“All Those Going Out of the Gate of His City”:
Have the Translations Got It Yet?

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The phrase נַפְלֵי תָּאָבָה עַל רֵעֹי (Gen 34:24a, b) is part of the narrator’s summary of the Shechemites’ response to the circumcision proposal. The lexical and semantic evidence supports a military collocation for the phrase. Moreover, the language surrounding Abraham’s transaction at the city gate with Ephron (Gen 23:10b, 18b) is shown to be an inadequate semantic parallel, depending more on culture and architecture. This article argues that the repetition of the phrase in the same verse (34:24a, b) reflects the narrator’s rhetorical skill that “humanizes” a catastrophe, underscoring its distributive and irreversible state. By arguing more for “elders” or “citizens,” the translations have missed the narrator’s association of the circumcised group with a war idiom.

Key Words: versions, circumcision, collocation, rhetorical, translation, city gate

INTRODUCTION

Genesis 34:24 employs the cryptic Hebrew phrase נַפְלֵי תָּאָבָה עַל רֵעֹי, “all those going out of the gate of his city” (24a, b).1 Though helpful analysis has been done on aspects of the phrase,2 it remains plagued by semantic

1. In some English translations, נַפְלֵי תָּאָבָה עַל רֵעֹי is entirely omitted from the second cola (cf. CEV, NIV, TNIV, NLT1/2) or rephrased entirely (DOLAY, JB, NAB, CEV, NET).
uncertainty, on the one hand, and rhetorical ambiguity within the pericope, on the other. While the function of the city gate for the adjudication of legal matters is well established, this understanding has not adequately explained the significance of the Gen 34:24 phrase. Following the Masoretic accents, the MT of v. 24 reads:

\[
\text{שדרות אר דחר וראכש בור} \\
\text{כלי ראיי רעש וריע} \\
\text{וּמִּלְּכָּל הַכֹּֽהַן} \\
\text{כָּל דרוּפ שְׁמַיִּים}
\]

So they listened to Hamor and Shechem his son, all those going out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all those going out of the gate of his city.

The difficulty of the Hebrew phrase becomes evident in a sampling of English translations that reflect obvious uncertainty: “all the responsible men” (v. 24a, Berekley), “every able-bodied man in the community” (v. 24b, NAB), “all who went out of the gate of his town” (v. 24a, JPS), “all the able-bodied men” (v. 24a, NEB), “all the men in the town council” (NLT), “all the citizens of the town” (v. 24a, JB), “Every grown man” (CEV), and “Every male who assembled at the city gate” (v. 24b, NET).

The phrase itself—네요 רעש וריע (= “those going out of the gate”)? Second, what exactly is the referent of the 3ms suffix, that is, רעש וריע (= “his [city]”)? Third, what significance can be drawn from this phrase conspicuously used twice in the same verse?


4. Author’s translation for the sake of illustration. Similarly: KJV, RSV, NASB, and ESV, for 34:24b, b.b.

5. The phrase “in the town council” (NLT, 2004) was added to the earlier: “all the men” (NLT, 1996).

6. Noting “the town” (24a, JB) and “the city gate” (24a, NET), the referent does not find agreement among translations or, as we will see, key versions.

7. The Samaritan Pentateuch and essentially the Palestinian Targum from the Cairo Genizah (C 3) follow the MT (i.e., 24b, b.b), but the LXX omits the repeated colon of 24b, rewording 24b as καὶ περιτέμνοντο τὴν σόρον τῆς ἀκοβοσίας αὐτῶν, πᾶς δὲ γένος, “and they were
We will attempt to answer these questions with a reevaluation of some interpretive ideas new and old. We will conclude with a fresh translation, noting key implications. Through an analysis of some ancient versions and co-textual collocations, I argue that the narrator identifies the circumcised Shechemite men through a military collocation.

**ESTABLISHING WORDS**

As a verb, נָאָיָהּ is widely attested, allowing for a variety of meanings. Beginning with its 5 occurrences in the story surrounding the Shechemite city, along with the 79 other uses in Genesis alone, we can verify a basic intransitive meaning of “going forth.” In Gen 34:24, נָאָיָהּ functions as an active participle that can omit the usual (נָא) preposition, taking, instead, an accusative of place, or that can use the construct state to specify a location. The standard force of the construction renders a dislocative, separative, or ingressive significance. Further investigation reveals numerous occurrences of נָאָיָהּ in overt battle imagery, essentially “to march into/to battle,” a use occurring more than 120 times. For example, a city can go out a thousand strong (נָאָיָהּ הַמּוֹלֵבָא, Amos 5:3), a king can lead out his army circumcised in the flesh of their foreskin, every male” (see a similar plus to the MT in Gen 17:14, also concerning circumcision). Not surprisingly, the Old Latin (OL) follows the LXX omission, merely reading: “adsensi sunt omnes circumcises cunctis maribus” for v. 24 (similarly, DOLXX, 1609).


10. HALOT 2:425.4.c; cf. BDB 422.1.a; DCH 4:254.1; H. D. Preuss, "נָאָיָהּ," TDOT 6:226–27. For Mishnaic uses, see: m. Šeqal. 6:3; m. B. Mešia 5:7; m. Mid. 2:6.

11. Employed especially with personal subjects (Exod 9:29, 33; Num 35:26; Job 31:34).

12. GKC §116b; Gibson, 134. I take this active participle (נָאָיָהּ) as a substantive with the force of the idiom bordering on occupation. See נָאָיָהּ and נָאָיָהּ for other examples of intransitive verbs of this construction, and IBHS §27.2.b (Gen 9:10; 19:25; 23:10; 18; 46:26; Exod 1:5, Judg 1:19; 8:30). For its atypical distinctions as a 1-Waw verb, cf. Joüon §79g; van der Merwe (et al.) §118.4.


men can be outfitted for military service (יָצָא לַפֵּלֶשׁ, 1 Sam 8:20), and an army can be encamped against its foe (יָצָא מֵהַגָּדוֹל, Deut 23:10). Similarly, G. A. Cooke cites the inscription of a Phoenician king, Milk-yathon, and Idalion, son of Ba’alram: “I conquered those who came out [in battle] [לָיַשׁ מִן] and their allies.”

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Further illustration can be found in the DSS, where יָצָא is used more than 200 times. According to E. Jenni, this literature frequently employs יָצָא “as a technical military term.” We can begin with The Thanksgiving Scroll where we find: רַשָּׁע עַל מִזְרַח כָּל מַלְאַךְ, “and the everlasting gates shall send out weapons of war.” This connection between “gate(s)” and “going forth” becomes clearly evident in the War Scroll, which contains salient examples of militaristic “going forth” into (eschatological) battle:

Accordingly, when they wage war against the Kittim, [they] shall go out [to] carnage they shall muster for themselves spirited warriors to go out for the army when the gates of battle open for the men of the infantry to go out when the gates of battle are opened for them to advance to the formations

17. Cf. Judg 2:15, 4:14; 1 Sam 17:20; 2 Sam 5:24, 10:16, 11:1; Prov 30:27; 1 Chr 20:1; 2 Chr 1:10.
25. Col. II (IQM 2:7b–8).
“All Those Going Out of the Gate of His City”

As for the phrase יָרַע (ya’re), I agree with D. J. A. Clines, who finds in יָרַע a collocation (see 2 Sam 18:4, Jer 17:19). In other words, there is good evidence to see idiomatic usage here with יָרַע, a combination of semantic and linguistic elements. H. C. Brichto asserts, “The idiomatic verb יָשָׁע can connote a delegation to hold a parley or surrender or a full-force sortie.”

Though the construction in Gen 34:24 is essentially a hapax, the lexical and semantic evidence can support a military idiom.

Using similar language, Abraham sealed a transaction at the city gate with Ephron and the Hittite assembly (23:10b); but that text reads: כל באת השער, “even all who went in (באת) at the gate of his city” (cf. 18:7). 

30. Col. VIII (1QM 8:3–4a).
35. This ה introduces a substantive, similar to a hanging nominative, and functions emphatically, “even of all” (= nämlich; cf. GKC §143e, 116b; Jouon §1251; V. P. Hamilton, Genesis 17–50 [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 134). The LXX captures this emphatic nuance of v. 10b with καὶ ( = “even”; so J. W. Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis [SBLSCS 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993], 335–36). However, the later reference יָרַע (v. 18b) is part of the narrator’s summary of Abraham’s legal proceedings with the Hittites and so employs a distributive ה, “among” (so T & THK [v. 10b]; also SP). Contra A. Dillmann and many modern scholars who emend יָרַע (v. 10b), interpreting both prepositions with distributive force (Genesis Critically and Exegetically Expounded [trans. W. B. Stevenson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897], 2:154–55; so BHK, BHS).
18b). By contrast, 34:24 stipulates “all those going out (לך נאם) of the gate of his city.” Whereas לך נאם typically focuses on the point of departure, וְהָלַךְ focuses on the goal.36 Calling לך נאם “antipodal” to וְהָלַךְ, Brichto illustrates this distinction:

The verb בּוֹּפִי “to come (into), enter, penetrate” also means, as in English or French, “to arrive” in the sense of to succeed, to achieve. An antipodal verb is יָפַי “to go (out),” “to go free,” “to leave”; when this last sense is in regard to a city beleaguered or under threat of impending siege it may refer to a sally against the enemy, a surrender to him, or a strategic retreat.37

Assuming “elders,” then, for 23:10b and 18b38 may be possible, but לך נאם (“even all who go in,” 23:10b) could also refer to general citizenry.39 In the end, the force of the Hebrew expression in 23:10b and 18b is itself not adequately settled,40 with G. Evans casting doubt on E. A. Speiser’s use of Akkadian for his translation: “all who sat on the council of his town.”41 Moreover, the difficulty surrounding “elders” in 23:10b certainly does not demand this notion for 34:24, a rare expression with its own difficulties.

THE LXX AMID JEWISH INTERPRETATION

Both the difficult nature of this possible Hebrew military collocation and the mention (or gloss) of “trade” in verses prior (cf. 34:10, 21) apparently led some OG scribes of Vaticanus (B) to render לך נאם (“all those going out”) with the equally uncommon εἰς πόροιμοι (“all those that went in”).42 Throughout the LXX, εἰπορευόμαι only occurs 11× and means

37. Brichto, Toward a Grammar, 38, emphasis his.
38. Lit., וְהָלַךְ, “sons of Heth.” Many translations gloss the construct with the formal gentilic, “Hittites” (so nRSV, JPS; contra RV).
39. Writing 52 years before Speiser’s essay, S. R. Driver assumes the וְהָלַךְ/לך נאם terms to be synonymous but states, “Those who [go in/go out] at the city gate are the citizens, who have the right of entrance to the communal assembly” (The Book of Genesis with Introduction and Notes [London: Methuen, 1904], 226). However, Speiser overplays the idiom for this context, wanting to see those who “participate in the city counsel” (p. 265), translating, “all the able-bodied men in the community” (ibid.). H. G. Stigers seems to agree with Speiser’s rationale of participatory elders, translating “citizens” instead of “able-bodied” (A Commentary on Genesis [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 259). However, I would agree with G. Evans and V. P. Hamilton (see “‘Coming’ and ‘Going’ at the Gate,” 33; Genesis, 2:133–34; cf. The Jewish Study Bible [Tanakh], textnote: “all his fellow townsman” [p. 78]; similarly Dillmann [Genesis, 2:154–55]).
41. See G. Evans, “‘Coming’ and ‘Going’ at the City Gate: A Discussion of Prof. Speiser’s Paper,” BASOR 150 (1958): 28–33.
42. “All that/who went in” are the translations of L. C. L. Brenton and C. Thompson using Vaticanus (B) ms available to them (The Septuagint with Apocrypha [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 46; The Septuagint Bible: The Oldest Version of the Old Testament in the Translation of Charles Thomson [rev. ed.; Indian Hills, CO: Falcon’s Wing, 1954], 57). The LXX translations of Brenton and Thompson illustrate how the military expression of Gen 34:24 became obscured behind the “default” idiom of Gen 23:10 and 18. Clearly εἰπορευόμαι was available to
to “trade” or “sell” with a strong business denotation. Though ἐκπορευόμαι is relatively rare, its dual occurrence in Gen 34:10, 21 proves contextually significant. In Rahlfs’ edition, ἐκπορευόμαι more correctly signifies a “business/trading” notion than simply “to come/go in.” In all 11 occurrences, the idea of “trading” or “buying” is clear. Therefore, translations such as Brenton’s, for example, are misleading on this phrase. A key piece of the puzzle seems to be רָשִׁים (“travel freely, move about [as shepherds]”; cf. Gen 34:10, 21). When רָשִׁים is construed with גָּן (“land”) as the direct object, “moving about” rather than “trade” is emphasized. Its lexical history suggests that רָשִׁים took on distinctive “trading” connotations, particularly through later Jewish Aramaic (that is, “go around, engage in trade”). According to H. Seebass, “the verb has undergone an interpretation based on its participle” (that is, “merchant”) such that 34:10 in particular highlights Hamor’s invitation for Jacob’s family to engage in property acquisition and commercial dealings.

43. Cf. Gen 34:10, 21; 42:34; 2 Chr 1:16, 9–14; Prov 3:14; 31:14; Hos 12:2; Amos 8:6; Ezek 27:13, 21. For the NT, see 2 Pet 2:3, Jas 4:13.
45. With the possible exception of Hos 12:2.
46. In Gen 34:10, the MT reads רָשִׁים (“to pass through” [= “trade”]) for ἐκπορευόμαι; 34:21 (רָשִׁים); 34:24 (רָשִׁים); 2 Chr 1:16 (רָשִׁים, but in proximity to ἐκπορευόμαι, a cognate rendering of רָשִׁים in the same verse); 2 Chr 9:14 (רָשִׁים); Prov 3:14 (רָשִׁים); 31:14 (רָשִׁים); Hos 12:2 ( ciò, “to bring, carry”); Amos 8:6 (רָשִׁים, “to buy grain”); Ezek 27:13 (רָשִׁים, “to trade”); 27:21 (רָשִׁים). ἐκπορευόμαι is far more common, used 161x with 6 occurrences in Genesis: 2:10; 24:11, 13, 15, 18; 34:24. In every occurrence in Genesis, ἐκπορευόμαι is the LXX lexeme for רָשִׁים, never ἐκπορευόμαι, unless a text such as Brenton’s Vaticanus (B) is the only exception.
47. T. L. Thompson, The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 184. Thompson argues against C. H. Gordon (see below), siding with E. A. Speiser’s qualifications of רָשִׁים and the derivation of the nominal “trader.”
51. “Trading” is a crucial element of Hamor’s prior negotiations with Jacob, as is “settling” in the land (v. 10), key elements he fails to mention in subsequent negotiations with the men of the city (cf. v. 21). Moreover the topicalization word order of v. 23, מַעֲמָכֵה קֵינְוֹת לְכִי בְּהַמַּחְתָה מַעֲמָכֵה וַכֹּל עֹלוֹתֵיכֶם (“their livestock and their property and all their animals—will they not become ours?”) reveals Hamor’s actual emphasis, apparently necessary to convince the men to be circumcised (cf. v. 26a).
Semantic meanings aside for the moment, the divergence within the LXX tradition points to an interpretive struggle affecting the Hebrew military idiom (34:24). It is possible that Vaticanus (B) was dependant to some degree on a corrupted MS(s), and supplied \[\textit{ej\[m\]poreuvomai}\] where \[\textit{ej\[k\]poreuvomai}\] should have been, since \[\textit{ejporeuvomai}\] is used descriptively of Shechem amid economic negotiations twice in the same chapter. However, the shift of one letter portends an intentional change in v. 24 rather than graphic confusion, and all the more since \[\textit{ejkporeuvomai}\] rather than \[\textit{ejmporeuvomai}\] reflects the MT. It appears that Vaticanus (B) represents a harmonization to the closer \[\textit{ejmporeuvomai}\] of Gen 34:10 and 21, also carrying notions of “trade” via \[\textit{ajx\[v\]comai}\] overtones—ironically altering the connotation of v. 24 such that “all those that went in [for trade]” are actually the ones being circumcised. We submit that some LXX scribes defaulted to this interpretive idiom of trade that was thematically in keeping with the immediate story line of Gen 34 and the developments of Hebrew commercial language.

Corroborating this, Vaticanus (B) remains the most interpretive. Moreover, the LXX witness across the MSs represents an interpretation driven by a conflation of the Hebrew terms \[\textit{axy}\] and \[\textit{awb}\] (that is, “go out/come in”) for legal expressions found elsewhere (i.e., 23:10, 18). “The Three” (σ, α, θ) read \[\textit{ezh\[p\]goum\[a\]}\] (“go out”), and Alexandrinus (A) reads \[\textit{ekporeuvomai}\] (“go out”). In similar harmonizing fashion, the LXX for v. 24 inserts \[\textit{th\[n\]savrka\[a\]\[j\[k\]robust\[a\]\[j\[t\]\[Ω\[n\]}\], “[in] the flesh of their foreskin,” which reflects the translators’ awareness of covenant terminology used earlier in Genesis (cf. 17:14, 23, 24, 25).

This “business/trade” reading for v. 24 appears uniquely dominant within Jewish interpretation. According to the Midrash, those “going out

53. However, the earlier third-cen. Berlin Genesis Fragment (Pap. 911) contains the antonym: \[\textit{cisporeuvomai}\] (“come/go in”; cf. \[\textit{axy}\], LEH, 176; T. Muraoka, A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Chiefly of the Pentateuch and the Twelve Prophets [GELS] Louvain: Peters, 2002], 154–55). Believing Pap. 911 reflects a parent-text older than Origen’s Hexapla, H. A. Sanders states that \[\textit{ekporeuvomai}\] is the intended reading (reverse of 23:10), the change due to scribal error and cursive influence (The Minor Prophets in the Freer Collection and the Berlin Fragment of Genesis [New York: Macmillan, 1927], 253, 427). Strongly holding to errors stemming from the parent MS (pp. 244–46), Sanders states, “The ligatures in cursive cause errors both by reading two linked letters as one and by reading one letter as two,” citing Gen 23:10 as an example (p. 245).

54. For \[\textit{ezh\[p\]goum\[a\]}\] (“go out”), see \[\textit{axy}\]; LEH, 196; similarly, for \[\textit{ekporeuvomai}\] (“go out”), see \[\textit{axy}\], LEH, 186; “to emerge,” GELS, 167.
55. The translations of Tyndale (1530), the Great Bible (1539), and the Geneva Bible (1560) all include “children” among those circumcised in Gen 34:24, possibly because “every male” was killed (v. 25).
of the gate” were the peasant class conscripted into circumcision as they passed by, even forced submission. Not surprisingly, the Targums of Onqelos (Tg. Onq.) and Jonathan ben Uzziel (Tg. Ps.-J.) strongly reflect this postbiblical notion of “trade” in Gen 34. For 34:24, in particular, B. Grossfeld’s translation of TO reflects the notion of agency: “all who went out of the gate of the city circumcised all the males.” Thus, those going out of the gate (דנָה יִרְאָה) performed the circumcision of the males. Elsewhere, Jewish interpretive tradition shows general embarrassment over the sons’ ruse of circumcision only to slaughter the Shechemites later, which apparently accounts for its exclusion in various pseudepigraphical texts.

For his part, Josephus not only omits the brothers’ plunder of Shechem (vv. 27–29), he removes the demand of circumcision entirely (vv. 13–24). Because patriarchal circumcision was an “exclusive” rite, its pragmatic use in Gen 34 only underscores the deception of Jacob’s sons.

In sum, I believe that construing דנָה יִרְאָה (“going in the gate of the city”) as a generically equivalent idiom to דנָה יִרְאָה does not bear out. ἔμπορευμα never translates ἀσβ, and “The Three” use ἔξωρχομαι


60. Cf. Theodotus (cited by Eusebius, Praep. ev. 9.22.5), Jdt 9:13–17; Josephus, Ant. 1.21.1–2. According to T. Levi 6, a reflection on Shechem’s rape of Dinah and the subsequent retaliation, Levi counseled Reuben and Jacob against requiring the Shechemite circumcision (6.3) because he was determined to kill the Shechemites himself (6.4), and the death of a circumcised individual was prohibited (6.5). In this way the brothers are protected by placing the stipulation of circumcision in the mouth of Jacob. Levi tells his own sons that his retribution was justified in the end because God had declared the Shechemites guilty and deserving of death (6.8) (Old Testament Pseudepigrapha [ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85], 2.792). However, manuscript c is unique among the Greek manuscripts in noting Levi’s aversion to the Shechemites’ circumcision.


62. J. S. Derouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor,” BBR 14 (2004): 183. Citing Gen 34:13–24, Derouchie states, “From a literary perspective, it is significant that the other accounts of physical circumcision in the Hexateuch mention the rite as if the reader already knows what circumcision means for the patriarchs and their descendants” (ibid., 182).

64. Cf. DCH 4:261; HALOT 2:425.4.d, which note the contrast and propose an original Hebrew idiom: דנָה יִרְאָה (“to go out and come in”), while some propose an earlier form still:
(“go out”) instead. While אָחַי (34:24) could be elliptical for אָבָב (23:10), this context appears to qualify it. Hirsch observes that אָבָב אַיָּרָא (34:24) (“those who arrive through the gate of his city”) would be the expected expression for city residents, had this been intended. The context of the Gen 34 pericope points to v. 24 as communicating more than the wholesale circumcision of its city “elders.” Moreover, an ellipsis does not adequately explain the repetition in the same verse.

It is important to recall that the significance of the city gate concerned more than administration. The security of a city, achieved through its gate, enabled regular business transactions, domestic trade, and cultic activity. The pivotal role of the gate made its location prominent for both king and merchant, but also the most vulnerable point of a city’s defense system under military attack (see 2 Kgs 10; Isa 28:6; Ezek 21:15, 22) because the gate already constituted a structural breach in the wall. Typically made of wood (Judg 9:52, Neh 1:3), gates could be burned; therefore, metal plating increased durability (Ps 107:16, Isa 45:2) along with casemate walls. It was in the gates themselves that troops assembled prior to leaving, the relative safety of the enclosed walls in order to “go out” on an expedition. So militarily strategic was the gate (Isa 28:6) that to “possess the gate” was tantamount to conquering the city. Not surprisingly, the phrase is used in blessings (Gen 22:17, 24:60).

65. Sarna, Genesis, 237.
68. See the helpful study on the city gate complex in Iron Age Palestine by T. H. Blomquist in Gates and Gods. Cults in the City Gates of Iron Age Palestine: An Investigation of the Archaeological and Biblical Sources (ConBOT 46; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1999).
69. For king: 2 Sam 19:8, 1 Kgs 22:10, etc. For merchant: “Sheep Gate,” Neh 3:1, 32; “Fish Gate,” Neh 3:28, etc.
70. “When the troops were about to capture the tower and were forcing the door of the courtyard, they ordered that fire be brought and the doors burned” (2 Macc 14:41).
71. See, for example, the literature for the six-chambered Iron II gate of Gezer and the two flanking towers with four guardrooms of the Iron II gate at Tel Dan. Also W. G. Dever, “Gezer,” ABD 2:998–1003; A. Biran, “Dan,” ABD 2:12–17.
73. Cf. Gen 15:18–21, Ruth 4:11–12. In fact, Tכ and תט resolve the figure by using “cities of your enemies” (ןְָּכַּוְָּלְָּיּוֹן) as a metonymy for “gates” (Gen 22:17b; also 24:60; Crossfeld, Targum Onkelos, 87 n. 13). Skinner states that the phrase “refers to the capture of the opponent’s administrative and military centers” (Genesis, 164); cf. Lohfink, “vr;,” TDOT 6:368–96. Significantly, both uses of the phrase in Genesis (22:17, 24:60) culminate oracles of blessing to the core participants (that is, Abraham and Rebekah) for the emerging Israelite community.
Whose City?

Due to limitations, we will work from the base text of the MT and, for the sake of argument, assume a comparable Vorlage for the LXX translators. That said, a second issue arises concerning רִיד (= “his city,” b+ b−): just who or what is the referent of the 3ms suffix? According to J. W. Wevers, the Hebrew suffix refers to הרֵם, “Hamor” (v. 24a). But one could just as easily argue for the semantically nearer מֵס, the city’s namesake, because he was not only the “prince (זָאשֶׁד) of the land” (v. 2a) but “was honored (יִבָּרֶךְ) above all the house of his father” (v. 19b). The LXX employs the plural οἱ ἐκπορευόμενοι, “all those going out,” for the MT 3ms suffix, making the referent πάντες οἱ ἐκπορευόμενοι, “all those going out.” The Cairo Genizah Targum (C 3) reads: הִשָּׁם, “his city” (b+ b−), and הִשָּׁם הַיָּבָנָן, “that city’s [gate]” (b+ b−), respectively. Hamilton agrees, viewing the MT suffix with articular function and demonstrative or locative force—that is, the men “in that city.” For Speiser, the suffix ultimately has in view citizens capable of bearing arms.

The repeated 3ms suffix of רִיד in 34:24 is not clearly represented in the versions or adequately discussed in the interpretive literature. It appears that some versions capitalized on the Hebrew collective singular

74. Various Qumran texts from the Pentateuch (e.g., 4QExod, 4QDeut) have led E. Tov to declare overt affinity between them and the LXX (“The Contribution of the Qumran Scrolls to the Understanding of the LXX,” in Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings [SBLSCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992], 11–47; idem, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible [rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress / Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001], 134–42). On the other hand, Wevers claims that the LXX of Genesis should be viewed “as an exegetical document” (Notes, xx; cf. xxi). Issues surrounding “proto-M” are beyond our present discussion.


76. Or even “chief” of that region; see E. C. Hostetter, “Hamor,” ARD 3:43.

77. It is telling of the brothers’ viewpoint that the narrator places Shechem before Hamor as the “focused” recipient of their deceitful plan (34:13), when elsewhere the expression clearly defaults to the father in paired listing and collective guilt (“Hamor and Shechem”; cf. vv. 18, 20, 24, 26). Moreover, v. 13 reflects this shift from a plural antecedent (i.e., Shechem and Hamor) to a singular verbal form (i.e., “him who had degraded”). Sterberg states, “They spoke with deceit, and not without cause, for they were addressing the defiler of their sister” (The Poetics, 460). J. P. Fokkelman adds, “Concerned lest we, too, allow ourselves to be misled, the narrator tells us in v. 13. . . . The words ‘with guile’ are an intervention, a typical hint from the narrator to us” (Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 66–67). The narrator also wades in with his own moral assessment: “he [Shechem] had done a disgraceful thing in Israel . . . such a thing should not be done” (v. 7).

78. Klein, Genizah Manuscripts, 70–71 (Klein renders הִשָּׁם as “the city”). For הִשָּׁם, the article could be construed as anaphoric with demonstrative force. E. Tov cites J. S. Penkower’s belief that “this codex is the closest to the Ben Asher tradition from amongst the known ‘accurate Tiberian manuscripts’” (Textual Criticism, 47).


80. Speiser, Genesis, 265; cf. 367.
noun ድር (“males,” v. 24c) either by a plural possessive pronoun (i.e., 
>a影音v), or by construing “the city” as a metonymy for the group of men as-
associated with it, in reference to the Hebrew collective singular. To be 
sure, it is hard to ignore the moral pathos of the story that alternates be-
tween scheming “groups.” That said, the versions and translations alike 
seem predisposed to rephrase or even omit the repeated Hebrew colon 
(b)). But I propose that the narrator could have stipulated demonstrative 
force (= ለእንወ ድር, “that city”) or an articular form (= ድር, “the city”)— 
which in fact, is used in the very next verses (b, b) b). Instead, the 
genitival construction of ከ ድር (”his city,” b b) placed either side of the 
collective noun ድር (”males,” 24c) “humanizes” a catastrophe, effectively 
underscoring its distributive and irreversible state. This view is further 
supported by the narrator’s shift from the plural ድር (”their city,” 2x) in 
34:20 to the singular ድር (”his city,” 2x) in 34:24. Whereas “their city” has 
Hamor and Shechem in view, “his city” stipulates each individual male. The 
narrator could have easily just reemployed ድር, but Hamor and 
Shechem are no longer the focus. It is precisely because “each male” has 
been systematically incapacitated that his “whole city” now lies in peril! 
Granted, such nuances of the MT can be difficult to translate.

Why the Repeated Colon (b, b)?

While ከ ድር has enough difficulties, what is the interpreter to 
make of its second occurrence in the same verse? Furthermore, what is the 
rhetorical function of these two cola? One option is just to delete the sec-
ond, assuming dittography in the MT or arguing for ከ in the 
LXX Vorlage. This could explain the difference between the LXX and the

81. Compare with Judg 9:55, 15:10; Isa 16:4; Jotón §150e; cf. Gibson 22; GKC §145d.
82. Whether in blessing or judgment, the notion of corporate solidarity reaches beyond im-
mediate family to “in-group” and “out-group” concepts (cf. Gen 33:19; Judg 9:28; Josh 24:32; 
also R. A. Simkins, Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldviews of Ancient Israel [Peabody, MA: 
Hendrickson, 1994], 26–31).
83. So H. C. Leupold, who acknowledges the emphasis as “(his own) city” (Exposition of 
84. This distributive aspect reemerges in the “aftermath report” of v. 25b, where Simeon 
and Levi are responsible for killing “every male” (ገድ ድር). This reiterates the brothers’ prior 
stipulation that “every male” (ceği) would have to be circumcised (v. 15; cf. v. 22).
85. J. Wevers sees the repetition as an “obvious” dittograph (Notes, 570) but acknowledges 
that “The Three” reflect the MT (ibid., n. 27). C. Westermann calls it an “erroneous repetition” 
and “certainly a scribal error” (Genesis 12–36 [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985], 534 n. 124c, 542).
Gunkel sees a probable “addition,” possibly reflecting the “Shechem recension” (Genesis, 365); 
cf. G. von Rad and the “Hamor recension” (Genesis: A Commentary [rev. ed.; Philadelphia: West-
minster, 1972], 333). According to Westermann (Genesis 12–36, 535), a “family narrative” (A) 
has been combined with the “Hamor tradition” (B) united to create the later narrative (C). For 
a recent defense, see D. M. Carr, Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Ap-
proaches (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 252–53. For the argument of reading Gen 
34 as a single source, see Wenham, Genesis 16–50, 307–10.
86. R. S. Hendel argues strongly against the notion of redundancy avoidance by the 
MT. However, more-recent analysis shows restraint, recognizing that "structural analysis may sometimes reveal an alternate and more plausible explanation for this so-called unevenness." Note repetition, J. T. Walsh writes: "The efficacy of such repetitions as structuring devices depends upon the likelihood that they will be perceived, at least unconsciously, by an attentive reader or hearer. Several factors influence this likelihood.... Exact repetition is striking." Let us consider our verse again.

Following the dialogue of Hamor and Shechem (vv. 21–23), v. 24 functions as the narrator’s summary of the men’s response. At this critical juncture, v. 24 assumes the more prosodic characteristics of rhythm, balance, and, most notably, parallelism. Each half of v. 24 begins with an imperfect plus ו RGBA-consecutive in the plural, reporting their collective acceptance of the proposal (ו RGBA, a), followed by their enactment of its condition (ו RGBA, c). Dialogue complete, the narrator’s use of dual preterites reports the actions of a new subject—a group consensus (ו RGBA) followed by its result (ו RGBA). Collective agreement has issued in collective circumcision. After each verbal colon (a, c) is an alternation with successive substantival phrases: كل לאו ו RGBA ( RGBA, c), creating rhythm and quantitative balance within the verse. Emphasizing totality, ה RGBA occurs 3x, one in each of the final cola. A collective fate is looming. Both substantival phrases are initiated with ה RGBA functioning to itemize the following numerical war idiom. The second ה RGBA lies medially with distributive force ( RGBA, "each male").
The term רַקְזַרְכָּה initiates an appositional phrase with epexegetically to explain exactly who was circumcised. Used 4x within this narrative, “each male” recalls the stipulation of Jacob’s sons (v. 15), the proposal of Hamor and Shechem (v. 22), and finally the narrator’s report that “every male” was killed (v. 25)—not one warrior was left to defend his city. All four lines begin with plural force but end with singular signification, grammatically or semantically. Within the rhetorical logic of the verse, a war idiom is not surprising following a promise of economic windfall (v. 24a, b; first half). However, the narrator’s verbatim use of the same idiom following notice of collective circumcision sounds a moral alarm for the reader and a funeral dirge for the men (v. 24c, b; second half). This reiterated war idiom moves from legal “condition” to the narrator’s warning of massacre—political to personal ramifications. The idiom funds a grammatical connection between naïve solidarity and individual tragedy. From one colon to the next, “warriors amassed” have been reduced to “men immobilized.”

In terms of literary structure, I believe that the narrator has juxtaposed parallel lines to communicate emphasis and dramatic irony within the discourse. With every chance, the narrator underscores the “totality” and “comprehensiveness” of the scene, culminating with the reminder of the subject’s location and responsibility in and for “his [sg.] city” (னיר). The rite assumed by each man (רַקְזַרְכָּה) is poignantly surrounded by the narrator’s pounding dirge—the city’s battle-ready warriors have already been “taken out!” The irony is biting because an idiom allied with heroism is used to denote the incapacitated. Ethical has trumped biological. D. A. Dorsey issues a helpful reminder: “an ancient writer was compelled to use structural signals that would be perceptible to the listening audience. Signals were geared for the ear not the eye.”

CONCLUSION

So what is the phrase רַקְזַרְכָּה and why “restate” it? The narrator’s double use of a war idiom has a more arresting effect on the reader. For the men as a group of characters, it underscores their binding decision, approved from the perspective of what they knew. For the narrator’s part, the horror is underscored in the unfolding scene as the cumulative effect of the phrases creates pause and apprehension just prior to the slaughter (v. 25). The intentional “cutting” of the battle-ready (v. 24) is cruelly matched by

95. B. K. Waltke, Genesis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 466. The war idiom also receives support from the fact that only the adult males were targeted (cf. v. 29), those who stood to benefit from prospects of a matrimonial alliance.
96. I suggest that the LXX’s omission of the collocation was both symptom and confirmation of competing interpretive strategies that, nevertheless, “blunted” the force of the MT.
97. Dorsey, The Literary Structure, 16. One wonders if contemporary translators adequately consider the “hearing” of the biblical text in their English translations.
98. Leupold, Exposition, 2:907.
the “cutting down” of the unsuspecting (v. 25). To the reader, this expansive language of v. 24 gives it an official if not annalistic tone appropriate to a military idiom—one with ethical reverberations that reach beyond the city of Shechem (cf. 49:5–7; Deut 33:8–11).

I believe that the translations have not adequately rendered the force of the Hebrew military idiom, in large part because its contextual significance has not been adequately grasped, and a military collocation in 34:24 appears too fantastic. However, merely assuming elders at another city counsel overlooks unique semantics, the struggle among key versions, the leadership’s skewed proposal, and a narrator’s literary skill. I submit then, that while “general citizenry” is more contextually defensible than “elders” for 34:24, it is beside the point. Instead, the narrator has chosen to identify the circumcised group through a war idiom, thereby working out the deceitful intentions of Jacob’s sons to maximum effect. Moreover, in the discourse surrounding 34:24 this deceit has merged with intense irony that only appears when one also realizes just who is being circumcised—the men constituting the city’s defense force!

For their part, translations can do better. “Able-bodied” may come closest, but this is only a helpful connotation and ultimately falls short of communicating the uniqueness of a militaristic idiom in 34:24. The narrator could have used other expressions such as: ינש חמש (“men of valor,” cf. 99. Built on the analogy of the dismembering ritual of Gen 15:7–18, M. G. Kline proposes that circumcision itself is a vivid illustration of the covenant curse of excision, threatening the “cutting off” of one’s descendants (see Gen 17:14; Kingdom Prologue [S. Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1993], 193). Seeing a death penalty, the LXX uniquely crafts εξολοθρεύω (“to be utterly destroyed”) to render the MT מות (“be cut off”; cf. Gen 17:9; m. Ker).

100. Gunkel, Genesis, 365.
101. The phrase מות (“by the mouth of the sword” [34:26a]) continues the militaristic theme, employing another military idiom wherein swords metaphorically “eat” in battle (cf. 2 Sam 11:25—[for the sword devours one way and sometimes another”]; also 2 Sam 15:14; Judg 1:8 [pl.; similarly, LXX: εχθράμμενος μαχητής, “with the blade of the sword”]). Ironically, the b of agency in the brother’s proposal (לכשת, “be circumcised [by you];” 34:15b) reappears as the Shechemites are cut down “by the sword” מות (34:26a; cf. GK §121f.). While מות occurs with other verbs (esp. הבט), only here does it occur with לחם (“kill”), yet another hapax construction.

102. Stigers admits his shock, “But to ask only the warriors to submit is to ask the city to bare itself to attack, for they would be greatly incapacitated,” and misses the irony (A Commentary, 259).
103. Observing numerous literary parallels of Gen 34 at the macro level, G. A. Rendsburg describes a “master compiler” (The Redaction of Genesis [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986], 59). If Gen 34 functions as an “interlude” with Dinah, a foreign palace, and a pact with foreigners, its counterpart is Gen 26—another interlude surrounding Rebekah, in another foreign palace with foreigners. From deception (26:7, 34:13–29) and treaty (26:26–33, 34:8–23) to acquisition (26:26 [by proper name], 34:10) and “uncircumcised” groups (26:1 [Philistines]; 34 [Shechemites]), Gen 26 and 34 reveal purposeful structuring as the second and next-to-last episodes of the Jacob Cycle (25:19–35:22) share numerous reverberating themes (Rendsburg, Redaction, 56–58, following M. Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19–35:22),” JJS 26 [1975]: 24).
1QM col. II [אַחֲרֵי הָיוֹת, 2:7b–8)] or, for that matter, some similar idiom with נֶעְרֵי ("youth, young men"), which was already descriptive of Shechem (34:19) and could have been reemployed if "able-bodied," "young," or "marriageable" (i.e., עַדְלָה) was all the narrator intended to convey. Instead, a war idiom, twice stated, is more arresting, and it prompts reflection. We suggest such a collocation is not only exegetically viable but may, in this case, require a more formal-equivalent translation. The closest to a military emphasis is the Schocken Bible, which renders the collocation: “all who go out (to war) from the gate of his city.” A similar translation in The Torah commentary reads: “All the fighting men in his community.” We propose that a term such as “battle-ready” could be a step forward within the following kind of translation:

So they accepted the proposal of Hamor and his son Shechem—

Every battle-ready man from his city.

And each male was circumcised—

Every battle-ready man from his city.

While this may be too redundant for our senses, we should not ignore the more prosodic nature of this verse either. With such a difficult idiom, readers should be offered alternate renderings or at least a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase in the Bible margin for reader-awareness. With balanced halves and verbatim phrases, the author has struck an economy of expression difficult to translate. However, when there is scope for simplification, linguists often speak of redundancy. Alter’s translation is creative and “packed”: “And all who sallied forth from the gate of his town listened to Hamor, and to Shechem his son, and every male was circumcised, all who sallied forth from the gate of his town.” While Alter has daringly employed one rich idiom for another, it will certainly take this kind of informed creativity in the source language to communicate such expressions in our receptor languages.

107. Recent translations illustrate this: The Jewish Study Bible (JSB, 2004) notes, “I.e., all his fellow townsment” (70, b-b); The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB, 2004) notes, “Lit All who went out of the city gate” (29 note h); The New Living Translation (NLT, 2004; also TNIV, 2005) offers neither alternate renderings (e.g., ESV) nor a literal translation (e.g., HCSB).
108. Poole, An Introduction, 130.
110. I want to thank Randall Gauthier, Ron Tavalin, and Patrick Egan for reading and criticizing earlier drafts of this article.