

מִדְּר IN JOB 7 4

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SCHULTENS may have been wrong in his sweeping Arabization of the Book of Job, but the fact remains that the diction of Job stands in close relation to the style of classic Arabic poetry. This is particularly noticeable in the many figurative expressions which find their counterpart nowhere else except in Arabic lyrics and often remain a perpetual perplexity and eternal enigma to the Occidental mind. Metaphors are a *conditio sine qua non* with all people of an imaginative mind, but the imaginative Orientals excel in the richness of imagery and the abundance of objects of comparison. To understand such figures of speech in the Hebrew Scriptures and especially in Job we must consult Arabic models before we venture to emend the masoretic text on the much abused plea of a hypothetical metre.

An instance in question is the baffling passage in Job 7 4 which has been a *crux interpretum* since the very inception of exegesis.¹ The sentence reads as follows: אִם־שָׁכַבְתִּי וְאָמַרְתִּי מָתִי אָקוּם וּמִדְּר עָרַב וְשָׁבַעְתִּי נְדָדִים עַד־נֶשֶׁף. The Authorized Version translates: "When I lie down, I say, when shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." The Revised Version inserts "and the night is long", retaining the rest. Apparently the former derives מִדְּר from נָדַד "wander, depart" (following Targum and Rashi),² while the latter construes it as piel of מָדַד "meas-

¹ The ancient versions show too much confusion to be of any help.

² With reference to those who assume נָדַד to be the root it must be maintained that the poet is not likely to use this word twice in the same verse.

ure" (like Saadya, Ibn Ezra, Moses Chiquitilla, and most of our modern commentators). So far these are the only alternatives within the boundaries of the masoretic text, and although the rendering of RV is an improvement upon that of AV, still the sense remains obscure due to illogical sequence. The phrase **עֶרֶב וּמֹדַע** seems to be like a thorn in the structure of the sentence. Hence those commentators who operate with metre (like Bickell and Beer) prefer to excise it altogether, thus alleviating the lack of balance produced by the dichotomy at **עֶרֶב**. But while obtaining what to them seems a sound metre, they fail to do justice to the principle of parallelism by which the second member of the verse should express an idea somewhat similar to that incorporated in the first. This principle is certainly more vital to Hebrew poetry than the theory of metre.

Of course, the accents in our passage are wrong, showing that already the Masoretes were at sea as to its real meaning. The athnah should be placed at **אָקוּם**, resulting in two equilibrated phrases. But what about the meaning of **עֶרֶב וּמֹדַע**? After a study of Arabic poets I reached the conclusion that these words can mean nothing but this: "and from the former part (literally breast) of the evening". **וּמֹדַע** here, like **עֶרֶב** and its equivalents in Arabic,³ is used metaphorically and signifies "front, forward part". This should not be strange if we consider that other parts of the body are used metaphorically in the

³ Comp. Lane, *Lexicon*, p. 1661, col. 2 f., also Dozy, *Supplement*, I, 822. Lane registers also the following: "The first part or commencement of the day, the night, of the winter, the summer, and the like." Very interesting is the following passage from Hariri's thirteenth makama: **لَمْ يَزَلْ أَهْلِي وَتَعْلِي يَحْتَلُونَ الْقَدْرَ وَيَسِيرُونَ الْقَلْبَ وَتَطْوُونَ الظِّمِرَ وَيُؤَلُونَ الْبَيْدَ** which in a literal translation sounds as follows: "My people and my husband were wont to settle on the breast, and to journey at the heart, to burden the back, to advance the hand." But the commentaries interpret it as follows: "settle on the breast = sit in the first place in the Assembly; journey at the heart = march at the centre or headquarters of the army; mount their friends on the backs of their camels; and confer favors. See De Sacy's and Chenery's translations and notes.

Bible: thus ראש "head" also means „beginning”,⁴ לב "heart" and בטן „belly” also signify “middle”,⁵ while עצם “bone” serves at the same time for „substance”.⁶ Nor is this phenomenon peculiar to Semitic languages. We find it abundantly in Indo-European idioms, where “bosom of the earth”, “womb of the ocean”, „breast of a mountain”, “neck of time” and others have become stereotyped phrases.⁷ I want to call attention particularly to the following quatrain from the eighth Canto of the Kumāra-Samblava of Kālidāsa (translated by A. W. Ryder):

The womb of night envelops slow
 The world with darkness vast and black . . .
 Moon-fingers move the black, black hair
 Of night into its proper place . . .⁸

However, in the personification of time and fractions thereof the Arab poets excel all others, as may be seen from the following examples:

فَقُلْتُ لَهُ لَمَّا تَمَطَّى بِصُلْبِهِ وَأَرَدَتْ أَحْجَازًا وَنَاءً بِكَلْكَلِ

„And I said to it (viz. لَيْل “night”), as it stretched its spine

⁴ The cases are numerous, but interesting for our discussion are Jud. 7¹⁹ ראש השמרת התיכונה “the beginning of the middle watch”, and Lam. 2¹⁹ ראש אשחרות “the beginning of the watches”.

⁵ לִבְיָם “the midst of the sea” is quite frequent in the Bible. Note-worthy is Jon, 23 where דָּבֶן שְׂאוּל is parallel to לִבְיָם. Comp. also بطن خبت “the midst of the valley” in Amrulkais, *Muallakat*, 1. 29.

⁶ As in the frequently recurring phrases עַצְם הַיָּם and עַצְם הַשָּׁמַיִם.

⁷ Thus Milton says:

Mountains on whose barren breast
 The laboring clouds do often rest

and Shakespeare (1 Henry IV., IV. 3. 92):

He deposed the king;
 Soon after that, deprived him of his life;
 And, in the neck of that, task'd the whole state.

⁸ Comp. with this the fifth Makama of Ḥariri:

لَيْلَهُ غَابَتْ سَنَوَاتُهَا إِلَى أَنْ سَابَتْ نَوَائِبُهَا

“a night of which the mixed hues had departed until its hind-locks grew gray in the dawn”.

and pulled along the posteriors and removed the breast" (Amrulkais, *Muallakat*, l. 45);

يَا لَيْلَةً لَمْ تَبِينِ مِنْ الْقَصْرِ كَأَنَّهَا فُبْلَةٌ عَلَى حَدَرٍ
لَمْ تَكُ إِلَّا كَلَا وَلَا وَمَضَّتْ تَدْفَعُ فِي صَدْرِهَا يَدَ الْخَرِّ

"O night thou didst not appear at all, so short thou wert, short as a stolen kiss. It was only as a very nothing and passed away, the hand of dawn thrusting at its breast to repel it" (from the Poems of Umayya b. Abi-š-salt. edited by E. Power in *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale*, V, 2, 152);

شَقَّ جَيْبُ اللَّيْلِ عَنِ نَحْرِ الصَّبَاحِ

"The drapery of night is torn away from the breast of dawn" (quoted by Freytag, *Darstellung der arabischen Verskunst*, p. 433. from a Diwan by Zafi-addin Alhilli). Note also the phrase:

جَاءَ فِي نَحْرِ النَّهَارِ "he came in the first part of the day".⁹

Moreover, not only the breast but even the *parties honteuses* of the body are used in this metaphorical way. حَجْرٌ "buttock" also means "the hinder part of a thing" and is used as an antithesis to صَدْرٌ in the following verse quoted by Lane from the *Taq el-'Aroos*: لَا تَدَبِّرُوا أَعْجَازَ أُمُورٍ قَدَّ وَانَّتْ صُدُورُهَا "Think ye not upon the ends of things whereof the beginnings have passed".¹⁰ اِسْتُ "poder or annu." is also used in connection with time, as e. g. in the phrase اِسْتُ الدَّهْرِ "the first, or beginning, of time".¹¹ قَالَ الْكَيْلِ "the posteriors, or hinder parts, of night" is quite frequent in both classic and modern Arabic.¹²

⁹ In the *Lexicon*, p. 2774, col. 3. Comp. اِسْتُ اللَّيْلِ and عقب and عقب الرقدة "the heel event. end of night" in Stumme, *Tunisische Märchen und Geleichte*, I, 95 and 109.

¹⁰ Comp. *Lanc'*, p. 1960, col. 3.

¹¹ *Lanc'*, p. 56, col. 2f.

¹² Beside *Lanc' Lexicon*, s. v., comp. also Socin, "Der arabische Dialekt

It will be seen then that the construction advocated here for **מדד ערב** is not foreign to Semitic idiom, though not found elsewhere in Hebrew. The Bible has preserved the dual only, referring to the breasts of females, on a par with **שָׁדַיִם**, but it is not impossible that also the singular was in vogue with the general meaning of "breast, chest, front", like **صدر** in Arabic.¹³ This is borne out by the fact that the sing. **דד** is actually used in post-biblical Hebrew with a derivative meaning. Thus in b. Yoma 37a we read that Ben Katin made **י"ב דד לכיוור** "twelve faucets or cocks to the basin"; while Moses ben Maimon (*Yad ha-hazakah*, Lulab, 8 7) speaks of **דד האתרוג**, which, like the Aramaic **פִּיטְמָה**, signifies the "protuberance on the blossom-end of the citron". From this use of **דד** to the combination **דד ערב** "front of evening" there is only a short distance.

But the best criterion in the interpretation of any text is after all the resulting sense and coherence of meaning, and in this respect we notice at once a decided improvement. The verse should read in the original:

אִם-שָׁכַבְתִּי וְאָמַרְתִּי מָתִי אֶקוּם
וּמִדְד־עֶרֶב וְשָׁבַעְתִּי נְדָדִים עֲרִי-נֶשֶׁף

and in the translation:

When I lie down I say: when shall I arise?

And from early eve I keep tossing till early morn.¹⁴

Notice the complete symmetry and perfect parallelism of the

von Mōsul und Mārdin", *ZDMG.*, XXXVII, 197. In this connection it is interesting to note that also the *penis* is used as an object of comparison among the Arabs, comp. Socin, *ibid.*, p. 218: **واحد عربي شاف المنارة قال هذا قالب البئار هذا زب القاع هذا دوكى الله يغزل به من فوق** "A Beduin beheld a minaret and said: this is the form of a cistern, this is the *penis terrae*, this is the spindle with which God spins from a top downwards."

¹³ In fact we find **שד** used in the singular when referring to the breast of the jackal (*Lam.* 4 3), in contradistinction to the dual used of woman's breasts.

¹⁴ **דד ערב** "the breast or forward part of the evening" is here opposed to **נשף** "morning twilight or dawn". "Early eve" and "early morn" yield the same sense and constitute a striking contrast.

two parts of the verse. The idea of the first is repeated in the second part, but, as is customary in Hebrew poetry, the repetition is more forcible and emphatic. Moreover, the metre is evenly balanced, without any change or emendation of the text. As to the unusual waw of **ושבעתי** it is what König styles the *waw apodoseos* or emphatic—copulative waw which is quite frequent in Arabic and occurs also several times in the Bible.¹⁵

¹⁵ König, *Syntax*, p. 615 ff. (§ 415 s ff.). Note Job 15 17 וְנָה קִימִי וְאַפְפִּירָה