

BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

1 Sam. 13 21

THE rendering "pim" at 1 Sam. 13 21 in the new Jewish version of the Scriptures is illuminating in several ways. It exemplifies the utility of excavation; it exemplifies the fact that a Masoretic reading which critics have unanimously condemned as hopelessly corrupt may have been exactly right all the time; it gives intelligibility to the text itself.

The plan of their work forbade the translators to make this justification of the first Masoretic words a basis for any emendation of the words which follow. But obviously the attitude of the LXX in finding the word שקל in the midst of ולשלש קלשון is powerfully supported by "pim". If we say that the fee was a pim for the sharpening of tools listed by name, this calls at once for some mention of those for which the charge was something else than a pim; otherwise why the list of tools, why not let the sentence end at "pim"?

When we have "pim" and a list of tools, and then the letters שקל in a group of letters for which no satisfactory meaning has otherwise been found, it ought to need no further demonstration that the last part of the verse is a list of those for which a shekel was charged. There remains the question how to dispose of the letters surrounding שקל.

We read in the first place, then, that the fee was a pim למחרשות ולאיתם ולשל. Do we hear elsewhere of the של? Yes, in 2 Sam. 6, 7, where again it has been an unsolved difficulty: traditional interpretation makes it an abstract noun, but Klostermann and Smith have already seen and said that it ought to be that upon which Uzzah falls as he is struck down, presumably

a part of the cart. If we may recognize the same word in 1 Sam. 13 21, then we learn that it was a sharp iron. Now we know that a man may die from Jahveh's stroke without other weapon; nevertheless, if the stroke throws him down upon a sharp iron, the mention of the fact seems very pertinent to the record of his death.

In the next place, שקל imperatively requires to be followed by ל, as פים is; and we may regard the dagesh of the Masoretic text as the relic of this additional ל. Supplying this ל, we find that the fee was a shekel לשון ולהקרדמים ולהציב הדרבן. The motive for the higher fee is that the ax is a larger and heavier tool than the hoe or colter, demanding more labor for its sharpening, and that in shoeing the goad the smith had to contribute not only his labor but a piece of iron. As to the preceding piece, we do not know לשון; we know לשון, but not as a piece of iron. Once the לשון is a piece of metal, Achan's לשון of gold. The fact that the English Bible renders this by "wedge" will not seem to anybody to have great evidential value for the interpretation of our passage; nevertheless we may perhaps take a hint from it. The wedge is a tool used since primitive times, heavy enough to make the smith much work in sharpening if it has grown as dull as the Hebrew peasant probably let it grow before he carried it down to Philistia and paid a shekel for sharpening it; and it might well be called לשון. Of course the reading of the noun לשון requires us to assume that the text had originally ללל, which copyists reduced to a single ל with dagesh; but it is not violent to suppose that if ללל occurred in an unintelligible sequence of letters there would be a tendency to simplify the gemination in copying.

What we have thus obtained, if we resist the temptation to supply also a conjunction before שקל, is "and the charge for sharpening was a pim for hoes and colters and *shal*, a shekel for wedge and ax and for shoeing a goad". Here we have given a motive to the listing of the tools that cost a pim, we have put meaning into the unintelligible word in the middle, and we have obtained from this passage a definite indication as to the meaning of an unintelligible word found elsewhere. Our income from the operation is thus considerable; it is time

to look at the expenses, for there are reasons for not being too positive of it all.

In the first place, the proposed emendations give us two singulars in a series of plurals. However, **ררבן** is singular already, and in Judges 9 48 the plural form of **קררם** has singular meaning, while we know little of the syntax of the other two words. In the next place, I find it difficult to think of any sharpened iron that belongs to a cart, or that would be carried in driving a cart, so that a person suddenly struck down should fall upon it; unless it be the goad, and in our passage the goad appears with another name. In the third place, in the use of a wedge it is ordinarily best economy of strength to start the wedge in a cleft made by an ax, so that the wedge does not need to be very sharp: however, if the Hebrew held it long enough before taking it to the smith it might get so dull that it could not be used anyhow. Obviously the effect of the high charge would be to make the sharpening come seldom and hence to make it a very hard job when it was done, and the smith may have worked hard enough to earn what he got. In the fourth place, if we knew the tool to be a wedge (though in fact this is the part of our conjecture that has least foundation) there is no reason why the wedge should not be just as likely to be called **שן** as **לשן**, and **שן** could be got out of the received text just as easily as **לשן**: or one might even retain the **ל** by assuming that the wedge was called by a name that was originally a dialectic variant of **שן**, with different vowel. A fact that should be remembered in all conjecturing, though I think it commonly is not, is that a passage containing an unfamiliar word or words is naturally more exposed to corruption than one in which all the words are familiar, and hence a hundred lines of corrupt text will, if restored to their true original, contain decidedly more hapax-legomena (which, bear in mind, will be words that are not now known to have existed at all) than do a hundred lines of uncorrupted text. This consideration cuts a great part of the foundation from under the whole business of conjecture, since the foundation has generally to consist in an attempt to restore words such as we are already acquainted with; on the other hand, a conjecture which produces

an unheard-of word, which will generally be regarded as the most reckless type of conjecture, may claim at least that it has more chance of being right than any one would allow it at first glance. Ordinarily, to be sure, one will sooner acquiesce in an unintelligible traditional text than create by conjecture an equally unintelligible text; so we simmer down to Porson's "Conjectural readings are worth a farthing a cartload". But in the present instance the sense requires **שקל** and **שקל** lies before our eyes in the traditional text.

Ballard Vale, Mass.

Steven T. Byington

חשך

The Hebrew Lexicon under **חשך** cites Palmyrene Aramaic as using this word in the meanings given by Vogüé. Some users of the Lexicon may not have Vogüé at hand, and it is a safe guess that not every one who could get a look at Vogüé will take the look. It will not be superfluous, therefore, to set forth what I found when I looked up the texts.

The two occurrences that are cited are from bilingual honorific inscriptions for statues of men who have deserved this honor because each of them, among other merits, **חסך** certain moneys. The first presumption, to me, is that the word will have the same meaning in the two passages. Vogüé recognizes no such presumption, but gives quite dissimilar meanings, each of which he arrives at by rejecting the testimony of the Palmyrenes themselves as furnished by their Greek translation.

The Greek of inscription 15 translates **חסך** by *ἀφειδήσαντα*. Inscription 6 is defective, but according to Vogüé's restoration we should read *ἀφειδήσαντι* there also. Vogüé's note on 15 remarks that the meaning of **חסך** as shown by Hebrew usage is exactly contrary to *ἀφειδήσαντα*, and that the meaning *φείδω*, not *ἀφειδέω*, is congruous to the other statements about the man's services. But here is the same fallacy that one may observe sometimes in certain works of Biblical criticism, of starting from the text as if it were a free composition, and not observing that the author is likely to have been bound by the facts, whether actual or traditional, which he had to record.

If the man had actually deserved well by ἀφειδεῖν his own money, the inscription could do nothing but record that, even if his official position had given him opportunity to deserve well by φείδειν the public money.

In restoring ἀφειδήσαντι for the lacuna in 6, Vogüé shows that he does not assume the Greek word to have been any slip of the stone-cutter of 15; his assumption is therefore that in Palmyrene usage this word had the opposite of its natural Greek meaning. One expects, therefore, that he shall interpret it the same way in 6. But he does not; and indeed it would require some ingenuity, though hardly more ingenuity than he uses. That which the man נור דגרין די דהב עתיקין in 6 was a תלת מאה, in Greek χρυσά παλαιά δηναρία τριακοσια ἀνάλωμα [ωμ]α- [τ]ω[ν]. Vogüé notes "La formule דגרין עתיקין = δηνάριος παλαιά correspond à celle qui se trouve sur les médailles pour indiquer la remise faite par l'empereur de l'arriéré dû au fisc... On peut aussi la considérer comme... anciennes espèces... aurei du haut empire, d'un poids supérieur..." Despite his profession of uncertainty, he feels so sure of the former half of this note that without any other foundation, so far as I see, he conjectures for the word נור = ἀνάλωμα the meaning "debt", and, as the end of the chain of inference, makes נסח here mean "remit".

But if instead of taking all this interpretation as canonical we start from the modest-looking assumptions that the Palmyrenes understood the two languages of their city and that the same word will most probably have the same meaning when found in similar contexts, we may buttress these assumptions by remarking that the normal Greek meaning of ἀνάλωμα harmonizes beautifully with the normal Greek meaning of ἀφειδεῖν, and that both the men honored are perfectly likely to have been honored for "generously spending" their money in services to their fellows.

My conclusion is that if anybody feels himself to need more light on the meaning of נסח than the Hebrew Lexicon gives him, he will do well to read his Palmyrene texts in the original rather than in Vogüé's translation.

Ballard Vale, Mass.

Steven T. Byington.

אביר 1 Sam. 21 8

One hears nowadays that אביר in 1 Sam. 21 8 has superlative adjectival sense, "the mightiest of" &c. But if Doeg was the mightiest of either Saul's herdsmen or Saul's guardsmen the mention of the fact would stand unmotivated in the text. And if such had been the meaning the words would have been אביר רעי שאול; the use of the periphrastic genitive shows that we are speaking not of the אביר of Saul's רעים but of Saul's אביר רעים. So this text cannot be an exception to the rule that אביר is substantive; and presumably אביר רעים is some sort of office. I conjecture that with large herds like the king's there was so much specialization of function that one man was engaged as the fighting man of the company, whose chief qualifications were willingness to fight at any moment and ability to kill any number of robbers or lions. Such a character would suit the part that Doeg plays.

Ballard Vale, Mass.

Steven T. Byington

נרגלות

Surely the interpretation "bannered hosts" for נרגלות is, as Graetz says, mere conjecture. But if we are to conjecture, the parallelism in Cant. 6 10 bids us conjecture rather a celestial luminary. There are two luminaries which the tradition of the world recognizes as "terrible" and which would be appropriately named by a plural word meaning "bannered": (a) the aurora borealis, (b) comets. History records that there have been times when the aurora borealis has appeared conspicuously in the latitude of Palestine often enough to be likely to have a name given to it; that it has not appeared very often is just what is wanted, for this is what makes it "terrible". On the other hand, I believe every nation which has observed comets has observed that comet differs from comet and hence that they are to be spoken of in the plural. I should regard either of these interpretations as convincing if it had not the other to compete with it; at any rate I see no occasion for considering any third interpretation.

Ballard Vale, Mass.

Steven T. Byington