

## PHILOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE PSALMS

H. L. Ginsberg has recently written that "the clearer the general superiority of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible over its rivals becomes (which of course does *not* imply its superiority in every detail over every other witness), the greater becomes the need for conjectural emendation."<sup>1</sup> Correctly understood and properly applied, this is a valid principle. If by conjectural emendation is understood the violent alteration and mutilation of the text, so popular a few decades ago and still prevalent in certain quarters, such a principle must be abandoned. But if one intends by conjectural emendation the prudent application of several accepted rules of textual criticism, Ginsberg's formulation may be heartily endorsed.

Despite the efforts of numerous scholars, the Psalter still remains a book in which a textual critic, employing a few simple principles of textual criticism, can work with positive results. The translations presented here are some of these results.

4:7. For the second half of this verse some commentators have recommended the reading, *nās mē'ālēnū ōr pānēkā yahwē*, but this suggestion has met with little success because it postulates the textual omission of a *mēm* and because it finds no support among the versions.<sup>2</sup> The translation which results from such an emendation is distinctly superior to those of the versions, but to achieve such a translation it is not at all necessary to suppose the omission of a *mēm*. Recent studies, confirmed by epigraphic discoveries, make it abundantly clear that the preposition 'al can mean 'from,' especially with verbs denoting 'to flee.'<sup>3</sup> Thus in Dan. 6:19 *šintēh naddat 'alōhī* clearly means 'his sleep fled *from* him,' and in the Aḥiram inscription *wnht tbrh 'l gbl* is to be rendered 'and let peace flee *from* Byblus.'<sup>4</sup> In Ps. 81:6 *b'ešēlō 'al ereš mišrāyīm* is to be translated 'in his going *from* the land of Egypt,' as recently pointed out by G. R. Driver.<sup>5</sup> The recognition that 'al can also

<sup>1</sup> *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XXIII (1950-51), I, 97.

<sup>2</sup> E. Podechard, *Le Psautier: Notes critiques*, I, 22, following Gunkel, adopts this reading on the ground that confusion between *hē* and *mēm* is not unknown in biblical manuscripts. Although this explanation is not convincing, the translation which he offers is quite acceptable: "Loin de nous s'est allée la lumière de 'sa' face!"

<sup>3</sup> L. Semkowski, *Biblica*, VII (1926), 95; M. Lidzbarski, *OLZ*, XXX (1927), cols. 455-56.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. F. Albright, *JAOS*, LXVII (1947), 156.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Welt des Orients*, 1950, p. 415. In a recent article in *Vetus Testamentum*, I (1951), 247, Driver has discussed this passage of Ps. 4 and has proposed a very similar translation: 'the light of thy countenance has fled from over us.' In order to defend the Masoretic consonantal text, he argues that *ōr* is feminine here, but the Psalmists' consistent treatment of *ōr* as masculine militates strongly against such a view. The present writer ar-

mean *from* will help to clear up a very difficult passage in Zach. 9:16 where we recommend the omission of *nūn* in *nēzer*, the result of dittography, so that the text reads *kī abnē zār mitnōs\*sōt 'al admātō*, 'for the slingstones of the stranger are put to flight *from* His land.' In the *Keret Epic* (A, 116-18) a similar sentiment is expressed in the passage which reads *hṣk 'l iṣ'l grth 'abn ydk mšdpl*, 'thine arrows shoot not into the city, (nor) thy hand-stones flung headlong.'<sup>6</sup> Hence in Ps. 4:7 one need either to omit the *mater lectionis* *hē* in *n\*sāh* and to read the colon *nās 'ālēnā ḥr pānekā yahwē*, 'the light of Thy countenance, O Lord, has fled *from* us,' or to adopt the explanation which has been suggested to me by Dr. D. N. Freedman. It is the opinion of Dr. Freedman that perhaps no emendation at all is necessary because Masoretic *n\*sāh* may reflect an original *\*nāsa* > *nās*. The old verbal ending would be for metrical reasons (if preserved, the final short vowel would be lengthened):

2 *rabbīm ḥm\*riim*  
 2 *mī yarēnā iḥb*  
 2 *nāsa 'alēnā*  
 2 *ḥr pānekā yahwē*

Since this latter solution leaves the Masoretic text intact and divides the verse into two balanced cola of a 2 plus 2 meter, it must be given the preference over my original explanation.

It is true that we do not find the expression *nās ḥr* elsewhere in the Bible, but in Cant. 2:17, 4:6 occurs the phrase *nāsū haṣṣ'elālm* 'the shadows have fled.'<sup>7</sup>

127:2. The grammatically and conceptually difficult clause *kēn yittēn līdīdō ṣenā'* will produce good sense if we emend the text to read *kēn yittēn līdīdō dōšen* 'thus he gives to His beloved rich nourishment.' The original text possibly read *lyddw dsn* which was later spelled out fully *lydydw dwsn*. An Aramaic ending was then added to the noun *dōšen*, a frequent phenomenon in the Dead Sea Scrolls, so that the reading became *dōsnā'*, and finally

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rived at his translation and grammatical analysis of this passage independently of Driver's article.

<sup>6</sup> This is Ginsberg's rendition in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 144a. In his earlier (1946) translation Ginsberg read the singular 'hand-stone'; the superiority of the 1950 translation is indicated by the text of Zacharias. The writer wishes to express his gratitude to Prof. Albright, who called his attention to the Ugaritic parallel.

<sup>7</sup> In the article cited above under note 1, Ginsberg emends the text to read *n'īēh* instead of *n\*sāh*, and as evidence of *sāmēk* miswritten for *īēl* he cites these two passages from Canticles and Qoh. 2:1. Despite the support of Sym., Syr., and Vulg. at Cant. 2:17 and 4:6, his emendation of these four texts is both unnecessary and unconvincing. *Suum cuique*.

by the haplography of the second *dw* the present text arose. In the Bible only the noun *dešen* is attested, occurring three times in the Psalms, but in Mishnic Hebrew the noun *dōšen* is used with the signification 'fatness, rich land.' This rendition is supported by the sentiment expressed in Ps. 111:5 *tereṣ nātan līrē'āw* 'He has given nourishment to those who fear Him.' Cf. also Ps. 23:2.

127:5. In the ancient and modern versions Psalm 127 has a very anti-climactic ending. 'They will not be put to shame when they speak with their enemies in the gate' is the usual translation of this half-verse, and the only dispute among commentators is whether the poet is referring to warfare or to the administration of justice at the city gate. The Amarna letters throw an entirely different light on this half-verse and clearly indicate that it should be translated 'they will not be put to shame for they will drive their enemies from the gate (city).' In Amarna letter 76, 38-41 Rib-Addi writes to the Pharaoh, *uššira šdbē pīlati rabā u tudabir ayābi šarri ištu libbi mātīšu* 'send a large number of archers so that they might drive out the enemies of the king from the midst of his country.'<sup>8</sup> In Amarna letter 138, 68-70 similar language is employed, *tidabbiru šdbē aziri ištu āli* 'they will drive the troops of Aziri from the city,' and in EA 279, 20-23 we read, *nidubbur amelātu šarāta ištu māt šarri bēliya*. In this analysis *el* becomes the *nota accusativi*, but since Masoretic *dy'btm* is indefinite, whereas the sense demands 'their enemies,' we assume that *dy'btm* conceals an original *dy'bēhem* which became, with the syncope of the intervocalic *hē*, *dy'bēm*.<sup>9</sup> Of course here the preposition *ba* in *baššā'ar* is to be taken in the sense of *from*, a signification which it carries in Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew. What is more, if one prefers to understand *šā'ar* as 'city,' there can be no objection because there is good biblical support for this meaning (Isa. 14:31; Ps. 87:2), and the Amarna parallels seem to suggest that the poet may have intended such a connotation.

56:6. The acknowledgment that biblical *dibber* can also signify 'drive out,' 'pursue' will serve to clarify an unintelligible passage in Ps. 56.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See George E. Mendenhall, *JNES*, VI (1947), 124, n. 4; cf. also H. Zimmern, *ZA*, VI (1891), 158.

<sup>9</sup> The writer is indebted to Dr. Freedman for this excellent observation.

<sup>10</sup> At II Chron. 22:10 the Masoretic text has *watt'dabbēr ēt kol zera' hammamlākā* 'and she drove out all the royal family.' Because of the doublet in II Kings 11:1 the verb is generally emended to *ʾabbēd*; the Masoretic reading may be right after all, although this cannot be insisted upon because the context indicates that Athaliah slew all the members of the royal family with the exception of Joash. In Ps. 47:4 *yadbēr* (vocalize *y'dabbēr*) clearly means 'he subjects (drives) peoples under us,' and at Ps. 18:48 the text should be vocalized *widabbēr ammīm tahtāy* 'and he subjects (drives) peoples under me.' The emendations which have hitherto been offered become superfluous.

In verse 6 after *yôm* we should restore a *mêm*, which was lost by haplography, and read as follows: *kol hayyôm m'dabb'ray yē'ās'ebā 'ālay kol mahš'ebôtām lārā* 'all the day long my pursuers are sorely troubled on my account, all of their plans are for evil.' The following verse explains the nature of their perpetual vexation: 'they lie in wait (Ps. 59:4), they hide, lo (Ugar. *hm*) they watch my steps.' The *niph'al* vocalization of the root 'šb, followed by the preposition 'al, is favored by the parallel construction at II Sam. 19:3.

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