

Isaiah 53,8-12 and Massoretic Misconstructions

In my study "Phoenician Elements in Isaiah 52:13-53:12"⁽¹⁾, I have given a complete translation and philological commentary on the Fourth Servant Song, so here it will be necessary to explain just those points in Isa 53,8-12 where the recognition of erroneous Massoretic word-division and punctuation requires new readings and interpretations, and where a datum from Ebla permits a fresh translation of a disputed phrase.

Isa 53,8 *mē'ōšer ūmimmišpāt luqqāh*
w^e'et-dôrô mî y^sôhēah
kî nigzar mē'eres ḥayyîm
mippeša' 'ammî nāga' (MTnega') lāmô

Without restraint and without moderation he was taken away,
 and of his generation who gave him a thought?

For he was cut off from the land of the living,
 for the rebellion of his people he touched the waters.

of his generation: The separative force of 'et is gradually being recognized⁽²⁾, and even the conservative *New International Version* of 1978 admits in a note the alternative translation "Yet who of his generation considered?"

his people: Another instance of 'ammî, "his people", with the third person masculine singular suffix -î, can be seen in Micah 3,5, *kôh 'amar yhw^h 'al-hann^ebi'îm hammat'îm 'et 'ammî*, "Thus spoke Yahweh against the prophets who were misleading his people". Preceded by *panāyw*, "his face", in vs. 4 and followed by 'ālāyw, "against him", in vs. 5 c, the suffix of 'ammî should also be third person, as recognized by those proposing to emend 'ammî to 'am yhw^h, "the people of Yahweh" (cf *BHK*³).

he touched the waters: The repositing of nominal *nega'* to verbal *nāga'* is prompted by the identification of *mô* in *lāmô* as a byform for

(1) In H. GOEDICKE, ed., *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Baltimore and London 1971) 63-73.

(2) See R. BORGER, *VT* 9 (1959) 85-86, on Gen 4,1; M. DAHOOD, *Bib* 55 (1974) 77, on Gen 49,25. Hence there may be no need to assume a haplography (cf. *BHK*³) in Gen 6,13, *w^ehînⁿi mašhîtam 'et-hā'ares*, "and I am going to annihilate them from the earth". Cf. the construction with *min* in 2 Chron 24,23. The apparent parallelism with *mē'al y^shūdāh* in Isa 7,17 suggests that unexplained 'et *melek' aššûr* be rendered "from the king of Assyria".

“water”. As noted elsewhere⁽³⁾, the Ebla bilingual that translates Sumerian a by *ma-wu*, “water”, will surely create many ripples in the pool of biblical philology. Thus at the end of Ps 66,7 difficult *lāmô*, which is lacking in some manuscripts and reads as *l'ôlām* by the Syriac, proves meaningful in view of the new Ebla information, and the final colon may now be read: *hassôrîm 'el* (MT *'al*) *y'râyâmô* (MT *yârîmû*) *lāmô*, “the rebels — God hurled them into the water”, an allusion to Ex 15,4, *markêbôt par'ôh w'hêlô yârâh bayyâm*, “The chariots of Pharaoh and his army he hurled into the sea”.

The resultant motif of touching the waters of death recalls Job 36,12, *b'selah ya'âborû*, “They will cross the channel”, and clarifies the reading and translation of Job 33,22, *w'tiqrab* (MT *wattigrab*) *laššahat napšô w'hayyâtô l'mô mêtîm* (MT *lamêmitîm*), “His soul draws near the Pit, and his life the waters of the dead”. In his commentary on this passage M. H. Pope⁽⁴⁾ has observed that the line is short and possibly a word has fallen out; to remedy this he proposes the emendation *l'mê-mâwet-mô*, “to the waters of Death”, with the enclitic emphatic particle at the end. While the result is good, the method is somewhat maladroit; the simple repointing of consonantal *lmmtym* to *l'mô mêtîm* results in a balanced line with eight syllables in each colon and produces essentially the same meaning reached by Pope. Other instances of *mô* “water”, recur in Job 6,15 and 9,30.

If this reading is sound, Job 33,22 would illustrate the breakup of the composite phrase **mô šahat*, “waters of the Pit”. In fact, *mô*, “water”, and *šahat*, “Pit”, concur in Job 9,30-31. As Pope points out, the watery nature of the netherworld is well attested.

In our Isaian verse the contrast with *'ereš hayyîm*, “the land of the living», suffices to determine the real import of unspecified “the waters”.

53,9 *wayyittên 'et-ršâ'im qibrô*
w' et-'ôšê-rîb môtâyw (MT *'ašîr bêmôtâyw*)
'al lô' hāmās 'ašāh
w'lô' mirmāh b'pû

It appointed his grave with the wicked,
 and with the makers of strife his execution;
 Even though he had not done violence,
 nor was there falsehood from his mouth.

It appointed: MT active *wayyittên* may be retained when collective singular *'ammî*, “his people”, is construed as the subject; 1QIs^a reads plural

⁽³⁾ See my article “‘A Sea of Troubles’: Notes on Psalms 53:3-4 and 140:10-11”, *CBQ* 41 (1979) 604-607, esp. 606. Among the new examples of *mô*, “water”, may be cited Prov 23,7, *kî k'mô šô'âr* (MT *šâ'ar*) *b'nepes' w'kên* (MT *b'napsô kên*) *hû'*, “because like disgusting water in the throat, such is he”. The repointing of unexplained MT *šâ'ar* to *šô'âr* results from comparison with Jer 29,17, *katt'enîm haššo'arîm*, “like disgusting figs”. Since Prov 23,6 mentions bread and delicacies and vs. 8 speaks of vomiting, “putrid water” can be admitted to fit the context.

⁽⁴⁾ *Job* (AB 7; Garden City, N. Y. 1973) 251.

wytnw. Being a collective noun, 'ammî as the subject may be rendered either singular "it" or plural "they".

the makers of strife: a literal rendition of the proposed reading 'ôšê rîb which has manifold advantages. First, it eliminates singular 'âšîr, "rich man", a counterpart to plural ršâ'im, "the wicked", difficult to explain. It also disposes of much-canvassed b'môtâyw⁽⁵⁾, which IQIs^a read bwmtyw. Then it sets up the neat chiasmus of 'ôšê-rîb, "makers of strife", and hāmās 'âšāh, "had (not) done violence", in the following colon. That rîb and hāmās belong to the same semantic field is confirmed by Hab 1,3 šod w'hāmās, "devastation and violence" // rîb ûmādôn, "strife and contention", whereas the sequence of the three nouns rîb, hāmās, and mirmāh, "falsehood", is matched by Fs 55,10-12 hāmās werîb, "violence and strife", followed by tōk ûmirmāh, "injury and falsehood" in vs. 12. Fourth, the reading 'ôšê-rîb recovers the word balance in the parallel cola, with four words in each colon and, finally, the vocalization rîb points to the correct punctuation in vs. 12c where rabbîm, "many", repointed to rābîm, "quarrelers", makes an apter counterpart to pōš'im, "rebellious". The parallelism in 12c resumes the verbal sequence of vs. 8d, p'sa' 'ammî, "the rebellion of his people", and vs. 9b 'ôšê rîb, phrases which in turn evoke Ps 18,44 rîbê 'ām, "quarrels of the people".

his execution: an attempt to reproduce plural môtâyw which I construe as a plural of majesty; cf. Ezek 28,10 môtê 'arêlîm for the only other attestation māwet in the plural. It would appear that the death of the Servant was a solemn public affair.

53,10a wayhwh hāpēš dakke'ô hāhillî (MT heheli)

'im tāšîm (MT 'im-tāšîm) 'āšām napsô

But Yahweh willed to crush him, pierce him,
the Awesome considered his life a guilt offering.

the Awesome: The identification of 'im as the stative participle of the root 'ym found in the adjective 'ayôm, "awesome, dreadful", and in 'ēmāh, "awe, dread", uncovers the composite divine name *yhwh-'im, "Yahweh the Awesome". Cf. my discussion of Num 12,6 in *Psalms II*, 354⁽⁶⁾; where there is no need to repoint 'im to 'ēm, since 'im, "Awesome", may handily be analyzed as the Canaanite form preserved in the archaic text of Num 12,6. Cf. the Ugar. PN s'im, "the Lamb of the Awesome", in *UT*, 1134:7; "the one of the Awesome" is also possible but less likely. Since the root s'm

⁽⁵⁾ Consult W. F. ALBRIGHT, "The High Place in Ancient Palestine", *VTS* 4 (1957) 242-258.

⁽⁶⁾ As well as L. VIGANÒ, *Nomi e titoli di YHWH alla luce del semitico del Nord-ovest* (BiOr 31; Rome 1976) 110-118. The Ebla personal name i-mu-damu / 'imu-damu / may well signify "Awesome is Damu". The text number is *MEE* 2,47 rev. I 3, published by G. PETTINATO, *Testi amministrativi della biblioteca L. 2769. Materiali epigrafici di Ebla 2* (Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, 1980) 311.

seems not to exist in Northwest Semitic, the analysis into \acute{s} + 'im becomes difficult to impugn. Cf. Jer 50,38 where 'emim, "the Awesome Ones", designates pagan gods, and the PN 'hy'm in 2 Sam 23,33 and I Chron 11,35. Since MT 'ahí 'am creates an inexplicable name(?), one feels authorized to read 'ahí 'im, "My brother is the Awesome". In 1 Chron 11,35 the LXX reads Achim which supports our contention.

considered: MT tāsīm may be parsed as the third-person masculine singular with the preformative *t-*, as first pointed out by H. J. van Dijk⁽⁸⁾. The balance between the *qtl* form *hāpēs*, "He willed", and *yqtl yāsīm*, "He considered", is a characteristic of Canaanite poetic style⁽⁹⁾. The *qtl-yqtl* sequence can also be seen in vs. 12c, discussed immediately.

53,12c *w'hū' hēt'-rābīm* (MT *rabbīm*) *nāšā'*
w'lappōš' im yapgīa'

It was he who bore the sins of quarrelers,
 and for the rebellious made entreaty.

quarrelers: as noted above, the recovery of *rīb*, "strife", in vs. 9 associates it with *peša'*, "rebellion", in vs. 8. This means that MT *rabbīm*, "the great", which fits the parallelism with 'āšūmīm "the powerful", in vs. 12a, is less suitable as the opposite number of *pōš' im*, "the rebellious", which expresses a moral quality, whereas *rabbīm*, "the great", is morally neutral. A similar problem with the consonants *rb* can be observed in Isa 63,1c where MT *rab* was understood as *rāb* by Symmachus who renders *hypermachōn* "defending", and the Vulgate which has *propugnator*. That *rāb l'hōšā'*, "striving to save", is a superior reading may be deduced from a comparison with Isa 19,20, *w'yišlah lahem mōšā' wārāb*, "And he will send to them a savior and defender".

In summary, it was the Massoretic misdivision 'āšīr b'mōtāyw for 'ōšē-*rīb mōtāyw* that has impeded the understanding of Isa 53,9 in particular⁽¹⁰⁾;

(7) Consult M. NOTH, *Die israelitischen Personennamen* (Stuttgart 1928) 192, who after an attempt to explain -'ām through Arab. 'āma, "herrschen, regieren", must conclude with the admission "Doch auch das ist vollkommen unsicher". See also W. BAUMGARTNER, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (Leiden 1967) I, 32a.

(8) "Does Third Masculine Singular TAQTUL Exist in Hebrew", *VT* 19 (1969) 440-447, esp. 442-443. He understands the servant as the subject of *tā-šīm*: "When he makes his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, etc." See also my recent study of this preformative *t-* in *Orientalia* 48 (1979) 97-106.

(9) Consult the *qtl-yqtl* sequence referring to the past in the Psalter as documented in M. DAHOOD, *Psalms III* (AB 17a; Garden City, N. Y. 1970) 420-422.

(10) The Massoretic unfamiliarity with the suffixed conjunction *wn*, with affirmative -n attested in Ugaritic (*UT*, § 12.9), may account for the anomalous reading *w'nē'sā'er* instead of *wān 'esšā'er ānī* "and I alone was left", in Ezek 9,8. See *Bib* 62 (1981) 276, and my remarks there. A similar wrong division of words may be responsible for the difficulties in Prov 24,12 where MT *w'nōšēr napšēkā hū' yedā* "and the guardian of your soul — he knows", is preferably

the presence of the *maqṣeph* between *'im* and *tāšīm* in vs. 10 has induced scholars to treat *'im* as the conditional particle instead of the divine epithet that restores balance and sense to the verse.

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read *wān šar napš^škā hū' yēdā'*, "And the anguish of your soul he knows indeed"; this reading provides the desired accusative object of *yēdā'*. Once consonantal *wnšr* is divided into *wn šr*, vs. 12b is seen to resume vs. 10 which mentions both feminine *šārāh* and masculine *šar*, "anguish". With the recovery of *šar napš^škā* one has the semantic equivalent of Job 7,11 *šar rūhī*, "the anguish of my spirit", and a variation of Gen 42,21 *šarat napšō*, "the anguish of his soul".



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