

WHY HAVE YOU DECEIVED ME?
LOT'S DAUGHTERS IN GENESIS 19

Introduction

The literary episode of Sodom has always fascinated readers of the Bible and is well known to experts in biblical studies and scholars from other fields. Therefore, only a few premises need to be provided.

According to chapter 19 of the Book of Genesis, two angels arrive in Sodom in the evening. Meanwhile, Lot, Abraham's nephew, is sitting at the city's gate. He persuades them not to stay overnights in the city square but rather to spend the night at his house, where they eat and refresh. But before they could rest, the Sodomites threatened to humble them by raping.¹

The subsequent unfolding of the story turns out to be interesting for our purpose. The role of Lot as a householder prompts him to try rescuing his guests. In doing so, he offers to the enraged inhabitants to take his virgin daughters in replacement of the angels. The Sodomites strictly reject the exchange, and the angels take charge of the situation: just before God burns out the city, they urge Lot to escape from Sodom with his relatives. Among them, as stated in Gen 19:12, 14, his sons-in-law.

In the light of the biblical customs, a question arises: how could Lot have both virgin daughters and sons-in-law? This paper represents an attempt to answer the question.

First, it will be argued how the issue has been dealt with over the years in the story of the research and how the words and expressions employed in the narrative can create ambiguities in the meaning they convey. Then, an interpretation proposal will be provided and discussed.

Virgins or wives? Lot's daughters in context

According to the biblical roles of female characters, it sounds strange that a woman could be a virgin and get married at the same time. Indeed, although the Hebrew Bible does not explicitly state that a girl has to be a virgin before marriage, it is easily inferable from the broader context. Not considering all the parallels provided by the Ancient Mesopotamian literature,² a verse of the Pentateuch will result sufficient for supporting the idea.

Deut 22:15³ rules two parents' behaviour whose daughter has been accused by her husband of not being a virgin before the nuptial night. The parents are called to show the "evidence of her virginity" to the city's elders to avoid the woman's exposition to a stoning. The reference is clearly to the bloody sheets of the first night of marriage, which the parents probably conserved as a guarantee of truthfulness. For a girl who had to be a virgin until the nup-

¹ There is quite agreement among scholars in seeing the Sodomites' threat of raping the angels as means to humble them, not as a deliberate act of homosexuality. See T. RÖMER, *Homosexualität und die Bibel. Anmerkungen zu einem anachronistischen Diskurs*, in *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, n. 33 (2018), pp. 47-63.

² For a further discussion of the topic, see D.

LAUNDERVILLE, *Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 2010, pp. 254-256.

³ "Then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate".

tial night and Lot's daughters are said to be virgins in Gen 19:8, the presence in the narrative of Lot's sons-in-law sounds, if not unrealistic, at least weird. On the contrary, if Lot had sons-in-law, it should mean that his daughters were already married.

Both ancient and modern commentators have addressed this incongruence and have tried to fulfil it through different explanations.

Flavius Josephus – *Antiquitates Iudaicae* I, 202⁴ – tries to heal the discrepancy by supposing a pre-marriage relationship between Lot's daughters and their men. According to him, the two virgins were only betrothed. Rashi attempts another explanation. Based on the Midrash Bereshit Rabbah,⁵ in his commentary on Genesis, he clarifies that Lot had four daughters in the city, two betrothed virgins, and two already married. The former lived within his house; the latter dwelt with their husbands. He points out that the locution “לקחי בנתיו” referred to the sons-in-law at v. 14 as a present participle. According to him, it would be used to remark the sons-in-law's engagement to Lot's daughters, who would not yet be married.⁶ In agreement with Rashi, even Ibn Ezra suggests the same explanation to heal the incongruence.⁷

Although hermeneutics have significantly changed over the centuries and focus on different aspects of the text, modern commentators have continued to emphasise the inconsistency of the text.

Refraining from giving a univocal interpretation, Skinner highlights the difficulty in understanding the locution. Although he interprets the action as an event planned for the fu-

ture, he admits, with others, that it can also be referred to as the past. He does not discuss the issues of the daughters' virginity.⁸ Bruggemann⁹ and Rendsburg¹⁰ do not mention the sons-in-law in their commentaries on Genesis, only focusing on the scene of the getaway from Sodom. Despite not enlightening the contradiction, Westermann addresses the insertion and the subsequent elimination of these characters in the plot as a means to outline the impossibility for Lot's daughters to have offspring after they escape from the city. According to him, it “could be a preparation for vv. 30-38, where Lot's two daughters are without husbands”.¹¹ Therefore, he means their role in the sense of actual husbands of the two virgin daughters. Sarna focuses on a different detail, providing more accuracy to syntax and morphology. Dwelling on the usage of the present participle in the locution of v. 14, already addressed by Rashi as a crucial point, the scholar points out an ambiguous use of the verbal tense. Through a close reading of the text, he underlies that using an undefined verb in this context allows two different readings, for it can both address a past action (so that the daughters would be married) or a programmed action in the future (so that the daughters would only be betrothed).¹² In agreement with the Sarna, Wenham goes even further. According to the social construct that defines the concept of family, he argues that husbands were considered full family members. This would also clarify why the angels mention them along with other relatives of Lot in verse 12. Therefore, Wenham states that if in the story of Sodom, the sons-in-law were not already married to Lot's daughters, it is strange to see them

⁴ *Flavii Iosephi Opera edidit et apparatu critico instruxit Benedictus Niese*, Vol. I, Berolini 1887.

⁵ H. FREEDMAN and S. MAURICE, *Midrash Rabbah*, Soncino Press, London - New York 1983, 50:9.

⁶ RASHI, edited by M. ROSENBAUM and A.M. SILBERMANN, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtharoth and Rashi's Commentary*, 1929-1934, Gen 19:14.

⁷ A. WEISER (ed.), *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Torah*, I, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem 1977, Gen 19:14.

⁸ J.J. SKINNER, *A Critical and Exegetical Com-*

mentary on Genesis, Scribner, Pennsylvania State University 1925, pp. 307-308.

⁹ W. BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis*, John Knox Press, Atlanta 1982, pp. 163-164.

¹⁰ G. RENDSBURG, *The Redaction of Genesis*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 1986, pp. 30-52.

¹¹ C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12-36: a Commentary*, SPCK, London 1985, p. 303.

¹² S.N. SARNA, *Genesis = Be-reshit: the Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1989, p. 137.

mentioned along with other Lot's relatives. On the contrary, if they were married, the existence of four daughters must be considered since Lot would have had no authority to decide over the life of married women. They would have been left to perish with their husbands, and only the unmarried would have been saved.¹³

While Waltke takes up Wenham's cautious argument,¹⁴ Alter is not that prudent. He seems sure that Lot "had other daughters already married" and that the named virgins were still unmarried.¹⁵ He infers the information from the expression of an angel, who urges Lot to take the two daughters with him.¹⁶ Giuntoli prefers to understand the text so that the daughters are married yet but leaves the problem open. He states that the pericope "לקחי בנותיו" can be understood both as past and as future action. Nevertheless, he does not discuss the incongruence of being at the same time virgin and married.¹⁷

Removing ambiguities

Since an incongruence in the text has been pointed out, some focal points need to be discussed. In doing so, it will be detected how the text addresses 1. Lot's virgin daughters (בנות), 2. his sons-in-law (אשר לא ידעו איש), and 3. their reciprocal relation (לקחי בנותיו), to better understand whether the words leave opened questions about the daughters' virginity, or about the sons-in-law's role of husbands.

1. בנות אשר לא ידעו איש (v. 8)

It has been said that Sodom's inhabitants surround the house and threaten the angels to harass them sexually. Because of that, Lot tries to protect his guests by proposing an exchange. He addresses the inhabitants using the appellation of brothers and then offers to take his virgin daughters in place of the angels.

The expression generally used in the Hebrew Bible to point out the idea of virginity is בתולה, within its respective adjective בתולים. According to the BDB, it is shaped on the triradical root בתל, which means "to separate". בתולים would indicate the status of virginity and, more concretely, the tokens of virginity; בתולה would be referred to as "one living apart in her father's house as a virgin" or "a virgin damsel".¹⁸

Nevertheless, according to the occurrences of this root, it is well known that it can have the meaning of "woman in marriageable age"¹⁹ or address a "virgo intacta".²⁰ Clines points out both purposes, remarking that it only sometimes makes explicit reference to virginity.²¹

The ThDOT states that just once in the Old Testament (Joel 1:8), it certainly does not mean "virgin". All the other occurrences should be interpreted in individual cases, considering the broader context. In effect, the viewpoint can both be anatomical and sociological.²²

However, the reference to virginity cannot be misunderstood in Gen 19 since Lot describes his daughters by employing the expres-

¹³ G.J. WENHAM, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Books, Dallas 1994, p. 57.

¹⁴ B.K. WALTKE and C.J. FREDRICKS, *Genesis: a Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2001, p. 874.

¹⁵ R. ALTER, *Genesis*, W.W. Norton, New York 1996, p. 87.

¹⁶ Gen 19:15 "As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, <Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city>".

¹⁷ F. GIUNTOLI, *Genesi 11,27-50,26: introduzione, traduzione e commento*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2013, p. 69.

¹⁸ F. BROWN *et al.*, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs*

Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody 1996, pp. 143-144.

¹⁹ For instance, cf. Isa 23:4; Isa 62:5; Jer 51:22, where it is used in contraposition to בחור, "young man".

²⁰ For instance, cf. Deut 22:19, 23, 28.

²¹ D.J.A. CLINES, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. II, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1995, pp. 289-290.

²² G.J. BOTTERWECK, H. RINGGREN, H.-J. FABRY (eds.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (Mich.) 1974, pp. 340-343.

sion “אשר לא ידעו איש”. The locution, on the one hand, recalls the sexual connotation of the verb ידע, which occurs yet at Gen 19:5.²³ On the other hand, it avoids every ambiguity that the usage of בתולה would have created. Indeed, it appears in the Hebrew Bible only two other times (Gen 24:16; Jdgs 21:12), functioning as explanatory periphrasis of בתולה.²⁴ This usage is also attested in legal texts of Ancient Mesopotamia.²⁵

2. חתניו (v. 14)

The word חתן occurs in Gen 19, once in verse 12, and twice in verse 14. The first occurrence appears in a list of possible Lot’s relatives provided by the angels. Since they were unaware of their presence in the city, the statement may represent a supposition to urge the escape. The other two occurrences appear in the plural form of the substantive. They are provided with masculine suffix pronouns in the third person and used by the narrator to address Lot’s two sons-in-law.

As shown, both ancient and modern commentators have supposed that Lot’s virgin daughters were not yet married to the men in question but only engaged to them. This assumption would lead to understanding the indication

given by the narrator as merely approximative. Therefore, if the men were not yet married to Lot’s daughters, they were not even identifiable under the definition of חתנים, which in this context cannot be understood otherwise than “husbands of married daughters”.

The term חתן, vocalised by a qamatz under the ḥeth and a pataḥ under the *taw*, occurs only nineteen times in the Hebrew Bible²⁶ and is always referred to men who have married a woman. It can convey the meaning of husband²⁷ or son-in-law,²⁸ and the second meaning is always attested in narrative pericopes. On the contrary, no occurrence is found where the term addresses a betrothed man. Hence, linguistic support cannot be brought to lend credence to this meaning.

3. לקחי בנתי (v. 14)

The verb לקח, when employed to address a relationship between men and women, has the meaning of “to marry”. The locution would be crucial to understanding the nature of the bond between Lot’s daughters and their men. As noted, using the verb in the present participle makes the expression ambiguous. According to the syntax of Biblical Hebrew, a participle is an atempo-

²³ R. HENDEL, *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods*, Cambridge University Press, Berkeley 2010, pp. 77-90.

²⁴ It is noteworthy that in both texts, the expression is framed in the context of a woman bargaining between her father and a counterpart. According to Gen 24, it is the virgin Rebecca who, at God’s command, is to be taken from her father’s house to be given in marriage to Isaac. Likewise, in Jdgs 21, Jephthah’s daughter is taken away from her father for a vow to Yahweh to defeat the Ammonites.

²⁵ For the occurrence in the Laws of Hammurabi, see M. ROTH, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Writings from the Ancient World 6, Atlanta 1995, p. 106. For the occurrence in the Sumerian sources, see S. LAFONT, *Femmes, droit et justice dans l’antiquité orientale au Proche-Orient ancien*, in *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, n. 165 (1999), Universitaires & Vandenhoeck - Ruprecht, Freiburg - Göttingen, p. 247.

²⁶ S. MANDELKERN, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae*, Vol 2, Schock-

en Publishing House Ltd, Jerusalem – Tel Aviv 1964, p. 434.

²⁷ In Ex 4:25, 26, it is Zipporah who defines Moses her חתן; in Ps 19:6 חתן is the man who leaves the nuptial chamber; in Isa 61:10, Isa 62:5, Jer 7:34, Jer 16:9, Jer 25:10, Jer 33:11, and in Joel 2:16 the term חתן is used with the word כלה, which addresses a young wife actually married.

²⁸ In Jdgs 15:6, Samson is pointed out as the חתן of his father’s wife; in Jdgs 19:5, the narrator employs the term to address a father who speaks to his daughter’s husband; in 1Sam 18:18, David states that he would become Saul’s חתן if he married his daughter; 1Sam 22:14 David has married Saul’s daughter and is defined the חתן of the king; 2 Kgs 8:27 makes difficulty since it is not clarified by the text which is Achaziah’s wife. It is only said that he was חתן to the house of Achab; in Neh 6:18, Tobiah is said to be shecaniah’s חתן. The word is used in the lexical context regarding marriage, and the same observation can be applied to Neh 13:28.

ral form. Set in the sequence subject-participle (חתנין לקחי), it can be understood in all the three temporal spheres, present, future, and past.²⁹

The present tense shows “an action as actually going on at the moment of speaking”.³⁰ Since, in this case, the circumstances are not those of a marriage, it is obvious to exclude the rendering of the expression with the present tense.

Using the present participle in the future sphere always represents an action “already in progress”,³¹ or imminent.³² Suppose the verb לקח, used as a predicative participle 33, means “to marry”. In that case, the previous statement makes the tense not wholly compatible with the narrative, for no marriage is already begun or is said to be forthcoming. Furthermore, the addressing to an event which is going to happen is often better clarified by the usage of emphatic markers to convey the idea of the ingressive aspect of the action, like the particle הנה or the verb היה.³³

It remains only to discuss the interpretation of the participle in the sphere of the past. This kind of participle is rarely atemporal.

Based on the context, it mainly represents the current action's background.³⁴

Following Muraoka, it expresses a frequentative or durative aspect of the verb.³⁵ In this case, there is no sense in the idea of “keeping to marry” or “keeping to be married”; the events do not allow to talk about a frequentative meaning of the verb לקח. On the contrary, the durative aspect is to be considered since it is common in the Hebrew Bible. It points out an action of the past that continues to affect the present.³⁶ This interpretation seems to fit the expression under consideration, as long as a past marriage keeps the couple reciprocally husband and wife in the present. Moreover, it would also be supported by Greek and Aramaic translations.

While the Peshitta³⁷ and Targum Onkelos³⁸ report the expression by employing a present participle corresponding to the Hebrew form, the LXX and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan provide a more punctual translation. The LXX translates לקחי through a perfect participle,³⁹ which is a resultative form addressing the actual status of the sons-in-law: the condition of being

²⁹ For a detailed discussion on the topic, see P. JOÜON and T. MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Vol. 2, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 1991, pp. 409-418; J. JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, Simor Ltd, Jerusalem 2012, pp. 239-247. B.T. ARNOLD and J.H. CHOI, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge - New York, 2018, pp. 90-95.

³⁰ JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 239.

³¹ JOÜON and MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 410; ARNOLD and CHOI, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, cit., p. 94.

³² JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 241.

³³ See JOÜON and MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 410; ARNOLD and CHOI, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, cit., p. 92; Bill only reports examples without discussing the question. Otherwise, Joosten discusses this kind of participles separately, under the section which considers the sequence participle-subject. According to Joosten, this sequence conveys the meaning of the actual present. See JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., pp. 250-260.

³⁴ Joosten speaks of foregrounded processes, which are normally introduced by הנה. Therefore,

the case in question should be considered under the section which he calls “attendant circumstance in narrative”. See JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., pp. 245-247.

³⁵ JOÜON and MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 411. Arnold only points out the durative aspect of the past tense. See ARNOLD and CHOI, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, cit., p. 93.

³⁶ According to Muraoka, examples of the present participle expressing a durative action in the past are Gen 19:1, 25:26, Ex 20:18, Jdgs 13:9, 1Kgs 1:5, and 2Chr 22:9. See JOÜON and MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., pp. 410-411.

³⁷ *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1977, Gen 19:14.

³⁸ A. SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic: Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, E.J. Brill, Leiden - New York 1992, p. 26: ונפק לוֹט וּמְלִיל עִם חַתְנוּהוּי נִסְבֵי בְנֵי־הַתְּיָה וְאִמְרָ קוֹמוּ פּוֹקוּ מִן אֶתְרָא הַדִּין אַרְי מַחְבִּיל יוּי יֵת קִרְתָּא וְהוּהּ כַּמְחֵאִךְ בַּעֲיֵנִי חַתְנוּהוּי

³⁹ J.W. WEVERS, *Septuaginta*, Vol. 1, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1974, Gen 19:14: ἐξῆλθεν δὲ Λωτ καὶ ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς γαμβροὺς αὐτοῦ τοὺς εἰληφότας τὰς θυγατέρας αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν Ἄναστητε καὶ ἐξέλθατε ἐκ τοῦ τόπου τούτου, ὅτι ἐκτρίβει κύριος τὴν πόλιν. ἔδοξεν δὲ γελοιάζειν ἐναντίον τῶν γαμβρῶν αὐτοῦ.

married. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan prefers using a peal, a state of the past which follows a relative clause.⁴⁰

If the considerations made so far can be valid, the past tense meaning, which ancient translators also quote, seems to fit the most to the general understanding of the text.

Omnis homo mendax

Since terminological ambiguities have been discussed, the following arguments will be based on the assumption that expressions employed in the text address two virgin daughters and two married men in the role of Lot's sons-in-law.

Commentators have provided several explanations to give the text coherence. Among them, the existence of four daughters seems to be the only plausible.⁴¹ It does not contrast grammar and does not create inconsistency in the plot unfolding. In agreement with the Midrash Rabbah, Rashi and Ibn Ezra, this interpretation has been sustained by other modern commentators.⁴² They use the argument to explain why the angels urge Lot to escape from Sodom and then specify in verse 19:15 to take the two daughters *who are there* at that moment. According to them, the clarification would suggest that there would be other daughters elsewhere.

A further proposal can be considered.

For virginity is a valuable characteristic in the Hebrew Bible,⁴³ which also has economic relevance,⁴⁴ Lot may have mentioned it to make

the exchange with the angels fairer.⁴⁵ He sets up his speech to the people of Sodom using a cooperative tone so that his proposal will be accepted. He addresses his fellow citizens as "brothers",⁴⁶ appealing to their sense of belonging to the same community.⁴⁷ Furthermore, talking to the Sodomites, the narrator makes him using the particle ׀. When this particle follows an imperative, it is addressed by scholars to remark the idea of a personal favour.⁴⁸

If Lot could take advantage of his daughter's virginity, why not think he was lying to make the object of the trade more desirably instead of supposing the existence of four daughters?

Some arguments can support this hypothesis.

First, consider *who* claims *what* is needed to establish a truthfulness scale. On the one hand, the narrator gives us information about the son-in-law. According to him or her, they are married to Lot's daughters. On the other hand, Lot himself notifies us about women's virginity. The first consideration concerns the point of view established by the cooperation of the narrator and the reader. Its reliability is based on the omniscience of who is telling the story. The second consideration represents the relationship between the characters and the reader.⁴⁹

The privileged perspective of the narrator contrasts with that of the characters. According to Sternberg:

Where the general model of omniscience in literature dispenses with one of the basic perspectives

⁴⁰ E.G. CLARKE, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance*, Ktav Pub. House, Hoboken 1984, Gen 19:14: ונפק לוט ומליל עם ונתנו דנסיבו ברתו ואמר קומו פוקו מן אתרא הדין ארום מחבל ית קרתא והוה פתגמא כתימאה כגבר מגחך בעיני חתנוי.

⁴¹ See notes 4, 5, and 6.

⁴² See notes 11, 12, and 13.

⁴³ According to Lev 21:13-14, the Levites can marry only virgin women.

⁴⁴ Ex 22:15; Deut 22:13-29.

⁴⁵ A.M. TAPP, *An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19.1-11, Judges 11.30-39, and 19.22-26*, in M. BAL, *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, The Almond Press, Sheffield 1989, pp. 157-174.

⁴⁶ Gen 19:7.

⁴⁷ TAPP, *An Ideology of Expendability*, cit., p. 161.

⁴⁸ JOOSTEN, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew*, cit., p. 122. Based on Joosten, even Dallaire points out the "speaker-centred nature of the request, highlighting the desire for a personal favor". See H. DALLAIRE, *The Syntax of Volitives in Biblical Hebrew and Amarna Canaanite Prose*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 2014, p. 54.

⁴⁹ Three relationships can be outlined in the biblical narrative: the relationship between narrator and characters, narrator and reader, and between reader and characters. See M. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1987, pp. 129-131.

by virtually equating the author with the narrator, the Bible introduces a new perspective by dissociating God from the characters and aligning him with the narrator.⁵⁰

On the contrary, the characters are the story's actors and cannot have a global knowledge of the unfolding events. Instead, their awareness is limited, as well as the information they provide to the reader through direct speech. The narrator is, therefore, more reliable than the characters unless he intentionally decides to lie to the reader.

In this light, the information provided by the narrator about the marital relationship between Lot's daughters and their men has a high degree of reliability. The same cannot be said about Lot's statement regarding his daughters' virginity.

Lot's intentionality in creating a sort of collaboration with Sodom's inhabitants has al-

ready been pointed out. This aptitude to take advantage of the situation, pertinent to Lot's previous behaviours,⁵¹ fits, in fact, the definition of lies as intentional deceptions.

Aiming to persuade someone constitutes the premise of some kinds of lies. Intentionality and premeditation are strictly involved in consciously altering the truth.⁵²

Might Lot have intentionally premeditated to lie to the Sodomites to persuade them to accept his proposal? Nothing in history prevents one from this idea. Therefore, it is meaningful in this context the study of Assis concerning the usage of structures in the Hebrew Bible.⁵³

Based on previous studies about structuralism in the Bible,⁵⁴ the scholar agrees to see the pivotal section of the concentric structures as the focal point of a climax. These concentric structures can be conceived as a chiasm (e.g. ABCB'A¹) or parallelism (e.g. ABCA'B¹), and the centre would be the point where the nar-

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 131.

⁵¹ Cf. Gen 13:8-12.

⁵² T.D. FEEHAN, *The Intent to Deceive*, in «The Journal of Philosophy» vol. 74, n. 3 (1977), pp. 143-159.

⁵³ E. ASSIS, *Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization*, in *Prooftexts*, vol. 22, n. 3, pp. 273-304.

⁵⁴ J. JEBB, *Sacred Literature*, London, 1820; T. BOYS, *Tactica Sacra: An Attempt to Develop, and Exhibit to the Eye by Tabular Arrangements a General Rule of Composition Prevailing in the Holy Scriptures*, London 1824; T. BOYS, *Key to the Book of Psalms: Being a Tabular Arrangement, by which the Psalms Are Exhibited to the Eye according to a General Rule of Composition Prevailing in the Holy Scriptures*, London 1825; J. FORBES, *The Symmetrical Structure of Scripture, or the Principles of Scripture Parallelism Exemplified in an Analysis of the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and Other Passages of the Sacred Writings*, Edinburgh 1854; J. FORBES, *Studies on the Book of Psalms: The Structural Connection of the Book of Psalms, Both in Single Psalms and in the Psalms as an Organic Whole*, Edinburgh 1888; J. FORBES, *Analytical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Tracing the Train of Thought by the Aid of Parallelism*, Edinburgh 1868; N.W. LUND, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1942; N.W.

LUND, *The Presence of Chiasmus in the Old Testament*, in «American Journal for Semitic Languages» n. 46 (1929-30), pp. 104-26; N.W. LUND, *Chiasmus in the Psalms*, in «American Journal for Semitic Language» n. 49 (1932-33), pp. 281-312. J.R. LUNDBOM, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 1997; P. TRIBLE, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, Fortress, Minneapolis 1994; A.R. CERESCO, O.S.F.S., *A Rhetorical Analysis of David's "Boast" (1 Samuel 17:34-37): Some Reflections on Method*, in «Catholic Biblical Quarterly» Vol. 47, No. 1 (January 1985), pp. 58-74; I.M. KIKAWADA, *The Shape of Genesis 11:1-9*, in J.J. JACKSON and M. KESSLER (eds.), *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, Pickwick 1974, pp. 18-32; G. RIDOUD, *The Rape of Tamar: A Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Sam 31:1-22*, in JACKSON and KESSLER (eds.), *Rhetorical Criticism*, cit., pp. 75-84; M. BUTTERWORTH, *Structure and the Book of Zachariah*, in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament sup 130*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1992; J. WELCH (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, Gersenberg Verlag, Hildesheim 1981; A. DI MARCO, *Der Chiasmus in der Bibel: Ein Beitrag zur strukturellen Stilistik*, in «Linguistica Biblica» n. 36 (1975), pp. 21-97; 37 (1976), pp. 31-68; J.W. WELCH and D.B. MC KINLA (eds.), *Chiasmus Bibliography*, Resarch Press, Provo 1999.

rator addresses the prominence of a relevant idea.⁵⁵ But Assis goes even further. According to him, concentric structures set in chiasmic form would be used to express the intention and the willfulness to act. He provides several examples of the presence of concentric chiasmic structure as a rhetorical device to communicate intent and premeditation;

This structure was applied when the author wanted to present the deeds or the character discourse as deliberate and premeditated. Chiasmus appears especially where one would otherwise re-

gard the character's actions or discourse as spontaneous or unaccounted for. In other cases, words of advice are formed chiasmically to cast the adviser's idea in a premeditated and convincing manner.⁵⁶

As already clarified, intention and premeditation are concepts related to deception and lies. So while it is true that Lot lied to the inhabitants of Sodom, he also intentionally premeditated what to say to persuade them. Because of that, it is noteworthy to notify the presence of a concentric structure organised in chiasm for verses 4-11 of Gen 19.

Section	Key-words	Theme	Verses
A	the men both young and old	All the inhabitants of Sodom surround Lot's house.	4. טרם ישכבו ואנשי העיר אנשי סדם נסבו על-הבית מנער ועד-זקן כלהעם מקצה:
B	Lot The men Closing the door To be injurious	Sodom's inhabitants want to act injuriously against the angels and Lot gets out the house closing the door behind him.	5. ויקראו אל-לוט ויאמרו לו איה האנשים אשר-באו אליך הלילה הוציאם אלינו ונדעה אתם: 6. ויצא אלהם לוט הפתחה והדלת סגר אחרייו: 7. ויאמר אל-נא אחי תרעו:
C	Who have not known any man	Intentionality and premeditation.	8. הנה-נא לי שתי בנות אשר לא-ידעו איש אוציא-הנא אתהן אליכם ועשו להן כטוב בעיניכם רק לאנשים האל אל-תעשו דבר כי-על-כן באו בצל קרתי:
B ¹	To be injurious Lot The men Closing the door	Sodom's inhabitants want to act injuriously against Lot and the angels gets Lot into the house closing the door behind them.	9. ויאמרו גש-הלאה ויאמרו האחד בא-לגור וישפט שפוט עתה נרע לך מהם ויפצרו באיש בלוט מאד ויגשו לשבר הדלת: 10. וישלחו האנשים את-ידם ויביאו את-לוט אליהם הביתה ואת-הדלת סגרו:
A ¹	the men both small and great	All the inhabitants of Sodom who have surrounded Lot's house get blinded.	11. את-האנשים אשר-פתח הבית הכו בסנורים מקטן ועד-גדול וילאו למצא הפתח:

⁵⁵ LUND, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, cit., pp. 40-47; G.P. RIDOT, *Prose Compositional Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9-20, 1 Kings 1-2)*, University of California press, Berkeley 1971, p. 49; WELCH (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, cit., p. 10; Y.T. RADDAY, *Chiasmus in the Hebrew Biblical Narrative*, in WELCH (ed.), *Chiasmus in An-*

tiquity, cit., p. 51; J. BRECK, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1994, pp. 17-19.

⁵⁶ ASSIS, *Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative*, cit., p. 275.

Sections A-A¹ and B-B¹ correspond thematically through the repetition of meaningful keywords. The centre of the structure, section C, functions as the pivotal point, also representing the focal topic: Lot's speech to the Sodomites and the offering of his daughters.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to propose a new perspective on the interpretation of incongruence in the text of Gen 19.

Although it cannot be proved whether Lot was lying in guaranteeing his daughter's virginity or not, it seems at least possible to value this hypothesis and cast some doubt on the truthfulness of Lot's statement.

Supposing Lot has four daughters can undoubtedly be an explanation, as many commentators have suggested. But nothing forbids us to think that Lot lied about his daughters' virginity, trying to trick the Sodomites out of self-interest to protect his guests. If such an interpretation is accepted, two other issues can arise.

On the one hand, the act of lying would add a negative nuance to the character of Lot himself. In addition to being greedy, he would also be mendacious and deceptive, which would guarantee one more reason for his tragic end, according to the perspective of divine justice. On the other hand, it would empathise the shift of the role of women from mere innocent victims to uninhibited sinners. According to Gen 19:30-38, Lot's daughters sin against God by having sexual intercourse with their father to secure offspring. If the view that the two daughters were not virgins is accurate, their guilt in being pregnant with Lot would be compounded. They would not only be guilty of incest but also of adultery.

Indeed, by a global overview, supposing the presence of devices and adultery in the narrative of Sodom would not even sound that weird. Sodom is the city of iniquity and sin and represents both the fruitful field of greed and the dry ground of sterility. In the rest of the Bible, it becomes the icon of bribery, mentioned by prophets to lash out at the corruption of the rotten Jerusalem.⁵⁷ In such a place, devices, lying, and adultery are not only possible but also expected.

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SUMMARY

The episode of Gen 19 in the Hebrew Bible has captured the attention of both ancient and modern commentators. This paper suggests a new argument to heal an incongruence in the story plot. On the one hand, the text states that Lot has two virgin daughters. On the other hand, he is also said to have sons-in-law. In light of the biblical customs, how could Lot have both virgin daughters and sons-in-law? The following paragraphs represent an attempt to answer.

KEYWORDS: Lot; Virgin daughters; Premeditation.

⁵⁷ Cf., for instance, Isa 1:7, 9, or Ezek 16:46.

