THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW AND OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF

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“OF CABBAGES AND KINGS”—OR QUEANS

Notes on Ben Sira 36:18–21

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In Ben Sira 36:18–37:15 we find four roughly analogous sections on the subject of foods (36:18–20), women (36:21–26), friends (37:1–6), and advisers (37:7–15). These sections are now of very different lengths and degrees of development, perhaps because of the accretion of other proverbial material on these themes, which elsewhere too have excited the sages of Israel to eloquence; but it can be seen that each started with a thematic statement of either pattern A, for example,

Every meat doth the belly eat yet is one meat more pleasant than another (36:18)

or pattern B, for example,

Every friend sayeth: I am a friend; But there is a friend who is (only) friend in name (37:1, cf. 37:7), i.e. schematically:

There are all sorts of X but one X is better than others utterly bad.

The introductory verse to the section on women, 36:21, is formally and verbally close to pattern A:

A woman will receive any man, yet is one woman more pleasant than another.

The Greek presents this verse in its correct position, at the start of the section on women, and in a form roughly equivalent to the above translation:

36:21 does not give us the sense that we require. Here we have a first hemistich that tells us that there are all sorts of men that a woman can marry (or whatever the odd term householder would mean); and yet the second hemistich (which also agrees formally with the pattern of the surrounding verses) shows us that such a first hemistich, though making an intellectually conceivable statement, is incoherent with its context. To contrast properly with the second hemistich we need rather, as the French commentator Lévi saw—

2. The objections raised against the substantial authenticity of these Cairo Geniza MSS of Ben Sira were already laid to rest by A. A. Di Lella in his Hebrew Text of Sirach: a Text-Critical and Historical Study, Studies in Classical Literature, 1 (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966); see also my review in CBQ, 30 (1968), 88–91. The Ben Sira MS subsequently discovered by Yigael Yadin at Masada and edited by him in The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1965) and in Étude-Israel, 8 (1967), 1–45, shows that the whole dispute was one of the aberrations of scholarship.

3. I. Lévi, L'Ecclesiastique, ou la Sagesse de Jésus, Fils de Sir, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études: Sciences Religieuses, vol. 10, nos. 1–11 (Paris: Leroux, 1898–1901) 2: 172–73. The difficulty was also sensed by earlier commentators. Typical of their suggestions is that of J. Knabenbauer’s commentary on Ecclesiasticus in Curris Scripturae Sacras (Paris: Leithleiwux, 1902). He glosses “omnia masculum excipiet mulier” by “debet nubere quicumque demum ei assignatur, cf. L(estré) Fr(itzsche) R(yssel)”; and explains “ipsa itaque mulier non potest discernere; et aliter res se habet ex parte viri; illa potest et debet discernere quam in matrimonium ducanurus est.” Although such a thought would restore coherence to the distich, the words crucial for making the contrast are unfortunately not in the text but only in Knabenbauer’s exegesis.
they see these things clearly in France—a statement on the many types of women that a man can choose to marry.

Either one of two very simple corrections to the Hebrew can, however, restore this needed sense.

כָּל זַכָּה ונָפְּלָה שָׁאָלָה
call zakah navele shalah
ואָל שָׁאָלָה נָפְּלָה הנָה

Every male cleaveth unto a woman 

By altering the word division (transferring the final ה from the end of the verb to the start of the word וְנַפְּלוּ) and by correcting what remains of the verb, either into וְנַפְּלוּ or into וְנַפְּלוּ, we get the statement about the many types of women which we need, and which contrasts properly with the second hemistich; and we gain in the process a statement which conforms to the facts of life—a criterion not to be neglected in editing the shrewd sages of the ancient East. We all get married, but not everyone gets a Helen of Troy.

That the above emendation does not strain the material and palaeographical possibilities of textual corruption in the second century B.C. will be readily granted. The wrong word division, and the consequent changes of the verb, will have occurred very early in the textual tradition, because the error—surely a conjunctive error—affected at a very early date the common archetype of LXX and of the Geniza MS. It will have taken place under the influence of the form of verses like 36:18, where כָּל זַכָּה is the object of the verb and not, as here, its subject—corruptions naturally have their own mechanical reasons which should not be construed as arguments for the good quality of the resultant text—but against nonsense, however well attested, the Bentleian canon of ratio et res ipsa must prevail.

In both the Hebrew and the Syriac versions, 36:18 is followed immediately by 36:19. In the Hebrew MS B, however, 36:21 is placed between 36:18 and the remaining verses on foods (36:19–20). It is clearly misplaced here. Moreover, in the place where it should come, after 36:20, we find a peculiar verse which occurs in none of the other versions.

This verse is transcribed by the editors in various ways. All agree in reading

call zakah shalah

The second word is transcribed by Peters, by Lévi, by Smend, and by Segal. Peters translates הבש as "Jeden Erschlagenen frisst das Getier, aber die eine Zuchtigung ist angenehmer als die andere," a translation that lacks something in coherence (!) and could perhaps be improved by giving the sense of "corpse / thing slain." Segal's text is similar in meaning: "a wild beast eats all animals that it has killed (= מַעְשֵׂה), but not all the meats are of equal quality." Smend saves himself from the duty of translating his text by maintaining that the verse is a senseless variant conflated from 36:18 and 36:21. Lévi suggests no translation of his הבש, asking whether it might be a mistake for הבש (from the verb הבש, "nourish oneself"), and observing furthermore that the sense of הבש is far from certain.

Two words then are causing our difficulties, הבש and הבש. The readings הבש and הבש must be rejected on palaeographical grounds. Of the materially possible readings הבש, הבש, and הבש, the first three are lexicographically or materially of dubious digestibility, even for wild animals. הבש, however, and this is perhaps the easiest

4. Cf. Gen. 2:24 with רְדָק instead of רְדָק and רְדָק instead of רְדָק (cf. perhaps LXX Mas a d p d a): does the modified form of the verse no longer imply a reference to marriage? The reader can supply for himself modern proverbial parallels.

5. If both the form and the preposition be allowable, the יִה will have been misread as יִה, and the remaining consonants will have suffered metathesis after the erroneous word division.

6. In this case the י ה will have been misread as י ה, and the י will have become י ה. A פִּד י ה would be unexpected but פִּד י ה could be a further Aramaism, in orthography also, for a qal י ה is the standard Syriac equivalent of י ה, cf. Gen. 2:24. The sense of the verb in Jewish Aramaic is analogous, though it is not, to my knowledge, used about matrimony. Hopefully we show good taste in refusing to speculate about a possible reading with פִּד י ה.

7. For another conjunctive error that has affected the tradition of Ben Sira at a similarly high date, see my "Notes and Queries on 'The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada,' " in the festschrift for W. F. Albright, Eretz-Israel, 9 (1969), 116–17.
ruptured into the common second? Like our predecessors, we find and dig up with the mean perfectly plausible sense for the first hemistich; but what of the truffles; admit—and the resultant sense harmonizes perfectly with the best acceptable meaning. The verb "chercher" Press, p. Arabe-Francais PP. Dominicains, 1897), 2: 81, each translated:

The verb was subsequently changed to the feminine in consequence of the corruption of verses whose sense was obscure or corrupt; and the corrupt Syriac has in fact omitted not only this verse but the probably adjacent 36:21 as and, because it causes a slight elevation in the level of the soil; see R. Montagne, La civilization du désert (Paris: Hachette, 1947), p. 24 (a reference for which I thank R. P. R. de Vaux O.P.). I can find no ancient reference from the Near East to the use of pigs or dogs for finding and digging up truffles; however, Prof. Zohary tells me that he has seen the Beduin in Syria use dogs (though not pigs) to locate them. Even this verse does not necessarily imply that animals were employed to dig up truffles for their masters, but only that they have a tendency to dig them up on their own account; it is indeed for this reason that pigs have, as indirectly attested by Prov. 11:22, rings in their noses.

15. Its formal closeness to 36:18, 21, could be used to argue either for its authenticity (it will even have belonged, with them, to Ben Sira's source) or alternatively for its being an early marginal gloss (being added because of its formal similarity, it will have been inserted in various copies after different verses). The aberrant positions of this verse and of verse 21 are not satisfactorily explained by saying that only one of them is a gloss, for we would still have to explain the odd position of 36:21 in MS B. One could equally well explain the evidence of the Hebrew MSS by postulating that the two formally similar verses simply swapped places; or alternatively one could assume that, in one of the MSS that preceded MS B, the verse on truffles once came directly before 21 and subsequently (by homoeoarchton and homoeoteleutcin) has stood together after 36:18, and after a similar haplography (this time of the former verse) 36:21 now stands alone in its surprising position in MS B. If the verse is a genuine part of Ben Sira we must grant that the haplography of the whole verse in the Greek and the Syriac is a non-conjunctive error, committed independently by the translators of those versions. This is not so implausible as it might seem; the Syriac has in fact omitted not only this verse but the probably adjacent 36:21 as well; this version is characterized by the frequent omission of whole verses and especially of verses whose sense was obscure or corrupt; and the corrupt should be restored to our dictionaries of early Hebrew.

Does this proverb form an original part of Ben Sira's book? Nothing in the contents or the attestation of the verse is irreconcilable with its genuineness, even though it is not clear whether it stood originally after 36:18 or after 36:20. A discoverer has a natural tendency to favor his own discoveries; but we hope that other scholars will share our taste for Ben Sira's truffles.

An animal will eat all that can be rooted up by its snout, but some truffles taste better than others, 14


13. The word is common Semitic; cf. Wolfram von Soden, Akkadisches Handwörterbuch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963-69), 1: 432, on kammat; E. W. Lane, An Arabic English Lexicon (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863-1893), p. 2529, on kma; (the precise form is disputed); Payne Smith, 1: 1723, on kma; Audo, 1: 468, on kma; Ben Yehuda, p. 2416, on kma. The Hebrew lexicographers hesitate on the proper form and gender of the singular; the plural is indifferently in the first hemistich, and with the form of the surrounding aphorisms. The verse (36:18-4) should then be translated:

An animal will eat all that can be rooted up by his snout,

and the words רכם and חמס should be restored to our dictionaries of early Hebrew.

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Nationale, 1877-1883), 3: 192-94, to which R. P. B. Couroyer O.P. kindly drew my attention. They grow in the southern desert of Palestine as well as the Syrian Desert: Prof. M. Zohary of the Botanical Department of the Hebrew University informs me that he does not know of any specimens found in the more settled wooded parts of Palestine. The truffle of the Syrian Desert, the best reputed species, can be found by men, because it causes a slight elevation in the level of the soil; see R. Montagne, La civilisation du désert (Paris: Hachette, 1947), p. 24 (a reference for which I thank R. P. R. de Vaux O.P.). I can find no ancient reference from the Near East to the use of pigs or dogs for finding and digging up truffles; however, Prof. Zohary tells me that he has seen the Beduin in Syria use dogs (though not pigs) to locate them. Even this verse does not necessarily imply that animals were employed to dig up truffles for their masters, but only that they have a tendency to dig them up on their own account; it is indeed for this reason that pigs have, as indirectly attested by Prov. 11:22, rings in their noses.

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