the Hebrew Bible<sup>4)</sup> is still identifiable in the textual evidence—a necessary question to ask before one considers how they are different.

## 1. A brief review of scholarship

Scholars have attempted to distinguish the two Hebrew terms in several different ways, but none is complete enough in scope to fully capture the complex dynamic between them.<sup>5)</sup>

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3) Linguists have long warned against imposing diachronic significance to the synchronic usage. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Riedlinger(eds.), trans. Roy Harris (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court, 1986).

4) While one can study how these terms are used outside biblical materials, space does not permit to cover those areas. For that, see F. Charles Fensham, "The Son of a Handmaid in Northwest Semitic", *VT* 19 (1969), 312–21; Chaim Cohen, "Studies in Extra-Biblical Hebrew Inscriptions I. The Semantic Range and Usage of the Terms אִמָּה and אִמָּהוּת", *Shnaton* 5 (1982), XXV–LIII.

5) For studies of Korean scholars, see Jung Jin Chun, "Comparison of the Manumission Laws in Exodus 21:2–11 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18", *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 16.1 (2010), 54–73; Hee-Hak Lee, "Re-reading 'the Abraham-Sarah Story' from the Feminist-theological Perspective", *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 19.3 (2013), 14–41.

A. Jepsen argues that *šiphâ* represents “a girl who is not free but is as yet untouched, whose duty was primarily to serve the woman of the house, whereas *’āmâ* is a woman who is not free, and who could be a man’s secondary wife, as well as the wife of a man who like her is bound in service.”<sup>6)</sup> Jepsen here proposes two important distinctions: first, in his rendering, *’āmâ* has a broader meaning than *šiphâ*; second, in general, a *šiphâ* relates to a mistress whereas an *’āmâ* is linked to a master. Yet he acknowledges that these definitions do not always work (cf. Gen 25:12; 30:3 – 4; 32:23) and therefore concludes that this original distinction has been lost over time. Riesener points out that *šiphâ* is used to highlight the quality of labor and servitude, whereas *’āmâ* is used in settings where the girl’s femininity is more strongly featured.<sup>7)</sup> In contrast, Reuter rejects the idea of a contrast lies between femininity and servitude and argues that “the choice of terms appears instead to be determined by the nature of the relationship: texts dealing with the total family and the woman’s relationship to the husband generally choose *’āmâ*. If her relationship to the mistress is to be expressed, the same person is called *šiphâ*.”<sup>8)</sup> Yet this solution does not match

6) A. Jepsen, “Amah und Schiphchah”, *VT* 8 (1958), 293.

7) Ingrid Riesener, *Der Stamm ʾamā im Alten Testament: eine Wortuntersuchung unter Berücksichtigung neuerer sprachwissenschaftlicher Methoden* (BZAW 149; Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1979). This opinion has been picked up by Engelken who concludes that there is a distinction of class status. See Karen Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel: eine begriffsgeschichtliche und sozialrechtliche Studie zur Stellung der Frau im Alten Testament* (BWANT; Stuttgart: Verlag W Kohlhammer, 1990), 144 – 45.

8) E. Reuter, “אָמָה”, G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry(ed.), trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2006), 408. See also Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzeltern Israels: Feministisch-theologische*

all the textual witness either. As we have seen, in Gen 30:3 a mistress calls her slave an *'āmâ*.<sup>9)</sup>

Recent studies have reexamined earlier attempts to distinguish between *'āmâ* and *šiphâ*. F. Mirguet, for instance, concludes that no distinction in social status can be made between the two. Rather, Mirguet's fresh synchronic literary approach pays attention to how these synonymous words affect the reading experience at the literary level. Mirguet stresses the openness of the textual signification and argues that the two words constitute a "space" in which a potential meaning is deposited, one that must be actualized by means of the reader's engagement.<sup>10)</sup> E. Bridge similarly contends that "no general distinction in meaning" can be forced on these terms.<sup>11)</sup> He acknowledges certain patterns, such as differences in usage between Genesis and other books, the frequent occurrences of *'āmâ* in legal context, and a preference for *šiphâ* in Genesis, but eventually concludes that no overarching distinction can be made due to the generic differences between different parts of biblical literature. My own analysis adds further evidence to this recent tendency, though by a different trajectory.

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*Studien zu Genesis 12-36* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 92–3, cited by Reuter.

9) For a more extensive analysis of scholarly opinions, see Edward J. Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave: *הַמָּאָה* and *הַשִּׁפְחָה* in the HB", *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012), 3–8.

10) Françoise Mirguet, "Les titres 'shifkiah' et 'amah': recherche de lexicographie biblique", *ZAW* 116 (2004), 242–50.

11) Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave".

## 2. A close examination of *'āmā* and *šiphâ*

Due to the sheer number of the passages that employ either *'āmā* or *šiphâ* in the Hebrew Bible, reviewing each passage individually is not the most efficient way to pursue a complete comparison. Rather, I will establish a set of key questions and examine each passage by means of those questions to see if any meaningful divergence between the two terms emerges. Again, the focus here is not on what the difference is between the two terms but on whether there is a difference at all. Of course, the choice of questions can affect the result, so I attempt to select a broadly acceptable set of questions based on the previous scholarly findings.

### 1) Femininity or the capacity to work

The first question concerns the function of the female slave. As noted above, scholars have attempted to distinguish female slaves based on the specific functions assigned to them. Is she used to provide children for her owner? Is her femininity, motherhood, or sexuality emphasized? Or is the slave primarily involved in domestic labor? The capacity to work may overlap with the marital or reproductive function.<sup>12)</sup> In some cases, a slave who has provided domestic service may later become a

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12) Admittedly, it is often difficult to discern whether the aspect of labor is implied. In the following analysis, labor is understood in a broad sense that if *šiphâ* and *'āmā* are listed alongside other terms, like *'ebed*, that designate a group whose typical function is to provide service to superior personnel, I consider that it underlies a labor setting even if physical servitude is not mentioned.

wife and produce children for her owner. By considering this question of role, we can trace whether the change of a slave's status entails a change of a designation and if either term has a closer connection with one function or the other.

## 2) Ownership type

In biblical narratives, slaves are often tied personally to their owner, whereas in other cases they are considered merely as part of the household property. When used primarily as a personal servant, the slave may serve a male or female owner. In each case where *'āmâ* or *šiphâ* is used, is the slave a mere part of the owner's property or is she more closely tied with her owner as personal property? If the latter is the case, is the owner female or male?

## 3) Deference

In biblical narratives, *'āmâ* and *šiphâ* are used frequently to denote an expression of deference, even when the female figure is not in the status of servitude.<sup>13)</sup> Is the term used as a means of deference before a male figure? It is important to sort out such instances, because they would not reflect the woman's social status. Our inquiry here concerns whether one of the two terms is more frequently used as a means of expressing rhetorical deference.

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13) Cf. Reuter, "אִמָּה", 408–9; Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave", 18–21.

#### 4) Legal settings

Slavery is often arranged through legally binding contracts, and scholars have long recognized the frequent use of *'āmā* in the legal corpus. Thus, by asking whether the term is used in a legal or non-legal (i.e., colloquial) setting, we aim to determine whether there is any distinction between the legal implications of the two terms.

In many cases, the decision is difficult to make and the results are thus approximate. The following tables are structured based on the questions listed above. Each question is horizontally put on top of the table, and each passage is evaluated in accordance with the questions.

**Table 1. *šiphâ* in the Hebrew Bible<sup>14)</sup>**

	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4
Gen 12:16	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:1	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:2	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:3	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:5	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:6	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 16:8	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 20:14	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Gen 24:35	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Gen 25:12	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 29:24	LBR	M-O/F-O	N/A	N/A

14) LBR = Labor oriented sense, the capacity to work; FEM = Femininity, marital, sexual, reproductive function; DEF = Deference; PRP = "Property"; F-O/ M-O = "Female owner" and "Male owner"; LG = legal setting; n/a = "not applicable."

Gen 29:29	LBR	M-O/F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:4	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:7	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:9	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:10	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:12	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:18	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:43	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Gen 32:6	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Gen 32:23	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 33:1	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 33:2	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 33:6	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 35:25	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 35:26	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Exo 11:5	LBR <sup>15)</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lev 19:20	FEM	N/A	N/A	LG
Dtn 28:68	LBR	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ruth 2:13*2	LBR*2	N/A PRP	DEF N/A	N/A N/A
1 Sam 1:18	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 8:16	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
1 Sam 25:27	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:41	LBR	N/A	N/A	N/A
1 Sam 28:21	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 28:22	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:6	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:7	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:12	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:15	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:17	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:19	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 17:17	LBR	N/A	N/A	N/A
2 Kgs 4:2	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Kgs 4:16	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Kgs 5:26	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
2 Chr 28:10	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Esth 7:4	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Ps 123:2	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A

15) "Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill ..." In this verse, "the first born of a *šiphâ*" does not highlight the feminine aspect of a female slave but indicates the lowest social rank that is contrasted to "the first born of Pharaoh."

Prov 30:23	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A
Eccl 2:7	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Isa 14:2	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Isa 24:2	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A
Jer 34:9	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Jer 34:10	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Jer 34:11	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Jer 34:16	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Joel 3:2	N/A	GOD	N/A	N/A

**Table 2.** *'āmā* in the Hebrew Bible

	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3.	No. 4
Gen 20:17	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 21:10	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 21:12	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 21:13	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 30:3	FEM	F-O	N/A	N/A
Gen 31:33	FEM	M-O	N/A	N/A
Exo 2:5	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A
Exo 20:10	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 20:17	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 21:7	LBR	N/A	N/A	LG
Exo 21:20	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 21:26	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 21:27	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 21:32	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Exo 23:12	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Lev 25:6	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Lev 25:44	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 5:14	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 5:21	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 12:12	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 12:18	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 15:17	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 16:11	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Dtn 16:14	LBR	PRP	N/A	LG
Judg 9:18	FEM?	M-O	N/A	N/A
Judg 19:19	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Ruth 3:9	FEM	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 1:11	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A

1 Sam 1:16	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:24	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:25	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:28	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:31	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Sam 25:41	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 6:20	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
2 Sam 6:22	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
2 Sam 14:15	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 14:16	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
2 Sam 20:17	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Kgs 1:13	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Kgs 1:17	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
1 Kgs 3:20	N/A	N/A	DEF	N/A
Ezr 2:65	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Neh 7:67	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Job 19:15	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Job 31:13	LBR	PRP	N/A	N/A
Psa 86:16	N/A	GOD	DEF <sup>16)</sup>	N/A
Psa 116:16	N/A	GOD	DEF	N/A
Nah 2:7[8]	LBR	F-O	N/A	N/A

Before discussing the tables and the evidence that they present, I should note the unevenness in the distribution of the terms between Genesis and other books. As others have observed, Genesis employs *šiphâ* predominantly, whereas subsequent books use *'āmâ* more frequently.<sup>17)</sup> Even within the Pentateuch, the difference in tendency is unmistakable, *'āmâ* is used seven times in Deuteronomy, nine times in Exodus, and twice in Leviticus, whereas *šiphâ* appears only once in each

16) "Give your strength to your 'ebed; save the child of your 'āmâ." In this Psalm, 'ebed and ben-'āmâ do not indicate an actual social status but are both used as a means of deference before God. Their master is not humans but the heavenly God that they serve.

17) See e.g., Reuter, "שִׁפְחָה", 406; Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave", 10, 17–8.

book. This unevenness most likely results from differences in genre and subject matter. Genesis is composed mostly of narrative materials of family history. Ancestral figures often take a maidservant as a wife, a specific setting in which *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* are frequently employed. The rest of the books in the Pentateuch, meanwhile, contain legal explanations in which female slaves are taken as part of the personal or family property. Given this difference, in the following analysis I will distinguish Genesis from other books.

### 1) Femininity or the capacity to work

	Overall			Outside Genesis			In Genesis		
	FEM	LBR	N/A	FEM	LBR	N/A	FEM	LBR	N/A
<i>šiphâ</i>	19	28	13	1	20	13	18	8	0
<i>'āmâ</i>	7	26	15	2	26	15	6	0	0

\*FEM = femininity (i.e., marital, sexual, or reproduction function); LBR = capacity to work.

Overall, both *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* are employed in a labor-oriented sense more frequently than in a femininity-oriented sense. This is hardly surprising because *'āmâ* and *šiphâ* designate female slaves, who by definition are bound for servitude. Although the distinction between *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* remains minimal in this regard, a strong contrast between Genesis and other books is readily apparent. For both terms, the feminine sense occurs mostly in Genesis, due to the specific narrative circumstances of the Patriarchal narrative—or, more specifically, the “surrogate

motherhood narratives.”<sup>18)</sup>

Although *šiphâ* is the more standard choice in Genesis, *'āmâ* is not entirely absent, appearing six times. Yet *'āmâ* appears only in chapters 20 and 21. This means that within Genesis, the distinction between *'āmâ* and *šiphâ* is not functional. If anything, it is sectional, in a tradition-historical or redaction-critical sense (i.e., the “block” model). For instance, in Genesis 16 *šiphâ* is used throughout, with both labor and marital connotations. In Gen16:1, Hagar is introduced as *šiphâ* of Sarai, a personal maid, but not yet in a marital setting. We can assume that Hagar was primarily a domestic servant to her mistress up to this point. In Gen 16:2, however, the same designation is used in a marital setting as Sarai gives Hagar, her *šiphâ*, to Abram to bear a child. As soon as Hagar was given to Abram, she presumably became exempt from her labor duties, but that did not lead to a change of designation to *'āmâ*.

In Genesis 20 – 21, on the other hand, *'āmâ* is used throughout except a single appearance of *šiphâ* (20:14). For some reason, the author of this section preferred the term *'āmâ*. Not incidentally, according to the traditional Documentary Hypothesis, Genesis 20 – 21 is a cardinal example of the Elohist source (E), whereas Genesis 16 belongs to the Yahwistic text (J), so this analysis may appear to support the source-critical assignment of each of these terms to one of the

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18) Reuter, “שפחה”, 407.

non-P sources, *šiphâ* to J and *'āmâ* to E.<sup>19)</sup> However, one can equally claim, based on the tradition-historical block model, that Genesis 20–21 originated in and belongs to a different traditional or redactional layer. In fact, the assignment of Genesis 20–21 to the Elohist source has been repeatedly challenged. Thus, it is misleading to interpret the concentrated occurrence of *'āmâ* in Genesis 20–21 as conclusive support for the source model.

Outside Genesis, neither of the terms appears regularly in a feminine sense. The two exceptions are not straightforward and require discussion. One occurs in Judg 9:18, in which Jotham ben Gideon calls his half-brother Abimelech “the son of his *'āmâ* (*ben-'āmātô*).”<sup>20)</sup> This phrase may imply a marital relationship, insofar as the *'āmâ* here is Gideon’s Shechemite concubine (Judg 8:31). But *ben-'āmâ* is a technical term that denotes one’s social status, as is also attested outside Hebrew (e.g., *bn amt* in Ugaritic).<sup>21)</sup> In all other places in the Hebrew Bible where *ben-'āmâ* is used in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 23:12; Psa 86:16; 116:16), one finds no hint of a feminine sense or a sexual connotation; rather, the term is exclusively employed to indicate one’s social status.

The other case of a feminine reference occurs in Ruth 3:9. Here *'āmâ* is indeed used with a sexual connotation, but

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19) For the most recent attempt, see Philip Y. Yoo, “Hagar the Egyptian: Wife, Handmaid, and Concubine”, *CBQ* 78 (2016), 215–35.

20) See Fensham, “The Son of a Handmaid in Northwest Semitic”, 319.

21) *Ibid.*, 321. However, *šiphâ* is unattested outside biblical Hebrew. See Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 406.

simultaneously to express deference as well. Ruth pleads to Boaz, “I am Ruth, your *’āmā*; spread your skirt over your *’āmā*, for you are next of kin.” Boaz accepts this request and later takes her as his wife. The marital implications behind this phrase are quite obvious.<sup>22)</sup> Still, this does not mean that only *’āmā* is used in a marital setting. After all, in Ruth 2:13 *šiphā* is used in a similar circumstance: “for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your *šiphā*, though I am not one of your maids (*šiphōt*).”

The disparity between Genesis and other texts is equally noticeable in their use in labor-oriented settings. In Genesis, *’āmā* is used only in non-labor settings. This finding may appear to support the scholarly observation that *’āmā* is more frequently used in contexts that stress the female slave’s femininity.<sup>23)</sup> Yet one cannot deduce from this evidence that *’āmā* possesses a more feminine or reproductive character than *šiphā*, since that pattern appears only within limited passages in Genesis. Outside Genesis, *’āmā* and *šiphā* are used synonymously in this regard, and one can hardly discern any difference between the two in terms of their usage in the labor setting.

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22) One can make a case that we find a similar case in 1 Kgs 1:13. Even the wife of the king David, Bathsheba, uses *’āmā* in a means of deference. “Go in at once to King David, and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne?’ Why then is Adonijah king?’” Although the use of *’āmā* here does not appear to suggest a marital connotation, one can argue that *’āmā* is deliberately used instead of *šiphā* to emphasize her marital state with him.

23) Riesener, *Der Stamm ‘bd im Alten Testament*.

One passage merits special attention, though. In 1 Sam 25:41, we read that “she [Abigail] … said, ‘Behold, your *'āmā* is a *šiphâ* to wash the feet of the servant of my lord (*'abdē 'ādōnī*).’” Abigail said this to the messengers of David, who were proposing marriage on David’s behalf. Abigail uses both *'āmā* and *šiphâ* to describe herself, but *šiphâ* appears to have a stronger sense of servitude.<sup>24)</sup> Still, it is not entirely clear that the choice of terms here is deliberate. In this literary unit that explains how Abigail became David’s wife, she calls herself both *'āmā* and *šiphâ*, but one finds no other indication that *šiphâ* entails a stronger sense of the capacity to work. In 1 Sam 25:27, for instance, there is no such semantic distinction: “And now let this present that your *šiphâ* has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your *'āmā*.” Thus, the impression that *šiphâ* has a stronger connotation of servitude is most likely accidental.

## 2) Ownership type

	Overall			Outside Genesis			In Genesis		
	F-O	M-O	PRP	F-O	M-O	PRP	F-O	M-O	PRP
<i>šiphâ</i>	18	6	15	3	0	10	15	6	5
<i>'āmā</i>	6	5	18	2	3	18	4	2	0

\*F-O = female owner (mistress); M-O = male owner (master); PRP = property.

As noted above, Reuter proposed that the distinction between *'āmā* and *šiphâ* lies in the nature of the slave’s relation to the

24) See Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 409.

owner.<sup>25)</sup> That is, *šiphâ* is used in relation to her mistress, whereas *'āmâ* is used in relation to her master or in the context of the entire household. It is true that *šiphâ* is used in most cases in relation to the slave's mistress. It appears that a *šiphâ* was often given to a bride as part of her dowry (e.g., Gen 29:24, 29). Especially outside Genesis, *šiphâ* is never mentioned as belonging to a male owner. Therefore, Reuter's argument would seem to find some support. However, the table above shows that the situation is not so simple. Overall, both *šiphâ* and *'āmâ* are used in relation to either a male or female owner and are listed as part of the household property. In Genesis, both terms are used in relation to the mistress or master, and *šiphâ* is used with male figures as well. For example, Gen 29:24 states that "Laban gave his *šiphâ* Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her *šiphâ*." The same is said about Bilhah in Gen 29:29. Here Laban gives Zilpah and Bilhah to Leah and Rachel as part of their respective dowries. From then on, they belong to Leah and Rachel and naturally become part of Jacob's household property. Still, the text is clear that Zilpah and Bilhah belonged to Laban before they were given to his daughters.<sup>26)</sup>

The impression of disproportion between the two terms

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25) Reuter, "הַיָּפְתָּה", 408.

26) There are four other cases where *šiphâ* appears in relation to her master in Gen 32:23; 33:1, 2, 6. These occur when Jacob prepares his reunion with Esau and when his family and he finally approach to meet with him. In these passages, the aspect of ownership is not as highlighted, and thus some of the passages appear to use *šiphâ* as an indication of Jacob's property (especially 32:23). Still, the literary context informs that Zilpah and Bilhah belong to Jacob, subject to the order of Jacob not Leah and Rachel.

appears to be rooted in the fact that *šiphâ* is a more frequent choice of term in Genesis and that Genesis includes the surrogate motherhood narratives, which recurrently feature an otherwise rare setting in which a female slave is addressed in relation to her mistress. Written under the influence of a male-oriented culture, biblical literature rarely features a scene in which two female figures are at the center of the narrative. Thus, the observation that “the *šiphâ* always belongs to her mistress”<sup>27)</sup> should be limited to the surrogate motherhood narratives and must not be generalized.

### 3) Deference

	Overall		Outside Genesis		In Genesis	
	DEF	N/A	DEF	N/A	DEF	N/A
<i>šiphâ</i>	13	41	13	15	0	26
<i>'āmâ</i>	14	29	14	23	0	6

\*DEF = Deference.

When a woman talks to a male figure of a higher rank, she often presents herself as a servant.<sup>28)</sup> This is part of the “court style.”<sup>29)</sup> In biblical court narrative, even a queen, when addressing the king in the court, speaks with deference (e.g., Bathsheba in David’s court, 1 Kings 1).<sup>30)</sup> For this purpose, both

27) Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 407.

28) Cf. Bridge, “Female Slave vs Female Slave”, 18–21.

29) Irene Lande, *Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangssprache im Alten Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1949), 68–72, cited in Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 409.

30) One could argue that this incident is unique in that Bathsheba is approaching David with a difficult supplication to make, which may have required an unusually heightened gesture of humility. Then, one

*šiphâ* and *'āmâ* are used, as the above table demonstrates, and the two appear interchangeable. Even in a single literary unit, the two words are used together, and the shift of usage is so subtle that no clear distinction between the two designations is identifiable. The way in which Hannah presents herself before Eli is exemplary (1 Sam 1:11-18):

11 She made this vow: “O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your *'āmâ*, and remember me, and not forget your *'āmâ*, but will give to your *'āmâ* a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite.” … Eli observed her mouth … only her lips moved … Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?” … 15 But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled … 16 Do not regard your *'āmâ* as a worthless woman … 17 Then Eli answered, “Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.” 18 And she said, “Let your *šiphâ* find favor in your sight.”

Here, *'āmâ* is employed four times (vv. 11, 16) and *šiphâ* is used once (v. 18). When praying to YHWH, Hanna uses only *'āmâ* (three times). When addressing Eli, she uses *'āmâ* at first (v. 16) and then finishes with *šiphâ* (v. 18).<sup>31)</sup>

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cannot be entirely certain to what degree a queen's use of deference as a slave but the fact that it could be done cannot be denied.

31) One might point out that Hannah presents herself as *šiphâ* only after she has received Eli's approval, and that therefore *šiphâ* is the more submissive term, but given the limited evidence, it cannot be conclusive. See Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 409.

In 1 Sam 25:24 – 41, as briefly noted above, Abigail corresponds with David and his servants in a similar manner. There *'āmā* is used six times (twice in 25:24 and once each in 25:25, 28, 31, 41) and *šiphâ* twice (25:27, 41). Also, in 2 Sam 14:6 – 19, where a wise woman from Tekoa speaks to David regarding the matter of Absalom's return, *'āmā* and *šiphâ* are used interchangeably. One could perhaps contemplate the literary implications of the interchange of the two terms,<sup>32)</sup> but it is difficult to maintain any meaningful difference between them when they are used to express deference.

#### 4) Legal settings

	Overall		Outside Genesis		In Genesis	
	LG	N/A	LG	N/A	LG	N/A
<i>šiphâ</i>	1	57	1	31	0	26
<i>'āmā</i>	17	32	17	26	0	6

\*LG = Legal setting.

As scholars have long noted, *'āmā* is more frequently used in legal settings than *šiphâ*.<sup>33)</sup> This factor explains in part the disparity between Genesis and other books insofar as Genesis, where *šiphâ* features predominantly, is mainly composed of non-legal narratives. We also noted above that the use of *'āmā* in Genesis occurs in a particular section of the book (Genesis 20 – 21), and that this is also a non-legal setting. But one cannot

32) Cf. Mirquet, "Les titres 'shifkhah' et 'amah'".

33) Bridge, "Female Slave vs Female Slave", 10.

jump from this evidence to the conclusion that outside Genesis, *'āmā* is used exclusively in legal contexts. In fact, the legal use even of *'āmā* is relatively minor, as can be expected in view of the limited scope of legal materials in the Hebrew Bible. Even in colloquial settings, *'āmā* appears more frequently than *šiphâ*.<sup>34)</sup> A more correct way to characterize the data would be to highlight the lack of legal use of *šiphâ*,<sup>35)</sup> which appears just once in a legal context (Lev 19:20) throughout the Hebrew Bible.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Our analysis adds more weight to the recent studies that have underscored the difficulty of drawing a clear-cut distinction in meaning between *šiphâ* and *'āmā*. In most cases, they are used synonymously and interchangeably. There are some observable patterns, however—namely, the differences in usage between Genesis and other books and the paucity of *šiphâ* in legal settings. Whereas *'āmā* is used in both legal and non-legal material, *šiphâ* occurs almost exclusively in colloquial texts. There may be various ways of explaining these patterns. They could originate from the generic difference between the narrative material in Genesis and the legal material in the subsequent books of the Pentateuch. Perhaps there was a

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34) One must, of course, take into account that the deferential use reviewed above (13 times for *šiphâ* and 14 times for *'āmā*) are included in this statistic, but even without them, the legal use is not as predominant as one expects.

35) Reuter, “שִׁפְחָה”, 406.

regional or dialectic difference, or perhaps the difference is attributable to changing usage across time periods. In any case, it is hasty to point out the source-critical value of an alleged distinction between the two terms, let alone to use said distinction as an established criterion for source division. Whatever differences may have existed originally have been lost at the synchronic level of the present form of the text, as the two words are used interchangeably by the biblical narrators. This result reinforces the difficulty of uncovering the cultural reality behind the text of biblical passages, because at times the text itself has gone through stages of growth and alteration.

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## 구약성서의 ‘아마’와 ‘십하’

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이 논문은 구약성서에서 여종을 뜻하는 두 개의 단어, ‘아마’와 ‘십하’를 비교하고 그 상관관계를 조사한다. 자료비평 이후 학자들은 이 두 단어가 비제사장 계 자료(E와 J)를 구분하는 기준 중 하나로 사용해 왔다. 창세기 등에 기록된 옛 이야기 속에는 족장과 그의 본처, 그리고 여종 사이의 긴장감 넘치는 역동이 고스란히 남아 있다. 여종은 때로 ‘십하’라 불리기도 ‘아마’라 불리기도 한다. 자연히 이 두 단어에 대한 학자들의 연구는 둘 사이에 어떤 사회적 지위나 기능상 차이가 있는지 찾아내는 데 집중되어 왔다. 하지만 구약성서 본문에는 두 단어가 동의어로 사용되고 있다는 증거가 곳곳에서 관찰되어 왔다는 점에서 자료비평의 영향을 부인하기 어렵다. 그러나 두 저자가 둘 중 하나를 선호했다 해도 그것이 반드시 둘 사이에 의미적, 어원적, 기능적 차이가 있음을 의미하지 않는다. 또한 한 저자가 두 개의 단어를 동의어로 사용했다는 가능성도 배제할 수 없다. 언어학적 측면에서도, 본디 어원이 다른 두 단어도 시간이 지나면서 동의어로 기능하는 경우가 빈번하다. 통시적 의미의 변천과 공시적 의미 사용을 구분해야

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하는 이유이다. 본 연구는 제반 선입견을 배제한 상태에서 구약성서에 등장하는 ‘아마’와 ‘십하’의 용례를 기술적으로 분석하여 둘 사이에서 발견되는 유사성과 차이를 관찰하고, 그 결과 두 용어의 관계를 간단히 설명할 수 있는 하나의 기준은 존재하지 않음을 논증한다.

검색어

중

시녀

여중

아마

십하

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