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A Confrontation with Youngsters in Job 30,12–13

DOI 10.1515/zaw-2015-0027

Introduction

Verses 30,12–13 describe Job's miserable current state and read:

Mere striplings assail me at my right hand (על-ימין פְּרָחַח יְקוּמוּ)

They put me to flight (רָגְלִי שָׁלַחוּ)

They build the roads for my ruin (וַיִּסְלְּוּ עָלַי אֶרְחוֹת אֲיָדָם)

They tear up my path (נָתְסוּ נְתִיבָתִי)

They promote my fall (לְהַיָּדֵי יַעֲלֶוּ)

Although it does them no good (לֹא עֲנָר לָמוֹ)

Verse 12 is a notorious *crux interpretum*, and 13 is no less difficult. Andersen felt that »siege-imagery could be behind the very difficult language of verses 12ff., where breach and crash suggest the fall of a beleaguered city.«¹ Ehrlich thinks that in 13 »Die drei ersten Worte sind heillos verderbt.«²

Understanding of 12–13 has been also hindered by the *hapax legomena* פְּרָחַח and נָתְסוּ. Tur-Sinai asks: »Why should the פְּרָחַח rise precisely on the right? What is פְּרָחַח, a word for which no plausible interpretation has been found, and why is this new subject introduced?«³ The word נָתְסוּ is particularly enigmatic, since no root נתס is known in any of the ancient Semitic languages. Finally, the last colon seems to suggest a situation at variance with the context.

This study views 12–13 as a description of a »Kulturkampf« confrontation between Job and groups of youngsters that oppose his manner of behavior, and see in his tragedy validation for their philosophies of life.

1 F. I. Andersen, *Job, an Introduction and Commentary* (London, 1976), 236.

2 A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel. Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches, Psalmen, Sprüche, Hiob* (Hildesheim, 1968), 298.

3 N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem, 1967), 424.

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Analysis

Ancient Versions

Verses 11–13a are absent in Septuagint MSS. The reconstructed Septuagint version renders 12–13: »They have risen up against me on the right hand of their offspring; they have stretched out their foot against me the ways of their destruction. My paths are ruined; for they have stripped off my raiment: he has shot at me with his weapons.« This literal but garbled translation takes פרחח = »offspring«, perhaps reading פרחח = רגלי = »their foot«, perhaps reading רגלם עלי = »against me«, a paraphrase; נהסו = »ruined«, perhaps reading נתיבתי = »my paths«; להייתי = »for they have stripped off«, perhaps reading חלצו = »my raiment«, perhaps reading לא עזר לי = »he has shot at me with his weapons«, which is impossible.

Targum has: »At my right, their sons rise up in impudence; they trip my feet, and press on me their ways of destruction. They ruin my path; they make my punishment take effect, and there is no one who would restrain them.« It takes perhaps בהוצפא as an explanation of על ימנא = פרחח = »their sons«, perhaps reading פרחח, from פרח »to bud« or »to sprout«, and thereby strengthens the linkage to the preceding text; ויסלו עלי = »and press on me«, rather than »cast up«; נהסו = »they ruin«; נתיבתי = »my paths«; להייתי = »to my punishment«, rather than »calamity«; and, יעילו = »take effect«.

Peshitta translates: »They rise up against my right hand, they have tripped me up; they have perplexed me through the crookedness of their ways. They mar my paths without a cause, they rejoice for what has befallen me; they shall have no helper.« It omits פרחח and אידם, and takes עלי ארוחות = »they have perplexed me through the crookedness of their ways«, which cannot be anchored in the MT; נהסו = »mar«; להייתי = »without a cause« and »for what has befallen me«; and, יעילו = »are glad«, perhaps reading גילו.

Vulgate renders: »At the right hand of my rising, my calamities forthwith arose: they have overthrown my feet, and have overwhelmed me with their paths as with waves. They have destroyed my ways, they have lain in wait against me, and they have prevailed, and there was none to help.« It takes פרחח = »my calamities«; יקומו = »of my rising«; אידם = »as with waves«, perhaps associating it with אד »mist«; נהסו = »they have destroyed«; נתיבתי = »my ways«; להייתי יעילו = »they have lain in wait against me«; and, omits למו.

The incoherent interpretations of the *Versions* are clear indication that already the ancient translators were baffled by 12–13.

Modern Exegesis

Modern exegesis on 12–13 assumes that starting with 12b Job uses the metaphor of a besieged city to describe his travails. Typical of this interpretative approach is Clines' recent translation: »On my right hand the mob rises; they trip me up; they build siege ramps against me to ruin me. They tear down my defenses; they succeed in bringing me down; they need no help.«⁴ In this translation:

עַל־יְמִין = »On my right hand«, which corresponds in Hebrew to עַל־יְמִין. It is surprising that ועַל־שְׂמֹאל is not mentioned. Beer notes: »Dem על־יְמִין entspricht im Texte keine andre Ortsbezeichnung. Bickel ergänzt, wie ähnlich schon Reiske, ועַל־שְׂמֹאל vor רגְלֵי שְׁלֹחוּ.«⁵ Ehrlich sees in יְמִין the Aramaic plural of »days«, and takes it as a designation of old age. Support for this sense of יְמִים can be found in 32,7. He renders 12a: »Gegen das Alter erhebt sich die junge Brut.«⁶ Unfortunately, this clever emendation requires the singular יְקוּם (»erhebt sich«) instead of MT יְקוּמוּ. Gordis notes: »though Elihu might call; the Friends or even Job old, Job would not so describe himself, especially since he was in the prime of life.«⁷ Driver and Gray find the significance of the phrase עַל־יְמִין in the fact that usually a man's right hand is strongest and he feels more secure on the right side.⁸ Yet, he is being assailed from the right. Moreover, the images conveyed by these notions of עַל־יְמִין do not cohere with the figure of a siege, in which the attack comes from multiple sides. A number of commentators omit יְמִין and read עָלִי instead of עַל.

פְּרָחָה = »the mob«. This *hapax legomenon* has been naturally connected to פָּרַח, »bud, sprout, shoot« and metaphorically taken to mean, »young descendant«. Among the ancient manuscripts 25 have פְּרָחָה (Num 8,4; Isa 5,24). Many assume that the quadrilateral פְּרָחָה was formed by reduplication of the third radical. The unique פְּרָחָה led to some daring emendations and understandings. For instance, Kissane reads פְּרָחָם »their brood«, relying on the Targum.⁹ However, the ח/ה confusion is unattested in the Tanach. Pope says: »The duplication of the final consonant is a bit odd in this word and it may be that the syllable *hāh* hides the word *hāhhu*, attested in Akkadian and Ugaritic in

⁴ D. J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (Dallas, 2006), 931.

⁵ G. Beer, *Der Text von Hiob Kap. VI–XIV* (Marburg, 1895), 194. However, the orthography of ועַל־שְׂמֹאל is considerably different than that of רגְלֵי שְׁלֹחוּ.

⁶ A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, Vol. VI., *Psalmen, Sprüche, und Hiob* (Leipzig, 1918), 298.

⁷ Gordis, *Job*, 333.

⁸ S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*, Vol. II, ICC (Edinburgh, 1921), 212.

⁹ E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Job* (Dublin, 1939), 185.

the sense of ›spittle, filth, unseemly conduct,‹ or the like – i.e., *prh bh*, ›a vile brood.‹¹⁰

יָקוּמוּ = »rises«. However, יָקוּמוּ is *Qal* perfect 3rd masculine plural of קוּם »to rise«.

Thus the text preceding this word should enumerate various groups, or refer to a number of people; a *pars pro toto* concept would not be proper.

רָגְלֵי שְׁלָחוּ = »they trip me up«. It has been assumed as obvious that something malicious is done to Job's feet, but what is specifically done and what is its effect was not clear. For instance, some suggest that Job was pushed or propelled, that he was tripped, and that he was trapped. The phrase has been emended to וַיִּרְגְּלוּ שְׁלֹי »they spy on my calm«; וַיִּרְגְּלוּ שְׁלָחוּ »those that spy on me are unrestrained«; וַיִּרְגְּלוּ לִי שְׁלָחוּ »they let loose slander [against me]«; וַיִּרְגְּלוּ יְשָׁלְחוּ »they send their feet against me«; וַיִּרְגְּלוּ יְשָׁלְחוּ »sie stoßen mir die Füße«; etc. A number of commentators delete this phrase.

וַיִּסְלְוּ עָלַי אֲרָחוֹת = »they build siege ramps against me«. Many assume that these words begin a metaphor (which ends in v. 13a), of an army besieging a fortress. A similar phrase (וַיִּסְלְוּ עָלַי דְּרָכָם) occurs in Job 19,12, where it concludes with a siege of Job's encampment. While the siege metaphor is clear in Job 19,12 in vv. 12c–13a it is obfuscated by the last three words. Thus, it is possible that the author used road building concepts to convey the notion of some people touting the superiority of their ways. יִסְלוּ is *Qal* 3rd imperfect plural of סָלַל I »lift up, cast up«. The noun אֲרָחָה »way, path« is never associated in the Tanach with »siege ramps«. This casts considerable doubt on the »siege metaphor«.

אֲיָדָם = »to ruin me«. However, אֲיָדָם cannot have this meaning because it is a noun. Since the masculine noun אֵיֶד means »distress, calamity«, אֲיָדָם means »their distress, their calamity«. BDB (15b) translation of אֲיָדָם by the adjective »calamitous« is incorrect.

נָתְסוּ = »they tear down«. This *hapax legomenon* has been assumed to be a by-form of נָתַצוּ »pull down, break down«. Driver and Gray rightly note that »נָתַצַּנּוּ elsewhere occurs either (1) of destroying buildings by pulling them *down*, or (2) metaphorically. Here, if the text is correct, the verb is used exceptionally of breaking *up* a path, and so rendering it impassable.«¹¹ The *Ketib-Qere* apparatus does not attest to a ט/צ confusion. Yellin suggests that the verb נָתַס was derived from the noun נִתְסָה »thorn«, which parallels the common Arabic نَشَّ »thorn«. ¹² Thus, נָתְסוּ = »they put thorns«. However, نَشَّ does not occur in literary Arabic and the noun نَشَّ does not occur in Hebrew.

¹⁰ M. H. Pope, *Job* (Garden City, 1986), 221.

¹¹ Driver and Gray, *Critical II*, 213.

¹² D. Yellin, אֵיֶד (Jerusalem, 1926), 70.

נְתִיבָתִי = »my defenses«. The meaning adopted by Clines is not attested in the Tanach. It is motivated by a desire to maintain the siege metaphor. Moreover, נתצו cannot have נְתִיבָתִי as an actual subject. Strauß takes נְתִיבָתִי = »meines Lebensweges«. ¹³ This seems an insightful interpretation.

לְהִיטֵי יָעִילוּ = »they succeed in bringing me down«. לְהִיטֵי is a prefixed feminine noun meaning »to my chasm, destruction, great calamity«; it cannot mean »bringing me down«. The verb יָעִילוּ, *Hiphil* imperfect 3rd masculine plural of יָעַל »profit, avail, benefit, help«, suggests that Job's assailants contribute to his calamity; i.e., they benefit the calamity, by making it a bigger calamity. Duhm considers the phrase לְהוֹרִי יָעִילוּ, »zu meinem Sturze nützen (!) sie«, as »Unsinn«. ¹⁴ However, the phrase makes sense if taken as a bitter sarcasm. The term has been emended to יַעֲלוּ »they attack«; יִגְלוּ »they rejoice«; יִהָרְסוּ מֵעֲגָלִי »they destroy my tracks«; etc.

לֹא עֹזֵר לָמוֹ = »they need no help«; in 29,12 it means »who has no helper«, such as an orphan. It can also mean »one who is not helped« and refer to Job; it can indicate the frivolity of the act, »it does them no good«; and, it could describe the craftiness of Job's assailants, »they have no help«. Variants of this phrase usually mean »there is no helper to him«. Many commentators read עֹצֵר instead of MT עֹזֵר, assuming an exchange of sibilants. However, the ז/צ confusion is not attested in the *Ketib-Qere* apparatus. Moreover, the *Qal* participle of עֹצֵר does not occur in the Tanach, though possible. Driver and Gray note that »MT even with עֹזֵר for עֹצֵר is scarcely tolerable.« ¹⁵ Pope abandoned this emendation since Arabic, عَزَّرَ »is used in opposite senses of ›help‹ and ›hinder‹.« ¹⁶

Solution

In 12 the plural יְקוּמוּ indicates that at least two categories of assailants are involved. MT mentions only one category פְּרָחָה. Thus the other category must be על ימין. However, as vocalized in MT it means »on the right«. This reading is suspect, since the text does not have the typical concomitant phrase ועל שמאל. A second category of assailants can be obtained from על ימין by vocalizing it עַל יְמִין

¹³ H. Strauß, *Hiob 19,1–42,17* (Neukirchen, 2000), 203.

¹⁴ D. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob* (Tübingen, 1897), 142.

¹⁵ Driver and Gray, *Critical II*, 215.

¹⁶ Pope, *Job*, 221.

reopens the deep wounds in Job's heart. However, this pain that the youngsters cause Job is of no benefit to them; it is just a contest of cultural superiority. הַיָּתִי is best understood as being derived from the feminine noun הַיָּהָה meaning »my disaster, my hell«. The youngsters' actions only increase Job's pain and magnify his feeling of disaster and ruin. To capture the nuances of ›help‹ and ›magnification‹ the author used the root יָעַל, for which יַעַל I means »to aid, to be useful, to profit«, and יַעַל II, kindred to עָלָה, means »to ascend, to rise above«. Thus, לְהַיָּתִי would imply »to my ruin they contribute and amplify it«.

Based on the proposed solution 12–13 can be cogently interpreted as follows:

Kids and young rabble rise, expose my habits.
 עַל־יָמִין וּפְרָחַח קוֹמוּ רְגְלֵי שְׁלַחֵי.
And extol the wanderings of their ruin,
 וַיִּסְלוּ עָלַי אֲרָחוֹת־אֲיָדָם,
denigrating my path.
 נִתְּסוּ נְתִיבָתִי.
To my ruin they contribute (and amplify it),
 לְהַיָּתִי יַעַלוּ,
Though it does them no good.
 לֹא עֹזֵר לָמוֹ.

This interpretation fits the context admirably. Societal outcasts dare to mock Job; they shun his presence, and spit at him (1–11).¹⁸ In 12–13 he is confronted by youngsters, who do not share his beliefs. They extol their skepticism, and probably mockingly point to Job's tragedy being a reward for his piety. This causes a rush of pain and frustration (14). He is seized by dread; it chases as the wind his noble nature, and as a cloud his hope for salvation disappears (15). The confrontation with the youngsters was very traumatic (16).

Abstract: In Job 30,12 is a notorious *crux interpretum*, and verse 13 is no less difficult. Understanding of 12–13 has been also hindered by the *hapax legomena* פְּרָחַח and נִתְּסוּ. This study views 12–13 as a description of a »Kulturkampf« confrontation between Job and groups of youngsters that oppose his manner of behavior, and see in his tragedy validation for their philosophies of life.

Zusammenfassung: Hi 30,12 steht als *crux interpretum* neben dem ebenso schwierigen Vers 13. Deren Verständnis wird besonders durch die *hapax legomena* פְּרָחַח und נִתְּסוּ erschwert. Dieser Beitrag versteht Hi 30,12–13 als Beschreibung eines »Kulturkampfes« zwischen Hiob und einer jungen Generation, die sich seinem Verhalten widersetzt und in seinem Schicksal die Bestätigung ihrer Lebenshaltung erkennt.

¹⁸ A. Pinker, »The Fate of Undesirables (Job 24,5–12),« in: OTE 27/3 (2014): 960–991.

Résumé: En Jb 30, le verset 12 est une *crux interpretum* notoire et le verset 13 n'est pas moins difficile. La compréhension des versets 12–13 est également entravée par les *hapax legomena* פְּרִיחַח et גְּתִיסוֹ. Cette étude considère les versets 12–13 comme la description d'un »Kulturkampf« opposant Job et des groupes de jeunes, qui sont hostiles à sa conduite et voient dans son sort tragique la confirmation de leurs philosophies de la vie.



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