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THE REFERENCE TO TRELLIS-WORK IN
PSALM 74, 5

A MERE glance at this verse reveals numerous difficulties. To begin with the first word יִרְעַע scarcely yields a suitable meaning, and in spite of all attempted emendations and interpretations, seems to be out of place, as there is no noun in this verse which can be subject of this verb. *It was perceived, made known, it was seen,* are suggested renderings which have nothing to recommend them. Then the second word כְּמִבְּיָא is taken by some of the versions as a noun, something like מְבוֹא.¹ And even when one has succeeded in recasting the text in a more or less Hebraic form, the simile conveyed is so feeble as to be out of harmony with the tenure of the rest of the verses, where the Psalmist employs the strongest terms in describing the cruelty of the enemy. Nor is the lexical difficulty of the expression of עֵץ בְּסִבָּה to be lost sight of. In all other places where סִבָּה occurs it either stands alone, as in Gen. 22, 13; Jer. 4, 7, or is followed by יַעַר, as in Isa. 9, 17. For עֵץ is never used in Hebrew in the sense of *forest*, and as סִבָּה in our text must denote a *thicket*, if the ordinary interpretation be adopted, the singular עֵץ can scarcely be appropriate. In the following verse neither the *ketib* וַעַת nor the *kerē* וַעֲתָ is suitable for the context, as the Psalmist obviously describes an event which took place in the past. It is therefore no wonder that modern commentators are almost unanimous in declaring this word to be corrupt. Some take it to be the ending of a longer word such as

¹ LXX has τῆν εἰσοδον, and Jerome's rendering is *in introitu*. The variant readings εἰξοδον and *exitu* are probably due to the confusion of מְבוֹא and מוֹצָא.

מְקַלְעַת. Ehrlich in reading וַיֵּת for וַיֵּת should have advanced a step further and deleted the ׀ in order to make any sense at all, for there is no possibility of taking this clause as a circumstantial one. Although the copyists sometimes confused ׀ with ץ (comp. I Kings 1, 18b, 20), the fact that the Psalmist throughout this Psalm does not use the accusative sign תּ, despite the circumstance that in almost every verse there is a determinate noun in the accusative, is sufficient ground to reject this suggestion.

The solution, I believe, lies in the correct interpretation of the expression עֵץ בְּסָבָהּ which in this case ought to be rendered *in the wooden trellis-work*. No simile is intended in this verse, but a vivid description of what actually took place. The form of סָבָהּ or סָבָהּ is certainly *f'āl*, with the original *ā* remaining, as in Arabic and Syriac, or heightened to *ō*, as is usually the case in Hebrew. In I Kings 7, 17, where the decorations and furniture of Solomon's Temple are described, the form שְׁבָכִים occurs which is conceivably a plural of סָבָהּ, and the ordinary form שְׁבָכָה is probably a *nomen unitatis* of this word. It would thus be identical in form and meaning with Arabic *šibāk* "net-work, trellis-work." In verse 5 of this Psalm we would require to emend the text slightly and read בְּהָבִיא or בְּהָבִיא instead of בְּמִבְיֵא. It is also probable that כְּמִבּוֹא of the versions may be retained as a *nomen verbi*, as in the case of וּלְמַסַּע Num. 10, 2. The corruption of this word very likely arose through the misunderstanding of the expression בְּסָבָהּ עֵץ. For when these words were taken to mean *a thicket of trees*, the whole verse had to be explained as a simile, and hence the participle was substituted for the infinitive. The *ketīb* in verse 6 would be retained, and read וַיֵּת. Here again the Massoretes had to punctuate this word וַיֵּת in order to make this verse follow the preceding one with some logical sequence.

Having thus restored the text, we should translate the two verses as follows: *Let it be known when axes were brought above in the wooden trellis-work, and when they struck down all its carvings together with hatchet and axes.* The Psalmist, according to this interpretation, draws the attention of the reader to, or per-

haps invokes God (לְפָנָיִךְ may be understood) against, the wanton cruelty and ruthlessness of the enemy. He brings to the mind a vivid picture of the spitefulness of the oppressor who used all kinds of iron instruments, with the sole object of vexing the vanquished. The trellis-work of the Temple could have been destroyed quite easily without any instruments, especially as afterwards the Temple was entirely burned down. But the conqueror, to aggravate the mortification of the conquered nation, defiled all that was holy, and knowing, perhaps, that the Hebrews avoided the introduction of iron instruments when building the Temple or erecting an altar (comp. I Kings 6, 1 and Exod. 20, 25), he mocked them by demolishing the ornaments and decorations with hatchet and axes. One cannot help noticing that in this Psalm the author complains against the insults and effrontery of the impudent enemy. He asks God to remember that *the enemy reproaches the Lord, and a worthless nation provokes His name* (vv. 18, 22).

It is now necessary to explain to what kind of wooden trellis-work the Psalmist refers. One's mind naturally turns to שֹׁכְבָה mentioned in I Kings 7 and in the parallel passages of Chronicles. But the trellis-work mentioned there was certainly of metal, and played a minor part in the Temple, for it did not belong to the building itself, but to the furniture and decorations of the Temple. Thus if the ordinary translations and commentaries are to be relied upon no wooden trellis-work existed in Solomon's Temple. There are, however, in the First Book of Kings, chapter 6, a few passages which have not been rightly understood. מְקַלְעֵת (6, 18) has hitherto been taken to mean *carving*, and the verb קָלַע has been translated *he engraved, carved*. Despite the apparent consensus of opinion in this respect, I venture to question the philological soundness of this interpretation, as there is no evidence to support it. Were קָלַע to have that meaning, it would stand isolated in Hebrew without a parallel in the cognate languages and dialects. Even in Hebrew this signification of קָלַע would be confined to these obscure passages. And this circumstance in itself is sufficient to arouse suspicion. Nor does the context demand this explanation. In Hebrew קָלַע has two well-established meanings. In the first

place it denotes *he threw, slung*, and occurs several times in the Old Testament, both as a noun and verb. In Arabic, Syriac, and Ethiopic the noun in various forms is of frequent occurrence. The same root with another signification is to be found in קָלַעִים *curtains, hangings* (Exod. 29, 9, etc.). For in that verse it is evident that the radical meaning must be *he wove, plaited, twisted, intertwined*. With such a signification this verb is frequent in Neo-Hebrew, and is attested in Arabic by the occurrence of *ḵilāʿat(un)* "a sail." Fraenkel² takes *ḵilʿ(un)* to be a loan-word, but the form *ḵilāʿat(un)* which does not occur in any other dialect would tend to prove that it is a genuine Arabic root. The explanation of Gesenius that the idea underlying *ḵilʿ(un)* and the other meanings of קָלַע is *wavering*, is precluded by Hebrew קָלַעִים, as pointed out above. For קָלַע is so called, not because it *hangs and waves*, but on account of the way it is made.

All the cases where the verbs and nouns occur being taken into consideration, it would appear that this root should be recognized in Hebrew with only two meanings: (1) *he threw*; (2) *wove, plaited*. The common ground for the origin of these significations is probably the idea of *removing from one place and inserting into another*. With some modification this idea is present in all the significations in the cognate languages. In Arabic *ḵalaʿa* (I and VIII conjugations) = *he removed, uprooted, eradicated*. The meaning *he disentangled* is required in *فَنَشَبْتُ بِدَا فَرَسِي بَيْنَ الْحِجَارَةِ* *The forefeet of my horse got stuck among the stones. I alighted from it, disentangled its forefeet, and mounted it again (Ibn Baṭūṭah's Travels, Vol. IV, p. 9, edition of Defrémery and Sanguinetti)*. Thus even here the idea is not merely uprooting, but taking out the foot from among the stones and placing it on the smooth part of the road. Out of this the notion of *throwing, slinging* could have naturally developed, especially when the one who threw aimed at something. A parallel case is to be found in Arabic *salaka* "he inserted" and Hebrew הִשְׁלִיךָ "he threw." So also *šabaka* in Arabic = "he

² *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, p. 224.

inserted, intertwined," and in Syriac *asbek* (*Af'el* of *sbak*) sometimes = "he threw," and is chiefly used metaphorically in the sense of "attacked" (comp. Hebrew הִתְנַפֵּל Gen. 43, 18). Thus we have *ḥarbā* (*h*)_u *gēr bā'ē denarme ʔenasbek nāšā baḥdādē* "He wishes to arouse strife (*lit.* sword) and throw men against one another," i. e. to set one against another (*Homilies of Isaac of Antioch*, Bedjan's edition, p. 456, l. 12). In a similar way it is not hard to follow how the idea of "weaving" developed, for in weaving it is necessary to *remove from one place and insert into another*. And here again one may be permitted to quote the parallel of Arabic *šabaka* "he inserted," "wove," and Syriac *asbek* "he threw."

Now the meaning *he wove, plaited, intertwined* suits קָלַע in I Kings, chapter 6, quite as well as *carved*. We ought to translate אֶל הַבַּיִת פְּנִימָה מִקְלָעַת פְּקָעִים וּפְטוּרֵי צָצִים וְאֶרֶז אֶל הַבַּיִת פְּנִימָה מִקְלָעַת פְּקָעִים וּפְטוּרֵי צָצִים *And the cedar wood inside the house was an intertwining of gourds and outspread flowers*. According to this interpretation the ornaments were not carved out in the walls, but attached to them as a kind of *appliqué*, and hence they may rightly be called *trellis-work*, since they were intertwined.

It is these ornaments that the Psalmist had in mind.

Jersey City

B. HALPER