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TWO UNKNOWN VERBS

ETYMOLOGICAL STUDIES

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1. **אָל** (root **אָל**) to be strong and powerful; comp. Arabic **أَلَّ** (أَلِدَ).

THE first hemistich of Job 31 23 **כִּי פָדָה אֱלֹהֵי אִדִּי מֵאֵל**, disconcerts the reader by the lack of a verb. The more usual way of translating it is: "For calamity from God was a terror to¹ me." Compare Targum: **אֲרַחֵם וְלִינָה לְיָמֵי תִבְרַךְ אֱלֹהֵי**. This translation thus follows literally the Massoretic text, as if it had before it a sentence of inverted structure with **אֱלֹהֵי אִדִּי** as subject and **פָּדָה אֱלֹהֵי** as predicate.

It is, however, noticeable that out of more than twenty examples of **אָל** occurring in the Bible none, when used in the construct state or when provided with pronominal suffixes, refers to the author of the "calamity" or "distress," but all do refer to the victim of it. Therefore the above interpretation of **אֱלֹהֵי אִדִּי** as "calamity from God" must at first sight seem questionable. Also an expression like **פָּדָה אֱלֹהֵי**, a terror to me, can hardly be considered Hebrew; since "to me" in the meaning of *for me*, after a predicate noun, is generally expressed by **לִי**² instead of **אֵלַי**.

¹ Nearly so read the traditional Jewish explanation, the English Authorized Version, Saadia, Philippon, the English translation of the Jew. Publ. Soc., Kautzsch, Budde, etc.

² Compare, for instance: Prov. 1 9; 8 8; 8 22; 4 22; 15 21; 17 25; 20 3; 21 18.

While accepting in the main the above meaning of the sentence, Ehrlich³ nevertheless suggests the emendation: **לִּמְדָה יְהוָה** **לִּמְדָה יְהוָה** *For the most terrible of terrors is the hand of God,* taking **לִּמְדָה יְהוָה** as a superlative. But such an aphoristic form of sentence, general and objective, to say nothing of the heavy and improbable repetition of **לִּמְדָה**, does not seem simple enough as a mere parallel of the following hemistich which is personal and subjective: **וְיָצְאָה מִלְּפָנָיו אֵין עֲשֵׂה** *And by reason of his majesty I could do nothing.*

It is the more interesting to compare with the above general interpretation the two most ancient versions of the Bible, which seem here to differ from the Massoretic text. Indeed, both the Septuagint and the Peshîta render our hemistich by a normal sentence of logical structure with **יְהוָה** as subject and with a special verb of similar meaning. LXX: φόβος γὰρ συνέσχευ με, *For a terror overwhelmed me.* Syriac: **ܠܡܕܗܝܗܘܘܐ ܕܥܡܘܩܘܬܝܗܘܐ ܕܥܡܘܩܘܬܝܗܘܐ ܕܥܡܘܩܘܬܝܗܘܐ** *For the terror of God seized me.*

It seems, therefore, more than probable that the Hebrew text also would contain here some verb. Kittel, deeming our verse corrupt, does not hesitate to read: **יְהוָה יְהוָה לִּמְדָה יְהוָה**. But, if this **יְהוָה** is beyond all question as proved by the Syriac version, a verb like **יָצָא** *to come* would appear really weak as a predicate to the expression "the terror of God" and when compared with *συνέσχευ* and **ܠܡܕܗܝܗܘܘܐ**. Seemingly, it would have been merely suggested by the supplementary explanation to our hemistich, embodied in the Syriac verse: **ܕܥܡܘܩܘܬܝܗܘܐ ܕܥܡܘܩܘܬܝܗܘܐ**, and the calamity from him came upon me.

As to the Hebrew text, it can contain only a verb with a meaning similar to that of the above verbs used in the two earliest versions. Such a verb, almost without any text emendation, might be **יָצָא** of the root **יָצָא** that has given the usual noun **יָצָא**, *calamity*, assumed to figure in our verse. Thus the Bible would have preserved here a unique example of the Arabic verb **أَجَدَّ** (ر. أجد) *to be or grow strong and powerful*. Our text would not be in reality corrupt, but there might have occurred a mere mistake in the separation of the words, the final ' of **יָצָא**

³ *Bandglossen zur hebr. Bibel*, Leipzig 1913, vol. VI, p. 304.

belonging to the beginning of the next word, namely the Imperfect תָּמַד . Then our hemistich would read: $\text{כִּי פָדוּ אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה}$ ($\text{עָלַי} = \text{עָלַי}$) *For the terror of God was mighty upon me.* תָּמַד would be, with more emphasis, synonymous with חָזַק in expressions like $\text{עָלַי חָזַק ה'$ (Ezek. 3 14) "And the hand of the Lord was strong upon me;" $\text{דְּבַר מֶלֶךְ חָזַק עַל יוֹאָב}$ (I Chr. 21 4) "And the king's word prevailed against Joab;" $\text{כִּי חָזַק עֲלֵיהֶם הָרֶעֶב}$ (Gen. 47 20), "Because the famine was sore upon them."

Obviously, I consider this verb תָּמַד (r. תָּמַד) akin to the noun תָּמַד calamity, misfortune (= something strong versus us), and both the verb and the noun to be connected with the above Arabic root أيد , mediae أ , rather than with the verb أَاد mediae أ (r. أَاد) meaning to bend, as admitted by many.⁴ The evolution of meaning from أَاد (r. أيد) to be strong and powerful to תָּמַד calamity, distress, would find a parallel in the verb شَدَّد to fasten tight, strengthen, in crease in violence and the derived noun شِدَّة or شِدِيكَةٌ misfortune, misery, calamity. Comp. also Assyrian danānu ⁵ to be strong and dannatu distress, affliction.

As to the last word of our hemistich, אֱלֵי instead of עָלַי , it is sufficient to remember that the confusion of the prepositions אֵל and עַל occurs so often in the Bible that it seems quite superfluous to quote other examples.⁶ Now, the wrong separation of the words must have caused the dropping out of the final א of this $\text{אֱלֵי} (= \text{עָלַי})$, which then lost its genuine sense to become אֵל .

Finally, with this verb תָּמַד we get the most natural parallelism between the two halves of our verse:

"For the terror of God was mighty upon me,
By reason of his majesty I could do nothing."

⁴ See תָּמַד , for instance, in Gesenius' or in Fuerst's lexicon to the Old Testament. Also أَاد (r. أَاد) to happen, overwhelm, has been proposed.

⁵ See Muss-Arnolt: *A Concise Dictionary of the Assyrian Language*, Berlin 1906, p. 262.

⁶ See Fried. Delitzsch: *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament*, p. 124, Berlin und Leipzig 1920.

2. **חָלַשׁ** to snatch away, carry off, reap; comp. Arabic **حَلَسَ** and vernacular **حَلَشَ**.

This verb, in Job 14 10 **וְנָבַר יִסּוֹת וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ**, is still considered by most exegetes as related to the Aramaic **חָלַשׁ** to be weak and the adjective **חָלַשׁ** (Joel 4 10) which is really the counterpart of the Syriac **ܫܠܫܐ**. Appreciating, however, that **וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ** translated in this way is an anticlimax after **יִסּוֹת**, they have differently exaggerated the above meaning as far as the Aramaic root signification would allow. Our sentence is most usually rendered as follows: "But man dieth and wasteth⁷ away."

Quite in accordance with this proceeding we find, as early as the tenth century, Saadia's interpretation: "But man, when he dieth, is benumbed."⁸

Gersonides (XIVth century) stands apart, ascribing to the verb **חָלַשׁ** both in our passage and in Ex. 17 13 the meaning to cut⁹ off. This might have been suggested to him by vernacular Ar. **حَلَشَ**¹⁰ to reap with a sickle.

Delitzsch's interpretation of our verb in both above passages (in Job 14 10 *fallen, stürzen*; in Ex. 17 13 *fällen, niederstrecken*) can be considered only as a broadening of the Aramaic signification to be weak; since it rests on neither etymological comparisons nor other positive proofs.¹¹

Other translations, like Renan's *il reste étendu*,¹² Merx' und

⁷ This is the English Authorized Translation.

⁸ Saadia: *Version arabe du livre de Job*, Paris 1899, éd. Leroux; see p. 45: **وَأَنْتَعَدَى** to grow numb **وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَاتَ فَكَأَنَّ أَعْيُنَهُ**.

Notice the curious resemblance of this interpretation to the meaning acquired by the same verb in Yiddish: **חָלַשׁ** to faint, swoon. Comp. also the French Zadoc Kahn Translation: *s'évanouit* (meaning also to disappear).

⁹ See **וַיִּחַלֵּשׁ** in *Biblia Magna*, Job 14 10.

¹⁰ In common use among Palestinian *fellaḥim*. Since this verb does not belong to the literary language, it does not occur in the classical Lexica, like those by Freytag, Lane, Kasimirsky; it is, however, found in Wähmund's Arabic-German, Steingass' Arabic-English and Belot's Arabic-French dictionaries which include dialectical words and phrases.

¹¹ See Delitzsch: *Das Buch Hiob*, Leipzig 1902, p. 154, also p. 46.

¹² Renan: *Le livre de Job*, Paris 1882, p. 57.

liegt da,¹³ Budde's *und ist dahin*¹⁴ (for "er liegt dahingestreckt" in the Commentary), seem to be more or less influenced by the Vulgate rendering—*nudatus*.¹⁵

The Syriac version *ܘܚܝܘܢ ܘܡܝܬ* as well as Targum *ܘܚܝܘܢ ܘܡܝܬ* have evidently been derived from the Aramaic signification of *ܘܚܝܘܢ*.

The Septuagint version *ῥηξερο*,¹⁶ however, is quite different from all the others. It fits our text in a manner striking by its very simplicity, a trait which seems to be a clear indication of its original suitability. Indeed, *ῥηξερο* comes from *οἰχομαι* which means: *to depart, go off, pass away, disappear*. The whole hemistich would then read: "But man dieth and *disappeareth*." This is undoubtedly the nearest to the original and genuine sense, inasmuch as it affords the best parallelism with the second hemistich: "Man expireth and *where is he?*"

On this account, some would read *וַיָּחַד* (Dillmann, Beer, Merx), others suggest the emendation *וַיָּחַד* (Wright, Budde). Thus we find here one of those characteristic instances where the wrong principle of changing the text in order to adjust it to an obsolete rendering of the ancient versions, chiefly the LXX, serves to prevent us from discovering the true meaning of rare Biblical vocables. For in most of such cases, especially when supported by Comparative Semitic lexicography, it is rather logical and natural to recognize archaic roots whose genuine sense was hitherto concealed by their *graphical* resemblance to other words more common in the Bible.

Our passage, too, does not need to be emended. For the verb in question has certainly nothing to do with the Aramaic *ܘܚܝܘܢ* *to be weak*, being evidently the ancient Hebrew counterpart of the Arabic *خَلَسَ* *to snatch away, carry off*.¹⁷ Nothing could give so perfect a parallelism with the next hemistich: "But man dieth and is *snatched away*;¹⁸ man expires and *where is he?*"

¹³ Merx: *Das Gedicht von Hiob*, Jena 1871, p. 65.

¹⁴ Budde: *Das Buch Hiob*, Göttingen 1896, p. 70.

¹⁵ This may possibly have inspired also the English Translation of the Jew. Publ. Soc.; see page 996: "But man dieth and *lieth low*."

¹⁶ LXX, Job 14 10: *ἀνὴρ δὲ τελευτήσας ῥηξερο*.

¹⁷ See Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, London 1865, p. 784.

¹⁸ Possibly the right vocalisation of the Hebrew ought to be here *וַיָּחַד*.

Curiously enough Schleusner, who noticed the connection between *חָכַשׁ* and the above rendering of the LXX, continued nevertheless to translate *חָכַשׁ* in accordance with the old fashion — *debilitator*.¹⁹

Furthermore, the above meaning also suits the text in Ex. 17 13: *וַיַּחֲלֹשׁ יְהוָה אֶת עַמְלֵק וְאֶת עַמּוֹתָיו לְפָנֵי יוֹשׁוּעַ* — “And Joshua carried off (or snatched away) Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” What an energetic expression the verse thus recovers!

This instrumental phrase *לְפָנֵי יוֹשׁוּעַ* recalling by association the above vernacular *חָכַשׁ* to reap with a sickle, which I have connected with Gersonides' interpretation, has double importance. On the one hand, it offers an additional and definitive proof that ancient Hebrew really possessed a verb *חָכַשׁ* different from its Aramaic homonym. On the other, it affords opportunity to trace the origin of the vernacular *חָכַשׁ* itself. As a matter of fact, this agricultural term is quite absent in Classical Arabic, something which may lead us to call in question its very Arabic origin. Furthermore, while common in the vernacular of Palestine and Syria, this verb shows no traces of its existence in Aramaic or Syriac. It is then most natural to assume that in our case we have to deal with a Hebrew loan-word picked up by the Bedouin invaders from the indigenous peasants. Indeed, the spelling of *חָכַשׁ* appears to be a simple phonetical copy of the Hebrew *חָכַשׁ*, without the corresponding *מ* (or *ث*) for *שׁ*, as one would naturally expect for roots common to both Hebrew and Arabic.

This assertion seems further to be strengthened by the very comparison of the vernacular *חָכַשׁ* with the classical *חָכַשׁ*. The meaning of the former verb to reap would be merely a specialized shade of the general sense of the latter to carry off, snatch away. Both verbs may be etymologically identical. The original Arabic form is *حَكَشَ*, the classical counterpart of the Hebrew *חָכַשׁ*, with common primitive meaning to snatch away, carry off. The Hebrews, a preponderantly agricultural people,

¹⁹ Schleusner: *Lexicon in LXX*, Glasgow 1822, see vol. II, p. 544, *δὲ γὰρ*.

would naturally have derived from this general signification a more special one: *to reap* — to carry off with a sickle. This verb may have been preserved by the Palestinian peasants up to the time of the invasion of Islam, when it could come back to the Arabs through the channel of the vernacular under the form *ḥalaṣ* (حَلَسَ), according to the later Hebrew pronunciation where every פ is regarded as ח.

I wish to conclude with a reference to Is. 14 12. Here, too, our verb has most probably either of the shades of the above advocated meaning, perhaps rather the second. For, whatever the value of עַל²⁰ in the phrase חוֹלֵשׁ עַל-גּוֹיִם might be, each hemistich would emphasize a tragical contrast in the fate of the King of Babylon. The first compares him to a "day-star" which is "fallen from heaven." The second, where חוֹלֵשׁ is obviously counterpart and synonym of נִגְרַעַת (from נָרַעַת *to cut down*), means to assert that he who used *to carry off* (or *to reap*) nations by his victories, as a reaper does corn, is now *cut down* himself.

"How art thou fallen from heaven,
 O day-star, son of the morning!
 (How) art thou *cut down* to the ground,
 O *reaper* of (LXX "all") the nations!"²¹

²⁰ Some would emend כל on account of the LXX. See, however, the explanation of this particle here by Qimḥi (ק"ד"ק).

²¹ Is. 14 12: אֵךְ נִפְלַת מִשָּׁמַיִם, הִלַּל בְּרִשְׁתּוֹ! נִגְרַעַת לְאָרֶץ, חוֹלֵשׁ עַל-גּוֹיִם (כל-גּוֹיִם)!