

NOTE

UGARITIC *DRKT* AND BIBLICAL *DEREK*

Ugaritic *drkt* (*darkatu*), "dominion, might,"¹ was the occasion for P. Nober's application of this sense to *derek* in Ps 110:7, where in place of the Masoretic vocalization he read *manḥl b'derek y'stiḥū* and translated *distributorem dominiū constituet eum*.² Four years earlier, in his article on the Balaam Oracles, Prof. Albright had suggested that in Num 24:17 the text should be vocalized *w'dār'kū kōk'bē-m ya'qōb*, "when the stars of Jacob shall prevail."³ The verb *dār'kū*, "prevail," he related to Ugaritic *darkatu*, "dominion." The arguments set forth in both these studies are of considerable cogency and lead one to suspect that there are other biblical texts where *derek*, now unsatisfactorily rendered "way" or emended, will yield good sense if understood as "dominion, might."

At the end of their analysis of *derek*, Koehler-Baumgartner in their *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* list a number of texts where in their opinion, which in turn is the opinion of the majority of modern textual critics, Masoretic *derek* should be emended to provide a contextually more appropriate meaning. Among the texts doomed to emendation are Hos 10:13, Jer 3:13, and Prov 31:3. Since, however, the number of biblical texts which has been elucidated by the careful employment of the Ugaritic data is daily becoming more impressive, it would be the part of sound methodology to apply the meaning of *darkatu* to these presently difficult passages, with the hope of arriving at satisfactory translations. The results which emerge from such a confrontation merit some consideration.

Since the third century B.C., translators have recognized that the parallelism in Hos 10:13 makes it impossible to accept the reading *dark'kā*,

EDITOR'S NOTE.—This paper was read at the annual convention of the Society for Biblical Literature and Exegesis, December 30, 1953.

¹ See C. Brockelmann, "Zur Syntax der Sprache von Ugarit," *Orientalia*, X (1941), 227.

² "De torrente in via bibet," *Verbum Domini*, XXVI (1948), 351-53. It is surprising that Msgr. E. Kissane, in his article, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, XXI (1954), 103-14, makes no reference to Nober's suggestion. Kissane's textual treatment of verse 7 could have benefited from a consultation of Nober's article.

³ "The Oracles of Balaam," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXIII (1944), 219, 225. The writer wishes to express his gratitude to Profs. A. Leo Oppenheim and Julius Lewy, who called his attention to the fact that Accadian *durgu* in a text published by Theo Bauer (*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, NF, VIII [1941], 167) means something like "fortress, stronghold." Bauer translated *durgu* by Kern. See also *Das Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, II, 22, by Theo Bauer.

“your way,” and that an emendation to *rikk^ekā*, “your chariots,” was inescapable. Such was the judgment of the Jewish translators of the Septuagint; such the conclusion of Canon Osty in *La sainte Bible de Jérusalem* (1952) and of the Revised Standard Version (1952). The verse in question reads *kt bātahtā b^edark^ekā b^rrōb gibbōrēkā*, “for you trusted in your own might, in the multitude of your warriors.” First it should be noted that the expression *bātaḥ b^ederek* understood as “he trusted in his own way” is unique and rightly rejected by most commentators, whereas there are numerous cases of such phrases as *habbōḥ^e ḥīm ‘al ḥēlām*, “those who trust in their own power” (Ps 49:7), *habbōḥ^e ḥā b^r’oṣrōlēhā*, “she who trusts in her treasures” (Jer 49:4), *wayyibṭaḥ b^rrōb ‘oṣrō*, “and he trusted in the mass of his wealth” (Ps 52:9). From the parallelism in the verse and the analogy of the phrases cited, it becomes clear that *dark^ekā* may well be taken in the Ugaritic sense of “might” or “resources.”

Secondly, in discussing this text, W. R. Harper appropriately cited Isa 2:7 as a parallel passage, for in this verse Isaiah draws a picture of Judah’s affluence and military prowess, which picture seems to be a fuller representation of Hosea’s brief sketch of the wealth and military might that were Northern Israel’s.⁴ Isa 2:7 reads thus:

wattimmālē’ ‘arṣō keseḫ w^ezāhāb w^e’ēn qēṣeh l^r’oṣrōlāw
wattimmālē’ ‘arṣō sūstm w^e’ēn qēṣeh l^rmark^ebōtāw

Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures.

Their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots.

The first half of the verse seems to be a more ample illustration of what is contained in Hosea’s one word *dark^ekā*, “your might,” while the latter half sets forth in greater detail *rōb gibbōrēkā*, “the multitude of your warriors.”⁵

Another text which many commentators do not hesitate to emend is Jer 3:13: *watt^rpaṣṣ^rri ‘et d^rrākayik lazzārīm taḥat kol ‘eṣ ra^onān*, “and you squandered your substance on strangers under every green tree.” Here *d^rrākayik* is usually emended to *dōdayik*, “your love” (since Cornill), or to *birkayik*, “your knees.”⁶ The reason for altering the text was provided by verse 6,

⁴ *Amos and Hosea* (ICC; N. Y., 1910), pp. 356–57.

⁵ For another example of Hosea’s condensed style, see J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (reprinted 1953), p. 179, where the highly compact teaching of Hos 6:6 is compared with the fuller declamation of Isa 1:11–15.

⁶ Among recent commentators on Jeremiah, Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (Handbuch zum Alten Testament; Tübingen, 1947), p. 22. Of course, the expression “to squander one’s substance” reminds one of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:13).

of which verse 13 is merely a repetition. Cornill's emendation unquestionably produced the meaning desiderated by the context, but now it is possible to achieve the same effect without sacrificing the Masoretic text.

By recognizing the new semantic possibilities of *derek*, it becomes easier to get some sense out of the highly enigmatic warning given in Prov 31:3: *'al tittien lannāštm ḥēlekā ād-rākēkā lamḥôt m'lākīn*. In this verse *d-rākēkā* is either emended to *yrākēkā*, "your loins," or to *l'bab'kā*, "your heart," but those who retain the Masoretic reading generally end up with a translation similar to that of the Revised Standard Version: "Give not your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings." The rendition of the second colon appears to be unmeaning, and is justifiably rejected by those who resort to emendation. But the close parallelism with *ḥēlekā*, "your strength," and the Vulgate's translation of *d-rākēkā* as *divitias*, "riches" (*ne dederis mulieribus substantiam tuam, et divitias tuas ad delendos reges*), lead one to surmise that *d-rākēkā* could also carry some of the ideas that are found in *ḥayil*, namely, "strength, power, substance."

This clue, however, does not suffice to extract an adequate meaning from the second half of the verse; hence it becomes necessary to turn to the Phoenician inscriptions to explain the mysterious word *lamḥôt*. In Phoenician is found the compound preposition *lmḥt*, which, as the context demands, signifies "in full measure, sterling."⁷ In the light of these extra-biblical aids, it is possible to suggest the following tentative translation for Prov 31:3: "Give not your strength to women, nor your substance in the full measure of kings."⁸

Among modern commentators on the Psalms, Baethgen was the first to perceive that *darkē yhwḥ* in Ps 138:5 was best rendered by *das Walten Jehovahs*, "the dominion of the Lord," while the exegesis of the phrase by Gunkel and Kittel shows that they understood it in the manner of Baethgen.⁹ The

⁷ Cf. M. Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der Nordsemitischen Epigraphik* (Weimar, 1898), p. 303; G. A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1903), pp. 94, 97. Hoffmann, cited by Cooke, derives the nominal element in *lmḥt* from the root *mhy*, "to wipe off," and supposes that it was used in the first place of corn-measures, "to wipe off into the corn-measure," i.e., "to fill up to full weight." This semantic transition is somewhat too tortuous to be convincing. A more probable etymology is supplied by Arabic *mḥḥ*, "to be full of marrow," and Hebrew-Phoenician *mḥḥ*, "to be fat."

⁸ Prof. Albright prefers to explain the consonants *lmḥt* as related to the Egyptian word *mḥst*, which means "scales," Hebrew *mōznayim*. In either case the import of *d-rākēkā* would remain the same, for Albright would render it, "give not your resources to the chancery of kings."

⁹ *Die Psalmen* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; Göttingen, 1892), p. 417.

soundness of their interpretation is now made evident by the fact that *derek* can specifically denote "dominion, power."

yôdâkâ yhwk kol malkê 'āreṣ kî šām'â 'imrê ptkā w'yāštrâ b'darkê yhwk kî gādôl k'bôd yhwk

All the kingdoms of the earth shall thank you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.

And they shall sing of the *dominion* of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.

Although the syntax of the phrase *yāštrâ b'darkê* is unique and has caused difficulty for translators since Septuagintal times,¹⁰ there are similar sentiments expressed in Pss 21:14 and 59:17.

21:14 *râmâ yhwk b'uzzekâ nāštrâ ūn'zamm'râ g'bārâtekâ*

Arise, O Lord, in your strength, that we may sing and praise your power.

59:17 *wa'anî 'āštr 'uzzekâ*

And I will sing of your might.

Another advance which can be made in the more exact understanding of Ps 138:4 is that *malkê* (vocalize *molkê*) 'āreṣ should be translated "kingdoms of the earth." This opinion is favored by the parallelism in Ugaritic between *mlk* and *drkt* (49:V:6; 68:10), and by H. L. Ginsberg's observation that in the Aramaic letter of King Adon, dating from about 600 B.C., *mr' mlkn* signifies "Lord of kingdoms," not "Lord of kings."¹¹ There is also ample biblical evidence for this view. Thus the balance with *gôyim*, "nations," in Isa 60:3 and 62:2 indicates that "kingdoms" is the more desirable translation of *m'lāktm*, while anatomical considerations make it imperative that it be so understood in Isa 60:16: *w'yānaqt ḥ'lēb gôyim w'šôd m'lāktm ttnāqḥ*, "and you shall suck the milk of nations, the breast of *kingdoms* shall you suck."¹²

In conclusion, how are we to explain this retention of an uncommon meaning by a very common word? Evidently, the two meanings of the word had been conflated and the authors no longer had a clear notion of the connotations of the word they were using. That is to say, they may have followed older prototypes adapted to their purposes, and the original meaning

¹⁰ The Authorized Version rendered the verse: Yea, they shall sing *in* the ways of the Lord, while the Revised Version has: Yea, they shall sing *of* the ways of the Lord.

¹¹ "An Aramaic Contemporary of the Lachish Letters," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 111 (Oct., 1948), 25, n. 5; see also *Journ. of Bibl. Lit.*, LXIII (1944), 218, n. 70.

¹² The translators of the Septuagint toned down the harshness of the Hebrew phrase by rendering it *plouton basileôn phagesai*, "the wealth of kings shall you consume."

had become somewhat weakened. This weakening appears most clearly in Ps 138:5, where Baethgen saw that *darkê yhwk*, "the ways of God," should be taken as the providential ways of God, i.e., his dominion over the whole earth.¹³

MITCHELL J. DAHOOD, S.J.

Weston College

¹³ According to the study of Leo Hayman, "A Note on I Kings 18:27," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, X (1951), 57-58, *derek* in the verse studied signifies "the treading of grapes," not "way." This seems to be another instance of an uncommon meaning for a very common word.