

HEBREW METRE AND THE TEXT OF THE PSALMS

IN the *Westminster Commentary* on the Psalms (1931) I made a protest against the excessive use of textual emendation, especially when an emendation is based on metrical grounds. This protest has called forth counter-protests from reviewers, which impel me to return to the subject. It is an important matter, for the number of emendations put forward by modern commentators such as C. A. Briggs, B. Duhm, H. Gunkel, and S. Mowinkel is very great, and the text of the Psalter suffers a great change in their hands.

The point at issue is, Does the available evidence, external and internal, point to the use of rigid metre, or only to an approximation to the strict forms which may rightly be called 'metres'? If there be only approximation, emendation on 'metrical' grounds must be a hazardous proceeding. My thesis is that both kinds of evidence taken together are only sufficient to prove an approximation, and that modern commentators in their eagerness to correct the text on 'metrical grounds' leave no room for the slow development of Hebrew Prosody. Their practice is based on the unconfessed assumption that Hebrew Prosody sprang forth full-grown at birth from some mighty Hebrew brain, while it is surely more probable that in Israel as among other peoples simpler and less rigid forms were earlier in use than the stricter and more elaborate. In the case of ancient Italy, A. W. Verrall writes: 'The native verse called *Saturnian*, which existed before the importation of Greek culture, was so rough as to be sometimes hardly distinguishable from prose' (*Companion to Latin Studies*, p. 830). So St Jerome, in a passage to be quoted below, declares that the rhythm of the Hebrew poetical books sometimes proceeds 'without bondage to number of feet'.

Some scholars ignore the qualification which St Jerome makes and thereby tacitly deny any growth to Hebrew Prosody, at least as we see it in the Psalms. It is easier to do this, if the contents of the Psalter are all assigned to one period, or to two half-periods of very late date. But this is only to add conjecture to conjecture, and it is worthy of note that Hermann Gunkel (1926) does not accept many of the late datings given by Bernhard Duhm (1922). The swing of the pendulum is away from the Maccabean age.

It may be that those who criticize the text of the Psalms from the standpoint of strict metre are moved by the fact that strict metre is found in other Semitic poetry. This fact, however, must be taken in its full context.

The Arabs possess rigid metres, and the Syrians used to number the syllables which go to a line of their poetry. On the other hand it must be borne in mind that both the poems of the Arabs and the hymns of the Syrians are centuries later in date than the Psalms. It is reasonable to suppose that the compositions of Arab and Syrian, as compared with the Psalms of the Hebrews, represent a later stage in the development of poetic art.

It must be added that something else beside strict metre is found in early Arabic literature, especially in the Kur'an. Here is found a literary form called *saj'*, which may be described as rimed prose. As a specimen I give a rendering of Sura xx *vv.* 1-7 slightly paraphrased in order to call attention to the rime with which each verse ends. The lines in the original are not uniform in length.

Not to vex thee give we Kur'an in thy hand,
 But for him who is pious as a warning command,
 From the Creator of Earth and Heaven's lofty strand.
 See on His throne the Merciful stand,
 For He is lord of heaven, sea, sky, and land.
 Raise not thy voice, for He knoweth e'en secrets hid deep in the
 sand,
 And to Him the sole God belong the Great Names in their
 glorious band.

Buchanan Gray (*Forms of Hebrew Poetry* p. 44) suggests that a more appropriate rendering for *saj'* would be 'unmetrical poetry'. I have referred to it here to suggest that, if we approach our subject with a presupposition drawn from an acquaintance with Arabic literature, we ought to be ready to recognize, in the Hebrew writings, not only poetry and prose properly so called, but also a third form which stands between them. Further, if there be any development in the history of literature, it is right to suppose that in Israel some plainly imperfect form, akin perhaps to *saj'*, preceded in date the form of strict metre. But again historical analogy suggests that the old form would persist for a time by the side of the new. So in the Psalter we may expect unmetrical passages to survive even by the side of others which shew a decided approach to metrical form.

External evidence suggests that the case is still more extraordinary as it appears to the Western mind. It seems that the unmetrical may succeed the metrical in the same composition. 'Interdum quoque', writes St Jerome, 'rhythmus ipse dulcis et tinnulus fertur numeris pedum solutis; quod metrici magis quam simplex lector intelligunt.' *At times, moreover, the rhythm sweet and piercing is borne onwards of its own motion free from bondage to 'numbers', a fact more intelligible to*

prosodists than to the unlearned reader (Hieronymi in librum Job Praefatio). Herein lies a snare for the unwary emendator who looks to 'metre' to support his emendations. It is his own fault when he goes wrong, for, if he is not warned by the words of St Jerome, he should take warning from his study of the present Hebrew text, in the course of which he should discover that correction of the 'metre' too often means an impoverishment of the meaning by the rejection of some word or passage which is too rich in thought to be lightly sacrificed.

This surely is the case in the treatment which some critics deal out to Ps. lxxx. In the Masoretic text three sections or strophes are clearly marked off by a refrain, viz., vv. 1-3, 4-7, 16 b-19. But the middle passage of the Psalm, vv. 8-16 a is not divided up by the refrain, and stands by itself, having its own subject. It describes the fate of Israel under the figure of a vine which is planted with care and flourishes at first, only at a later period to be neglected and left to the ravages of wild beasts. Duhm and Gunkel deal (in part) with the case by inserting by conjecture the usual refrain after v. 10 and again after v. 13. They thus obtain a Psalm of five strophes, but it must be confessed that the refrain comes in awkwardly both after v. 10 and after v. 13; especially does it break the obvious connexion between vv. 10 and 11.

But if we reject emendation by a double insertion of the refrain, what account can be given of vv. 8-16a? The objection that the passage is unmetrical falls to the ground, if we accept Jerome's definite statement that in Hebrew poetry the metrical is allowed to pass into the unmetrical. We cannot reject vv. 8-16a on any formal ground of Prosody. Neither can we reject the passage because it introduces a parable without any warning. That is just the way of Biblical Hebrew; it makes no use of any later formula such as *Unto what is the matter like?* Moreover in substance vv. 8-16a link themselves with perfect naturalness to vv. 1-7. The thought of these verses is that the Shepherd of Israel who once led Israel 'like a flock' has now turned against them; vv. 8-16a give the same thought in another form. The Shepherd becomes the Husbandman, the flock becomes the vine, but the story is the same. Divine care has been changed into Divine wrath against Israel. The thought is the same, but the expression of it has been enriched by the addition of this parable. The Vine brought into the land of hills, its natural home, has there been given up (as it seems) to destruction. Then let the parable remain entire, unbroken by a merely formal refrain!

Another Psalm to which it is proposed to do much injury in the name of metre is Ps. xci. Duhm puts forward an arrangement of it in nine stanzas of four lines each, common metre. But this vigorous Psalm does not fit easily into these formal stanzas. Three verses in particular,

4, 7, and 15, protest against this rearrangement. Each of these verses contains in MT three clauses (or lines), which form a well-knit whole. They do not easily link themselves to the neighbouring *vv.*, which contain two lines only.

Let us take *v.* 4 and look to the meaning before we study the versification. This is a serious Psalm, and not a mere exercise in hymnology. Perhaps no Psalm is fuller than this of reference to dangers, and no Psalmist is more deeply concerned in giving the reassuring message of JEHOVAH's protecting care. Is there then anything superfluous in the language of *v.* 4?—so that (as Duhm thinks) one clause can be spared to be transferred to the end of *v.* 7 in order to form *v.* 7 into a stanza of four lines? If so we can leave *v.* 4*ab* with Duhm to complete the 'stanza' which begins with *v.* 3, and with 4*c* we can complete the 'stanza' which begins with the three clauses of *v.* 7. So by transferring one line we are able to construct (or to 'restore') two 'stanzas'. If poetry is to be made by mechanical means, what could be more clever than this?

But let us study *v.* 4 in its traditional context. 'He shall deliver thee', the Psalmist writes in *v.* 3, 'from the snare of the fowler.' The metaphor is taken from Birdland, and in *v.* 4 the Psalmist returns to Birdland. He remembers that JEHOVAH is as an eagle (Deut. xxxii 11) in His care for His little ones.

'He shall cover thee with his pinions,
And under his wings shalt thou take refuge:
His truth (*better*, faithfulness) is (*or* shall be) a shield and a
buckler.'

Duhm would remove the third line: but can it be spared? Readers answer perhaps that the parallelism is complete without it, and that the metaphor of the 'shield' introduces a new, perhaps a strange idea. But it is just the 'shield' which links *v.* 4 to *v.* 5, where mention is made of the 'arrow' that flieth by day. A succession of different metaphors is not alien from Hebrew literary usage.

But the serious objection to Duhm's proposal is that it ignores the fact that the addition of a third line to two parallel lines, the use of the tristich, may be said to be a practice of this Psalmist, since he uses it thrice in these sixteen verses. And manifestly the Psalmist has a purpose in his procedure, for the third line will be found on examination to emphasize or to complete his thought.

In *v.* 4 the third line both emphasizes and completes the Psalmist's assurance to his hearer. The parallel lines (*v.* 4*ab*) are not as complete in their reassurance as they seem to be. They promise safety for the moment. But the Psalmist looks beyond the need of the passing

moment, and asserts God's character as the true ground of confidence: 'Thou shalt take refuge under his wings—until this danger be past—but His faithfulness is the permanent reason for confidence,—once a shield, always a shield'.

No less objection lies against Duhm's interference with the text of *v. 7*. Here the first two clauses give no assurance of safety; the third clause is needed: 'It shall not come nigh thee'. The assurance is final. No mention of shield or buckler is appropriate after this, yet Duhm would make up his 'stanza' by adding the line (torn from its context in *v. 4*), 'His truth is shield and buckler'.

Lastly in *v. 15* Duhm proposes (haltingly indeed) to insert a wholly unnecessary clause (founded on Isa. lviii 9) after *15a*:

'He shall call upon me, and I will answer him:'

[He shall cry, and I will say, Here am I!]

Better, surely, to stand by MT and be content to read after *15a*:

'I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him, and honour him.'

Here is the third instance of the Psalmist's telling use of the tristich. In the text unemended there is a happy natural climax:

I will answer him :
I will be with him in trouble—Divine Presence :
I will deliver him—Divine Intervention :
I will honour him—Divine Blessing.

Duhm's interpolated clause only spoils the climax.

In MT on the other hand for the third time in this Psalm we find a tristich with the third member standing outside the parallelism and producing a marked effect by its position.

The tristich is not a rare form in Hebrew literature, and yet critics who prefer smoothness to sense seem to prefer an unbroken series of the distich even when a tristich by its isolation adds the necessary finishing touch to the author's expression. An illustration of this strange preference is found in Gunkel's treatment of the opening of Ps. ii 1, 2.

1. 'Why do the nations rage,
And the peoples imagine a vain thing?
2. The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD, and against his anointed'—

Gunkel proposes to omit the third member of *v. 2*. He is thus able to arrange the Psalm in twelve couplets, with one case only of a line standing out of his regular measure at the end.

But he obtains this regularity of form in *v. 2* by sacrificing a clause

which rings in the Psalm with challenging power. The first two clauses describe a situation which was all too common in the ancient world: the nations are astir and war is raising its head. But the Psalmist marks with astonishment and horror that there is a new feature in this war: it is directed 'Against JEHOVAH and against His Anointed'. He asks, 'Why—Hoping to gain what—do the kings of the earth set themselves *against JEHOVAH and His Anointed?*' A clause which supplies so sharp a point to the four preceding clauses is surely not to be rejected as a mere gloss. On the grammatical side it is needed to supply an antecedent to the pronoun suffixes of the two clauses which follow—'*their bands, their cords*'. As regards external evidence it should be said that no tell-tale version omits the clause, neither LXX, nor Peshitta, nor Targum ('to rebel in the presence of JEHOVAH, and to strive against his Messiah'). Should a fancy about metre be allowed to prevail against these facts?

Among the unconvincing emendations of the Metricists are a good many cases of the proposed omission of single words in order to bring a line within the number of accented syllables ('beats') which are assigned to the line in a particular Psalm. Thus in Ps. i 3 (MT) the righteous man is likened to a tree 'planted by the streams (פְּלִינִי) of water'. Here is a vivid picture of the husbandman's care: his trees are planted beside the water-channels (פְּלִינִי) which he himself has dug to irrigate his land. But if the word 'streams' be omitted half the picture is destroyed, and yet Gunkel would read simply 'planted by the water'. Like a faulty scribe he assimilates the reading of the Psalm to the wording of the parallel passage in Jer. xvii 8.

Another instance is the treatment of Ps. civ 31 by C. A. Briggs in the I. C. C. The verse runs:

Let the glory of JEHOVAH endure (יְהִי) for ever:

Let JEHOVAH rejoice in his works.

The words, according to Dr Briggs, are a kind of echo of Gen. i 31, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good'. Therefore he re-writes the verse of the Psalm:

The glory of Yahweh endureth forever

Yahweh is glad in his works.

A later editor, he says, missing the connexion with Genesis, has inserted the jussive verb (יְהִי) and made the line too long.

We may agree with Briggs that here is an allusion to Genesis, but surely the verse alludes more directly to the verses of the Psalm which immediately precede it. The Psalmist devotes the first twenty-eight verses to a recital of all that is bright and beautiful in Creation, but he cannot persist to the end in ignoring the fact of death. In v. 29 he calls to mind the truth that, when JEHOVAH hides his face, His creatures

die. In *v.* 30 he hastens to add that in the midst of death the work of Creation still goes on. JEHOVAH is God of Life.

Death at work! and Life at work! The Psalmist finds that the time has come for an Appeal to the God of Life, for Prayer indeed. Let the glory of the LORD, His glory in bringing to Life, continue for ever! So he prays. Let JEHOVAH *rejoice* in His works! Let Him not reject them, and cast them away to perish! His power is awful. His mere touch makes the earth quake. May the sinners only and the wicked experience His power to destroy! May God's glory be manifested in His preservation of the happy universe which the Psalmist has described! Surely a prayer is in place here, and the jussive form of the verb (יהי) gives due warning that a prayer is beginning. The use of the sudden prayer has parallels in the Psalter, e.g. lii 9; xci 9; cvi 47. Surely in civ 31 again the metrical correction involves a serious loss to the meaning of the Psalm.

Further the fact should not be ignored that emendation on metrical grounds is beset with a special uncertainty. Take as an instance Ps. cxxxvii 1. The verse is said by the Metricists to be *überladen*. In MT it runs:

By the rivers of Babylon
There we sat down,
Yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.

In the Hebrew the words fall heavily one by one like sighs or tears, but the Metricists would put weeping into strict metre. So Duhm omits the reference to the homeland and re-writes the verse:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat,
And there we wept.

On the other hand Bickell (*apud* Duhm) writes:

By the rivers of Babylon we wept
When we remembered Zion.

Bickell is surely right in retaining both of the great rival names, Babylon—Zion. And is not Duhm right in retaining the word which shows the exiles in the very attitude of mourners, *sitting* on the ground? And are not Bickell and Duhm both wrong in what they reject? Do they not mutilate the picture which lies before them in its completeness in the Masoretic text?

Another striking instance of emendation (which is hard to justify) made in the name of the metre is found in Ps. xxv 7:

Remember not the sins of my youth, [nor my transgressions:
According to thy loving kindness remember thou me]
For thy goodness' sake, O JEHOVAH.

Here Duhm has two objections against MT. In the first place the

verse forms a tristich instead of a distich, and secondly the first line of it contains four beats (accents) instead of three, and so departs from the metre of the other lines. So he omits the bracketed words and reduces the verse thus:

Remember not the sins of my youth
For thy goodness' sake, O JEHOVAH.

Thus Duhm is able to conform *v.* 7 to his metrical scheme, but it must be added that he makes it unconformable with *v.* 6. He does not allow weight to the fact that the 'sins' and 'transgressions' of *v.* 7 balance and answer to the 'tender mercies' and 'loving kindnesses' of *v.* 6. Nor when Duhm would reject the word 'transgressions' does he consider how much the Psalmist's plea would lose in strength if the word were absent. This Psalm is no literary trifle, but a very earnest prayer for forgiveness from one who knows that he has offended his God. He is not content to speak of his 'sin': a 'sin' may be a negative fault, whereas he is conscious of the active offence of rebellion against JEHOVAH. He says 'my transgressions' using the Heb. פֶּשָׁע (*pésha'*), 'rebellion', the very word which introduces the searching confession of Ps. li in *vv.* 1 and 3, while the same root is found in פֶּשְׁעִים (*póshē'im*), 'transgressors', or better, 'rebels' in *v.* 13. If it be urged in favour of Duhm's use of the knife that in Ps. xxv *vv.* 6, 7 contain repetitions and are overfull, it may be answered that these repetitions are in place as indications of the urgency of the sinner who prays for forgiveness. Finally it should be noted that Duhm on *v.* 10 may be urged effectively against Duhm on *v.* 7. On *v.* 10 Duhm's comment is, *Der Stil ist hier bare Prosa.* If the commentator allow *v.* 10 to pass unemended as 'bare prose', why should not *v.* 7 also be allowed to pass unchallenged? In form as well as in 'style' *v.* 10 is prosaic: Jerome's statement that Hebrew verse sometimes passes into prose should have commended itself to Duhm in this place.

I hope that I have said enough in the foregoing pages to show that the subject is a highly important one. O.T. scholars of all nations are apt to forget that emendation at its best is only learned guessing, and that its right use is that of a weapon held in reserve for desperate cases. Emendation is of the nature of a game, and has the fascination of a game: it is often played for its own sake and the loss of sound learning. Even where the text is certainly corrupt, a plausible emendation may take us still farther from the underlying fact. Of course all this is known to the commentators, but they pay little heed to it. 'Trotzdem', writes Gunkel, 'habe ich mich mit schwerem Herzen entschlossen, mich auf das hohe Meer der Konjecturalkritik zu begeben, und habe eine unendliche Zeit und Mühsal daran gesetzt.' The lure of the

game—a game of hazard—has been too strong for this learned writer as for many others. It is so unfortunately easy to cut the Gordian knot by emendation, or even to imagine a Gordian knot where there is only a simple tie.

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PSEUDO-CLEMENT AND OVID

I HAVE read with interest Dr M. R. James's discovery of an alphabetical catalogue of the loves of the gods in the Clementine *Recognitions* and *Homilies*,¹ which I think is new; it certainly had never occurred to me before that the passages were originally alphabetical. I cannot find an exact parallel in any author I know; the lists in Hyginus shew no trace of alphabetical arrangement that I can see, nor does that in pseudo-Tertullian, *de execrandis gentium diis*,² *ad fin.* But I think there are signs that Ovid knew of some such catalogue, possibly even the same one that pseudo-Clement had before him. If this is so, then the author of this ancient equivalent of Lemprière is someone older than Appion.

The passage I have in mind is *Metamorphoses* vi 103-120. Like those in the *Recognitions* and in pseudo-Tertullian, it is an attack on the loose morals of the gods; Arachne is weaving her web and being as insulting as she can in her choice of subjects. Up to this point, I can see nothing alphabetical in the arrangement, but now,

Maeonis elusam designat imagine tauri
 Europam
 fecit et Asterien aquila luctante teneri, 108
 fecit olorinis Ledam recubare sub alis;
 addidit ut satyri celatus imagine pulchram
 Iuppiter implerit gemino Nycteida fetu,
 Amphitryon fuerit cum te, Tirynthia, cepit,
 aureus ut Danaen, Asopida luserit ignis,
 Mnemosynen pastor, uarius Deoida serpens.

The heroines in question are Europa, Asterie, Leda, Antiope, Alkmene, Danae, Aigina, and then two goddesses, Mnemosyne and Persephone. Follows a catalogue of the loves of Poseidon:—

Te quoque mutatum toruo, Neptune, iuuenco
 uirgine in Aeolia posuit; tu uisus Enipeus
 gignis Aloidas, aries Bisaltida fallis,

¹ *J.T.S.* xxxiii (1932), pp. 262-265.

² Printed in Oehler's edition of Tertullian, vol. ii pp. 766-768; but the only critical edition is that of E. Bickel in *Rhein. Mus.* 1927 p. 394 sqq.

et te flaua comas frugum mitissima mater
sensit equom, sensit uolucrum crinita colubris
mater equi uolocris, sensit delphina Melantho.

i.e. Poseidon in various disguises has been the lover of Arne (daughter of Aiolos), Tyro (see λ 241), Theophane (see Hyginus, *fab.* 188), Demeter, an Erinys (scholiast on Ψ 346), and Melantho.

A prose-author like pseudo-Clement may be content to copy down names from a catalogue just as they come; a poet can hardly be expected to do so, if only for convenience of scansion; and Ovid, if indeed he is using an alphabetical list, has not adhered to it rigidly; thus, in dealing with Zeus, he has put Europa's bull first because it makes the best picture, and has then brought two bird-disguises together. But, even so, the departures from the order of the alphabet are but slight; I give the names as I suppose them to have stood originally, putting in italics those that have been moved from their Ovidian order: Asterie, Antiope, Alkmene, Aigina, *Danae, Europa, Leda*, Mnemosyne, Persephone. Then, for Poseidon: Arne, Demeter, Erinys, Melantho, *Theophane, Tyro.*

Arachne, when Pallas interrupts her, is going on with other deities and their loves:—

est illic agrestis imagine Phoebus, 122

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Liber ut Erigonen falsa deceperit uua,
ut Saturnus equo geminum Chirona crearit, 125

i.e. Apollo, Dionysos, Kronos.

It may very well have been, then, that there existed a large list in which the gods were arranged as follows: Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, then the rest in alphabetical order; and, under the name of each god, those of the heroines and goddesses whom he had favoured with his attentions in disguise, arranged in alphabetical, but not sub-alphabetical order. Being of good date (first century B.C., or earlier) this would be no mere catalogue, but a work of curious learning, giving such particulars as the parentage of the women concerned, the place of the intrigue, the names of the offspring and their subsequent adventures, references to the authors who told the stories in question, and so on. On this, or on excerpts and compendia made from it, the not unlearned author of the pseudo-Clementina may well have drawn, after it had already served Ovid and no doubt many others besides.

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ANTI-JUDAICA—THREE QUESTIONS

IN studying the Christian *Antijudaica* from the first century to the Renaissance I have found many difficult passages in which I have been obliged to consult friends and experts, and I am deeply indebted to them for the help they have given. But occasionally even they have failed me. Here are three examples. I have, it is true, suggestions of my own upon each, but these do not convince other people. And, on the other hand, their suggestions have not convinced me. It seems best, therefore, to let the passages speak for themselves. I shall be very grateful if scholars, who, for example, have access to MSS, can throw light upon any or all of them.

1. 'Anastasius' (probably cent. xi). Migne *P. G.* lxxxix col. 1248 B. Did not John the Baptist witness to Him? . . . Λοιπὸν Νικόδημος ὁ ἄρχων ἡμῶν, καὶ Ναθαναήλ, καὶ Ἰωσήφ ὁ ἀπ' Ἀρμαθίας, καὶ Βιζῆς καὶ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος, οἱ καὶ συνέφαγον αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ γάμῳ Σίμωνος τοῦ Γαλιλαίου, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ εἰς οἶνον μετέβαλεν.

What is the meaning of Bizes (*Bizas*, Canisius, iii 141)?

Who is intended? Is there any other example of one of Our Lord's early followers being called by this name?

2. *De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagogae—Dialogus* (between A.D. 437 and 476). Printed in Augustine's works, Migne *P. L.* 42 [Aug. viii] col. 1134 (bottom).

'Quia officina et mulieres tuas depilato capite ac decalvato in asinis saepe vidi damnatas.' The immediate context is unpleasant, referring to the sanctity or otherwise of circumcision. What does 'officina' represent? Is it a corruption of a Greek word? Other Greek terms are found in this extraordinarily interesting document, which deserves a modern critical edition.

3. Amulo, *C. Judaeos* (A.D. 846) ch. xxxix. Migne *P. L.* 116, col. 168. 'Nuncupant eum [Our Lord] sua lingua *Ussum Hamizri*. Quod dicitur Latine, Dissipator Aegyptius . . . affirmantes eum gentis suae Dissipatorem Aegyptiacum.'

What is the exact form of the Hebrew or Aramaic word that underlies *Ussum*? Jerome on Isa. viii 11 (Vallarsi iv 123) interprets *Sammai* as *dissipator*, which is there presumably from the root *Shāmēm*.

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