Textual Suggestions on Isa. 26 66, Zeph. 22.5

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ISAIAH 26

The difficulty is in the last word וַיָּשָׁבוּ. It used to be connected with קָדָם Qal, to be plenty, many; הָיָה, to have plenty, to have a great number. But this view is abandoned by most, though not by all, scholars. Most recent critics derive it from קָדָם = קָדָם “to strike,” and change יָשָׁבוּ to יָשָׁבוּ, translating “and they strike hands with foreigners.” But this is not quite satisfactory either, for the idea of foreign alliances is not in the context. The verse speaks of divination (read בְּשָׁבֵת for בְּשָׁבֵת) and soothsaying. If foreign intercourse were given as the reason for the prevalence of these magic and mantic practices, it would have been brought out more clearly and the connection would have been indicated in some way. We expect rather that the thought of the beginning of the verse should be developed still further, especially when we see that in vs. 8 there are three clauses used to express the one thought of idolatry. Since “the children of foreigners” are parallel to the “Philistines” of the previous clause, we look for a

1 Thus, e.g., Whitehouse in the New Century Bible on Isaiah, 1905, translates “are crowded with.”

2 Besides, the expression יָשָׁבוּ קָדָם in the sense of “striking hands with” for the purpose of an alliance is unusual and occurs only in this conjecture. Usually the phrase runs יָשָׁבוּ קָדָם “to clap one’s hands” either in anger (Num. 24:19), or in mockery (Lam. 2:17 Job 27:2). Of course, this does not imply that יָשָׁבוּ קָדָם may not have been a good Hebrew phrase, but only that we cannot control it. The Arabic safaqa has the meaning “strike (hands)” as well as “slap (the face)” and safatwa is the term used in bargaining for the hand-clasp that seals the bargain.
parallel of דִּבְרֵי in דִּבְרֵי. And it seems therefore very likely that the original text read instead of

בֵּיתֶךָ נַעֲרֵי תַּשָּׁפֵשׁ

וּבֵיתֶךָ נַעֲרֵי בְּעָשָׁה

“For they are full of divination,
and are soothsayers like the Philistines,
and practice sorcery as the children of foreigners.”

Isaiah 66:3

It is generally acknowledged that we need some participle before וּ in the clause רֹאִים מָנָּהֲנָה. Usually וּוּ is supplied. But it is not easy to see how this could have been omitted, and the whole structure of the verse speaks against it. It appears to me more probable that the text had originally וּוּ which was misread וּוּ. The structure of the verse favors it; it is strictly parallel to וּוּ. Compare Lev. 22 for וּוּ in the sense of “offer, sacrifice.”

The verse then reads,

“He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man;
he that sacrificeth a lamb as he that breaketh a dog’s neck,
he that bringeth an oblation as he that offereth a swine,
he that burneth frankincense as he that blesseth an idol.”

Zephaniah 2:2

The first line in Zeph. 2:2 כְּפָרֵם יֵלָה חוֹל כְּפָרֵם כְּפָרֵם is translated by LXX πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ἢμᾶς ὡς ἀνθὸς παρατοποευμένον. It will be noted that in this translation the difficult words מָרַח and מָרַח are omitted, for τοῦ γενέσθαι cannot seriously be regarded as representing an original reading, ἢμᾶς ὡς or ἢμᾶς. Evidently the Greek translators did not know what to do with מָרַח and so translated the text very freely in order to get some good meaning out of it; and, of course, their translation does make sense. But there was another difficulty in the text. They had translated כְּפָרֵם by ὡς ἀνθὸς παρατοποευμένον i.e. כְּפָרֵם. There was, however, another word left, מָרַח. What should they do with it? Nothing remained but to omit it also. It is evi-
dent that the LXX reading is guesswork and not to be taken into consideration for the reconstruction of the original text. The context makes it quite clear that the general meaning must be "Get you shame and be ye ashamed, O nation unabashed, before it is too late!" This suggests the reading בַּעֲשָׂרָה כְּפַלְתָּה לְהַיּוֹר בָּאָמָר, "before the appointed time is at an end!" The only change is in הבא which must be read בגה. For הבא in the sense of "prescribed limit of time" compare Job 14:5, 13. For the construction of בַּעֲשָׂרָה with the infinitive compare not only הבאה but also הבאה חיה Hag. 2:15.

The following clause בַּעֲשָׂרָה יְהוָה is probably still dependent on הבאה and to be translated "before the appointed time is at an end, [before] the day has passed as chaff," when you might have repented and by repentance averted the doom.

But the simile of flying chaff is used as a rule to illustrate, the idea of scattering rather than that of swiftness. And so a suggestion may be made on this clause, with all due reserve, for it is perhaps unnecessary to suspect the Massoretic text. It would seem not unlikely that the text read originally for

בַּעֲשָׂרָה יְהוָה

כִּי שָׂפָא לְעֵבָר יְהוָה

"for the day hastens, urges, to pass by." For the use of the

This is a beautiful illustration of the way in which the Greek translators would try to make an untranslatable passage intelligible. It is a very keen guess and certainly brings out in general the meaning that the prophet had intended. We may adopt their guess, if we please, but must not translate the Greek into Hebrew and then think that we have restored the original Hebrew text.

6 Reading בָּאָמָר for בָּאָמָר with Graetz, Cheyne et al.

5 "Abashed" is the probable though not certain meaning of הבאה. Was it originally הבאה נלע, "bowed down, humbled"?

4 So also LXX.

7 The construction of בָּאָמָר with a noun may also be compared, בָּאָמָר before the harvest, Is. 28:4, בָּאָמָר before the morning, Is. 17:14.

8 Compare RV.
Hiphil compare Is. 22. 4. The verb expresses the urgent haste; the time presses. Repent, soon it will be too late!

The whole would then read,

Get you shame and be ye ashamed,
O nation unabashed!
Before the appointed time is at an end,
For the day hastens quickly by.
Before there come upon you
The fierce anger of Jahve.

ZEPHANIAH 2:5

The phrase "Canaan, the land of the Philistines," is so unusual that it arouses suspicion, even though the Versions have the same text. Wellhausen, Nowack, Marti, and Fagnani omit כנען from the text as secondary. But there must be some explanation for its presence in the text of the Massoretes and of the Versions. Why should somebody have introduced it and incidentally have rearranged the text, transposing "the land of the Philistines" from the end of the verse to its present position?

It is more likely that the text read originally for

כנען
כינע

"for the land of the Philistines shall be afflicted,
and I will destroy thee [originally: it (?)], that there shall be no inhabitant."

9 Possibly the Qal יָנַשׁ was used, though that is not so likely.