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Concerning Hiram ("Hiram-abi"), the Phœnician Craftsman

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THE group of passages discussed in the present paper gives good illustration of the precarious character of some of the "accepted results" of modern textual criticism of the Old Testament, and also contains an excellent example of the Chronicler's literary method, in improving the older material which passed through his hands. In either respect the case here presented is a thoroughly typical one, namely the allusions in the books of Kings and Chronicles to Hiram, or "Hiram-abi," etc., the skilled Phœnician artificer who aided Solomon in building the Temple in Jerusalem, and whose name (in one form or another) often holds such a prominent place in fanciful accounts of the origin of the Order of Freemasons.

The name of this craftsman appears several times in I Kings, and always in the same form, *Hirām*, **הִרָאִם**, the same name as that of the Tyrian king himself. The passages are repeated, with more or less embellishment, in II Chronicles, but there our Hebrew text seems at the first glance to give the name in several different forms, no one of which is quite like that in Kings. According to our modern

commentators, the Chronicler has preserved (*somewhere!*) the original form of the name, that in I Kings being in any case a corruption of the primitive reading; but just what the original form was, no one has succeeded in demonstrating, nor has any one given a plausible explanation of the supposed alteration of the Hebrew text.

It will simplify matters to state, at the outset, that our Hebrew text of Chronicles has everywhere חִירָם, *Hūrām*, instead of הִירָם, *Hirām*, whether the name is that of the king or of the craftsman. This may possibly be due to alteration of the original text of Chronicles, but such alteration is not at all likely under the circumstances. In I Kings both the Hebrew text and the Greek version testify uniformly to *Hirām*, and it would therefore be a most improbable thing for any scribe or redactor to alter *uniformly* to חִירָם in all the passages in II Chronicles. We may be reasonably sure, on the contrary, that the Chronicler himself wrote everywhere חִירָם. In our Greek Bible, Theodotion's rendering¹ of Chronicles would restore everywhere the form *Hirām*, doubtless a mere harmonization of the familiar type.

The first of the passages in which Hiram the artificer is mentioned is **I Kings 7 13 ff.** (Grk. 7 1 ff.): "13 And King Solomon sent and took Hiram, [a man] from Tyre, 14 whose mother was a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and whose father was a man of Tyre, a worker in bronze. And he [*i.e.* Hiram] was a most expert craftsman, . . . and he came to Solomon the king, and did all his work."

In **II Chron. 2 12 (13) f.** this is put, very characteristically, in the form of a letter from King "Hiram" (2 10)² to King Solomon. The instructive value of this remarkable instance of the Chronicler's literary habit has been generally overlooked. Why the epistolary form, when the old material was preserved, and no essential changes in the narrative were made? Obviously because he was one who cared very

¹ For evidence of the fact that our Greek version of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, is the work of Theodotion, I may refer to my *Ezra Studies*.

² Observe what was said above in regard to the form of the name in Chronicles.

much for striking detail in the history of his people. He was a writer with a strong imagination and a love of the picturesque. That it was the Chronicler himself who was the scene painter, and not some older writer (or 'mid-rashic (!) source') from whose work he borrowed, I think I have made sufficiently clear in my *Ezra Studies*, pp. 229-238. As I have there demonstrated, the same manner of literary treatment, similar picturesque incidents, even the same favorite phrases, appear in all parts of the history alike; both where the older narrative is embellished by him, and also in the many passages which no one doubts are the work of his own hand. In the additions to Samuel and Kings (including the lesser alterations), in the whole of the Hebrew portion of Ezra and part of the Aramaic, and in a considerable part of Nehemiah, we see the characteristic handiwork of the same literary genius. Here, in the incident of the correspondence between the two kings, we have an especially fine example. The Chronicler—for we know that it was he, and no other—saw the opportunity to do here what always seemed to him important to be done. Wherever possible, he dwelt upon and magnified the relations of the Hebrews with foreign powers (*Ezra Studies*, p. 210), very much as his kindred spirit, Josephus, did at a later day (*ibid.*, pp. 151, 154). We shall see further illustration of this tendency in some of the remaining passages dealing with the incident of Hiram, the Phœnician expert.

To return to the letter. After greetings and compliments, the letter proceeds (II Chron. 2 12 f.): "12 And now: * I hereby send to you a skillful and wise man, לְחִירָם אֲבִי; 13 the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and whose father was a man of Tyre. He is one who knows . . . [and then are enumerated the eleven things that he knew better than anybody else]; and he is able to carry out all the ideas which may be given him by thy wisdom or by the wisdom of my lord, thy father David."

* רִשְׁמֵה, the Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic רִשְׁמֵה and the Syriac ܪܫܡܗ (see the *Journal of the Am. Oriental Society*, vol. xx, p. 285); cf. II Kings, 5 a, 10 2 f.

Here are the statements of the Book of Kings, varied in the Chronicler's own way. The substitution of "Dan" for "Naphtali," which is probably not a real contradiction, was made for some good reason which we have no means of knowing. The exaggeration in the form of statement is harmless.

The chief point of interest is the form in which the name of the craftsman is given, **הורם אבי**. It is at present the well-nigh universally accepted view that 'the Chronicler has preserved the original form,' that in Kings being wrong, and that the name of this expert was "*Huram-abi*"; so the commentaries, dictionaries, histories, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, and so on.⁴ A few would prefer the form "*Hiram-abi*," to be sure. This conclusion involves not only 'emendation' of three passages in Kings, but also of the other passages in Chronicles, as will presently appear.

The fact is, the word **אב** here is *not* a part of the proper name, but the noun meaning "right-hand man," "trusted counsellor," as in Gen. 45 8, I Macc. 11 32, Greek Esther 13 6 (add. to 3 13), 16 11 (add. to 8 12), etc.; cf. also Judg. 17 10, 18 19. The correct rendering is: "I hereby send to you a skillful and wise man, Hiram, *my trusted counsellor*." The attempt has frequently been made, of course, to render it in this way here, — ever since the Greek version, — but the attempts all seemed to shatter on the *other* principal passage in Chronicles, as will presently be seen. Hence the general acquiescence in the view now prevailing.

The other occurrences of the name in the older narrative are found in **I Kings 7 40. 45**: "40 And Hiram made . . . [the various utensils for the temple], and Hiram finished all the work which was given him to do." And again: 45 [after the enumeration], "the things which Hiram made for King Solomon in the house of Yahwè."

These two passages are reproduced in **II Chron. 4 11. 16**. The first is unaltered, except in the form of the name: "11 And Hiram made . . ." [the utensils which are named].

⁴ Our English renderings (Authorized Version and Revised Version) are so evidently mistranslations as to require no discussion.

The second passage is very characteristically improved: 18 [after the enumeration] "these and all the utensils belonging thereto made *לְמַלְכֵךְ שְׁלֹמֹה* for the house of Yahwè."

This latter passage is regarded as decisive, showing that our Hebrew texts have gone through a complicated process of corruption. The accepted translation, which seems to receive strong support from the wording of the parallel passage in Kings, renders as follows: "These and all the utensils belonging thereto made *Huram-abi for King Solomon* for the house of Yahwè." To be sure, the reading *אַבִּי* gives a good deal of trouble, and not a few have preferred to regard *this* as the original form of the 'second element' of the name, and to suppose this founder of the Masonic Order to have been called "*Huram-abiu*"⁵ (or perhaps "*Hiram-abiu*").

But the accepted translation of the passage is wrong. Here, again, the noun *אַב* has the same meaning as before. He who had been styled (*by the Chronicler*) "the right-hand man" of the king of Tyre is now, with one of the Chronicler's own literary touches, termed "the right-hand man of King Solomon." The construction is an Aramaic one, paralleled several times in the later Hebrew of the Old Testament; see the passages cited in König, *Syntax*, p. 256 f. The correct rendering of the verse is: "These and all the utensils belonging thereto made Hiram, *the trusty counsellor of King Solomon*, for the house of Yahwè." As in the former passage by the incident of the letter from the one king to the other, so here again by the use of the word *אַב*, the Chronicler has increased the interest of the narrative and added to its picturesqueness. It is an example of his skill that ought not to be overlooked.

The name of the Phœnician craftsman, as originally written in the narrative of Kings, was undoubtedly *Hiram*, the same as that of the king of Tyre. The Chronicler probably wrote both in the form *Huram*, but we certainly have no good reason to prefer that form. The Hebrew text is sound in all of the passages involved, both in Kings and in Chronicles.

⁵ Often written *Abiu*, or even *Abif*.