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Textual Suggestions on Isa. 26:66, Zeph. 2:25

JULIUS A. BEWER

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ISAIAH 26

THE difficulty is in the last word **יְשִׁיבֵנִי**. It used to be connected with **שָׂבַע** *Qal*, to be plenty, many; *Hi.*, to have plenty, to have a great number. But this view is abandoned by most, though not by all, scholars.¹ Most recent critics derive it from **שָׂבַע** = **סָבַע** "to strike," and change **יְשִׁיבֵנִי** to **יִכְרֹדוּ**, translating "and they strike hands with foreigners." But this is not quite satisfactory either, for the idea of foreign alliances is not in the context. The verse speaks of divination (read **מְקַסְמִים** for **מְקַרְמִים**) and sooth-saying. If foreign intercourse were given as the reason for the prevalence of these magic and mantic practices, it would have been brought out more clearly and the connection would have been indicated in some way.² We expect rather that the thought of the beginning of the verse should be developed still further, especially when we see that in vs. 8 there are three clauses used to express the one thought of idolatry. Since "the children of foreigners" are parallel to the "Philistines" of the previous clause, we look for a

¹ Thus, e.g., Whitehouse in the *New Century Bible on Isaiah*, 1905, translates "are crowded with."

² Besides, the expression **יִכְרֹדוּ** in the sense of "striking hands with" for the purpose of an alliance is unusual and occurs only in this conjecture. Usually the phrase runs **יִכְרֹדוּ** **בְּיָדָם** "to clap one's hands" either in anger (Num. 24:10), or in mockery (Lam. 2:15 Job 27:22). Of course, this does not imply that **יִכְרֹדוּ** **בְּיָדָם** may not have been a good Hebrew phrase, but only that we cannot control it. The Arabic *safaqa* has the meaning "strike (hands)" as well as "slap (the face)" and *safyatwa* is the term used in bargaining for the *hand-clasp* that seals the bargain.

parallel of יִשְׁפִּיכּוּ in לַגִּימִים. And it seems therefore very likely that the original text read instead of

וּבְגִלְדֵי נְבָרִים יִשְׁפִּיכּוּ
וּבְגִלְדֵי נְבָרִים יִבְשְׁמוּ

“For they are full of divination,
and are soothsayers like the Philistines,
and *practice sorcery* as the children of foreigners.”

ISAIAH 66 3

It is generally acknowledged that we need some participle before נָדָם in the clause מִקְעֻלָּה מִקְעֻלָּה נְדָם־הַחֲזִיר. Usually נָדָם is supplied. But it is not easy to see how this could have been omitted, and the whole structure of the verse speaks against it. It appears to me more probable that the text had originally נָדָם which was misread נָדָם. The structure of the verse favors it; it is strictly parallel to מִקְעֻלָּה. Compare Lev. 22 15 for נָדָם in the sense of “offer, sacrifice.”

The verse then reads,

“He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man,
he that sacrificeth a lamb as he that breaketh a dog's neck,
he that bringeth an oblation as *he that offereth* a swine,
he that burneth frankincense as he that blesseth an idol.”

ZEPHANIAH 2 2

The first line in Zeph. 2 2 בְּשָׂרָם לָדָת חֶק בְּמֶלֶךְ עֶבֶר יוֹם is translated by LXX *καρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος παραπορευόμενον*. It will be noted that in this translation the difficult words חֶק לָדָת are omitted, for *τοῦ γενέσθαι* cannot seriously be regarded as representing an original reading, לֹא תִהְיֶה or תִּהְיֶה. Evidently the Greek translators did not know what to do with חֶק לָדָת and so translated the text very freely in order to get some good meaning out of it; and, of course, their translation does make sense. But there was another difficulty in the text. They had translated בְּשָׂרָם לָדָת by *ὡς ἄνθρωπος παραπορευόμενον* i.e. בְּצִיץ עֶבֶר. There was, however, another word left, יוֹם. What should they do with it? Nothing remained but to omit it also. It is evi-

dent that the LXX reading is guesswork and not to be taken into consideration for the reconstruction of the original text.³

The context makes it quite clear that the general meaning must be "Get you shame and be ye ashamed,⁴ O nation unabashed,⁵ before " *it is too late!*⁶ This suggests the reading בְּמָרָם קְלוֹת חֶק "before the appointed time *is at an end!*" The only change is in לָדַת which must be read קְלוֹת. For חֶק in the sense of "prescribed limit of time" compare Job 14 v. 13. For the construction of בְּמָרָם with the infinitive compare not only לָדַת בְּמָרָם but also מְשָׁרָם שׁוּם אָכֵן Hag. 2 15.⁷

The following clause כִּמְצָא עֵבֶר יוֹם is probably still dependent on בְּמָרָם and to be translated "before the appointed time is at an end, [before] the day has passed as chaff,"⁸ when you might have repented and by repentance averted the doom.

But the simile of flying chaff is used as a rule to illustrate, the idea of scattering rather than that of swiftness. And so a suggestion may be made on this clause, with all due reserve, for it is perhaps unnecessary to suspect the Massoretic text. It would seem not unlikely that the text read originally for

כִּמְצָא עֵבֶר יוֹם
כִּי מֵאֵץ לְעֵבֶר יוֹם

"for the day hastens, urges, to pass by." For the use of the

³ This is a beautiful illustration of the way in which the Greek translators would try to make an untranslatable passage intelligible. It is a very keen guess and certainly brings out in general the meaning that the prophet had intended. We may adopt their guess, if we please, but must not translate the Greek into Hebrew and then think that we have restored the original Hebrew text.

⁴ Reading הִתְקַשְׁשׁוּ וְקִשְׁשׁוּ for הִתְבּוֹשְׁשׁוּ וְבוֹשְׁשׁוּ with Graetz, Cheyne *et al.*

⁵ "Abashed" is the probable though not certain meaning of נִקְדָּף. Was it originally נִקְדָּף? כִּמְצָא, "bowed down, humbled" ?

⁶ So also LXX.

⁷ The construction of בְּמָרָם with a noun may also be compared, קָצֵף בְּמָרָם before the harvest, Is. 28 4, בֹּקֵר בְּמָרָם before the morning, Is. 17 14.

⁸ Compare RV.

Hiphil compare Is. 22 4.⁹ The verb expresses the urgent haste; the time presses. Repent, soon it will be too late!

The whole would then read,

Get you shame and be ye ashamed,
 O nation unabashed!
 Before the appointed time is at an end,
 For the day hastens quickly by.
 Before there come upon you
 The fierce anger of Jahve.

ZEPHANIAH 2 5

The phrase **כנען ארץ פלשתים**, "Canaan, the land of the Philistines," is so unusual that it arouses suspicion, even though the Versions have the same text. Wellhausen, Nowack, Marti, and Fagnani¹⁰ omit **כנען** from the text as secondary. But there must be some explanation for its presence in the text of the Massorettes and of the Versions. Why should somebody have introduced it and incidentally have rearranged the text, transposing "the land of the Philistines" from the end of the verse to its present position?

It is more likely that the text read originally for

כנען
 כי גענה

"for the land of the Philistines *shall be afflicted*,
 and I will destroy thee [originally: it (?)], that there shall
 be no inhabitant."

⁹ Possibly the Qal **קץ** was used, though that is not so likely.

¹⁰ C. P. Fagnani, *The Structure of the Text of the Book of Zephaniah* in the Harper Memorial Volumes, II, p. 266.