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Old Testament Notes.

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1. *The Meaning of וְכַעֲנַת*. 2. *The Missing Conclusion of Ezra 1.*

1. The Meaning of וְכַעֲנַת.

THE word occurs in Jewish literature four times; viz., Ezra 4¹⁰. 11. 17 7¹²; all passages in the Aramaic portion of Ezra. (In 4¹⁷ the form is וְכַעֲנַת, but the manner of its use leaves no doubt that it is simply a contracted form of the other.) The word is used in all these cases in exactly the same way. It stands at the end of the formal address, in official letters, just before the letter itself begins. According to the Massoretic pointing, it is connected with what precedes, *i.e.* with the formula of address, rather than with what follows.

It has been found very difficult of explanation. Judging from all Aramaic and Hebrew analogies, the word וְכַעֲנַת is the adverb of time, 'now,' like בְּעֵת, בְּעֵינָן, etc. So in the authorized English version the phrase was translated 'and at such a time.' But this was plainly giving the word more than it could carry; and of late years the accepted rendering has been 'and so forth.' The current theory is that set forth by Eduard Meyer in his recent book, *Die Entstehung des Judenthums*, p. 8 f.: 'The formal address of the letter was *abbreviated*, as often happens in modern times. וְכַעֲנַת, which must mean "and so forth," was the substitute for the omitted formalities.'

It is a well-known fact — the word 'must' in Meyer's statement indicates it, for example — that this translation of וְכַעֲנַת is an expedient of desperation. There is nothing to be made of the word in its only natural and attested signification 'and now'; on the other hand, its occurrence and form are beyond doubt. There is apparently only one way to deal with it, viz. to render it 'and so forth.' The old versions afford no help. They either omit the word altogether (as generally happens), or else plainly misunderstand it.

There is no feat of modern lexical jugglery by which **וּבְעֵנַת** can be made the equivalent of 'and so forth.' Gesenius' Lexicon, to which all things were possible, attempted as late as the eleventh edition to cut the word loose from **וְעַתָּה**, **וְעַתָּה**, and all its evident belongings, and give it an underground connection with the root **עָנָה**; which in turn involved a new and ingenious explanation of that root. More recently, lexicons and grammars of Biblical Aramaic have given up all attempt at explanation, simply stating that although **וְעַתָּה** means 'and now,' **וּבְעֵנַת** must mean 'and so forth' (so Gesenius-Buhl, Strack, Marti). Kautzsch (1884) dismisses the word as "von unklarer Bedeutung." The Siegfried-Stade Lexicon, recognizing, as do the others just mentioned, that we have here only a variation of **וְעַתָּה**, translates courageously, 'and now'; but omits to add that, as our Massoretic text stands, this translation is absolutely impossible and unmeaning in all the places where the word occurs.

Further, the theory that the address has been *abridged* in these letters has nothing to make it probable. The form of address is as full and specific as could be desired; it is not easy to imagine anything more that could be said. For example: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of Heaven, all peace"¹; or again: "To Rehum the governor, and Shimshaj the scribe, and to their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the rest of those who dwell on the other side of the river, peace." The addition "and so forth" is the last thing to expect in such cases as these.

There is one easy solution of the difficulty with this word; namely, to connect it in all cases (at least in thought) *with what follows*, not with what precedes. This corresponds to the invariable usage with the other forms of the word, required by their meaning. The translation of **וּבְעֵנַת**, also, is the natural one, 'and now'; the word *serving to introduce the letter proper*, after the formal address, exactly as is done by the similarly placed '*ammā ba'du*, 'as for what follows: '—'now for business: '—in Arabic formal documents. The Massoretic punctuation must be emended in all the places where the word occurs,² in such a way as to give it a completely isolated position. It would naturally stand at the beginning of the letter, rather than at the end of the superscription. The verse division should therefore

¹ Ezra 7¹², restoring **שָׁלֵם** after **שָׁמַיָא**.

² In Ezra 4¹⁰ the presence of **וּבְעֵנַת** is plainly due to the blunder of a copyist, caused by the fact that the last clause of the verse is exactly like the last clause of vs.¹¹.

immediately precede, not follow it. The word is not, however, to be treated as a part of the following sentence; as is done, for example, by the Greek translation of Ezra 4¹¹ in 1 Esdras. It occupies an independent position, like the Arabic phrase just compared. "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Rehum and Shimshai and their companions, greeting. *And now [touching the purpose of this letter]:*—Your report has been carefully read," etc. This is also indicated by the unusual *pausal form* of the word, וּכְצַנְתָּ instead of וּכְצַן (cf. e.g. Ezra 4¹⁸, where the latter word is used in the ordinary way), a form that is at once explained when this peculiar use is recognized.

It may be observed, finally, that this introductory וּכְצַנְתָּ in official documents is not without its parallels in the Old Testament, in the few cases where the form of a letter is given. Thus, 2 Kings 5⁶: The king of Aram sent a letter to the king of Israel, saying, וְעַתָּה כָּבוֹא הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה אֵלַיךְ הִנֵּה שְׁלַחְתִּי וְנָרַ וְעַתָּה:—When this letter reaches thee, know that I have sent," etc. Here the וְעַתָּה is the exact equivalent of the corresponding word in the Ezra documents. So also 2 Kings 10³: Jehu wrote letters to the officers in Samaria, saying, וְעַתָּה כָּבוֹא הַסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה אֵלַיְכֶם וְנָרַ וְעַתָּה:—When this reaches you," etc. We may perhaps also compare the first of the letters to the Jews in Egypt, prefixed to 2 Macc., where (1⁶) καὶ νῦν begins the letter, after the long benediction joined to the address.

2. The Missing Conclusion of Ezra i.

The first chapter of Ezra terminates in a singularly abrupt way. The Chronicler has told us, in the first four verses, of the proclamation of King Cyrus; then in verses 5, 6, of how the 'chief men of the families' of the Jews prepared to obey it, and how they were encouraged and aided by all their brethren. The remaining verses of the chapter (vs.⁷⁻¹¹) tell how the king brought out the temple-vessels (which are described), and gave them into the hand of Sheshbazzar. *Here the narrative stops short*; and when it is taken up again, at the end of ch. 2, the Jews are already in Jerusalem. We are not told that the expedition formed, and set out; or who its leaders were. Nothing is said about any rejoicing among the people—either those who went up or those who stayed behind. There is no date given for this most important of all expeditions; and that, too,