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The Oracle against Edom

(Isa. 63 1-6 and 59 16-17)

FREDERICK C. HARDING

YONKERS, N. Y.

THE purpose of this paper is to show grounds for making certain changes in the arrangement of Isa. 63 1-6 and to show the relation between this passage and Isa. 59 16-17.

It is generally recognized that Isa. 63 1-6 does not belong with the context but is an independent oracle with at least one line missing. It is also widely held that the waw consecutive should replace the simple waw wherever the latter occurs and that **וַאֲשַׁכְרֶם** should be changed to **וַאֲשַׁכְרֶם** in vs. 6a2. To these propositions this paper agrees.

There are, however, other phenomena that have not received sufficient attention and the rearrangement to be proposed is the result of an attempt to solve the problems which these phenomena raise. The references are to Kittel's text in which each line consists of two trimeter members.

The characters 6a2 (see above) will illustrate the method of reference to be followed. They refer to the verse, the line and the member respectively.

The emendations suggested and discussed in this paper are:—

- A. A line similar to vs. 3c2 should be added to verse 6a.
- B. Lines b-c of vs. 3 should be deleted.
- C. Isa. 59 17 should be included in this oracle between vs. 5 and 6.

A. The reason for adding a line similar to vs. 3c2 to vs. 6 can best be shown by comparing vs. 3b-c with vs. 6.

Vs. 3

- b "And I trod them in mine anger,
And I trampled them in my fury;
c Their juice splashed upon my raiment,
And I have defiled all my garments,"

Vs. 6

- a "And I trampled peoples in mine anger,
And I crushed them in my fury;
b And I spilled to the earth their juice,
.....

It is obvious that the second member of line b in vs. 6 is missing and that without it the poem ends abruptly.

Since it is not likely that the oracle originally lacked this member and since vs. 3b-c1 practically duplicates what remains in vs. 6 it is quite probable that the missing member originally corresponded with the second member of vs. 3c with perhaps verbal differences as in the other corresponding members.

B. The reasons for deleting vs. 3b-c are many. There are defects affecting both the interpretation and the structure of the poem for which they in their present position are responsible.

1. *Vs. 3b1 is metrically deficient.*

The measure is trimeter throughout with this and one other exception. That the author was not indifferent to the meter is very evident, especially in vs. 5b2 where the אני emphatic seems to have been dictated by metrical rather than by grammatical necessities.

This raises the question as to whether the deficiency in vs. 3b1 and another in vs. 1b2 are intentional. Another word is to be desired in vs. 1b2 to bring out the parallelism between it and the first member of the line, otherwise the two members run together and might pass for a single pentameter line. Some commentators add את after רב but it is better to add אני before רב . The verse would then read:—

"I that speak in righteousness,
I mighty to save."

This makes a strong parallelism and it is easy to see that a copyist may have overlooked the repeated word, or possibly thought it unnecessary, and so allowed it to drop from the text.

The deficiency in vs. 3b1 is more important because it is associated with a grammatical difficulty which the restoration of the meter might clear.

2. *Vs. 3b is grammatically obscure.*

This obscurity reveals itself when we seek the object of the verbs "trod" and "trampled" in this line.

The pronominal suffix "them" has apparently the "peoples" of the preceding line for its antecedent. But these are mentioned only to declare their absence. Cheyne therefore thinks that the trampling of these "peoples" was subsequent to, and not identical with, the treading of the wine-press. If this view is correct then vs. 3b-c is not a description of the event mentioned in the preceding line, but of something which happened afterwards, and the splendid figure of the wine-press becomes a subordinate feature; the real stage of action being some distant field where the vintner wreaks vengeance on those who failed to come to his assistance.

Apart from the improbability that a poet would thus sacrifice a figure for which he had so carefully prepared the way, there is positive evidence, in his use of the verbs "trod" and "trampled" and especially in his use of the word "juice" as a metaphor for blood, that he had no intention of doing so. Since, then, the "trampling" takes place in a wine-press it seems reasonable to suppose that vs. 3b-c is a description of the event mentioned in the preceding line.

But how can the peoples who are "trampled" be absent? The fact is we need another word not only to complete the meter of vs. 3b1 but also to enable us to make the necessary distinction between the absent "peoples" and the contents of the wine-press. Fortunately we are not left to conjecture what this word is, for vs. 6a1 supplies it. The interesting thing is that the needed word is "peoples" and it suggests the opinion that whoever is responsible for the present condition of the text substituted the pronoun in vs. 3b1 because the word "peoples" already occurred in the preceding line. If vs. 3b-c is to be retained, this word must be restored.

While, at first glance, this does not appear to help the situation, a closer inspection will show that it does, for it enables us to make the distinction we are seeking.

The "peoples" who are "trodden" and "trampled" may have been Israel's near and troublesome foes whom Yahweh as the Vintner had determined to crush. The absent "peoples" would then be more distant nations among whom he looked for a servant; some rising or risen world power that would crush Edom and the "peoples" Edom typified and yet spare Israel, as others had crushed Israel and spared Edom.

The use of the same word to designate two classes of nations somewhat obscures this distinction, but the suffix pronoun in vs. 3b1 utterly obliterates it. It is awkward, too, that such a word should occur in successive lines, but this is no argument against the emendation, rather is it an argument to be added to those which follow for deleting vs. 3b-c, since this strophe occurs again in a more appropriate place.

3. *Vs. 3b-c interferes with the strophical arrangement.*

With another member added to vs. 6b there are three distinct tetrastich strophes in trimeter measure: vss. 1 a-b, 5 and 6. The rest of the passage can be arranged in any one of several ways; there is no obvious and natural strophical structure.

Such a structure appears at once if vs. 3b-c is deleted; vs. 4 connects just as well with 3a as it does with 3c and the entire passage falls into a series of tetrastich strophes with the exception that vss. 1 c and 2 are best left apart to form independent distichs, the one ending the first section and the other beginning the second.

4. *Vs. 3b-c anticipates the climax and so obscures the progression of events.*

If these lines are omitted there is a fine progression to a splendid climax. The answer to the watchman's question begins in vs. 3a: The vintner *has* trodden a wine-press as the watchman surmised, he has trodden it alone. Vs. 4 gives the reason why in the absence of aid he had trodden it *alone*: the day of vengeance had come, i. e. the grapes were ripe and gathered for crushing and the task could be no longer postponed. Vs. 5 tells how amazed the vintner was that none of his servants appeared

to undertake or even to help in the work, and how therefore it was necessary for him to come in person and execute judgment. Vs. 6 forms the climax with its description of the terrible finale. The interpolated strophe not only destroys this fine progression but it destroys, too, the climactic effectiveness of the final strophe, since it completely answers the watchman's question before all the details are in. Vs. 6 is thus made to appear as a mere repetition of the finale already described in vs. 3b-c, but repeated here because of the added details in vs. 5.

But verse 5 is an integral part of the picture, and to regard it as an afterthought is to miss the author's entire purpose. It is the grim solitariness of the vintner as well as the terribleness of the destruction that he desires to depict. This he mentions in vs. 3a1, amplifies in vs. 3a2, and dramatically emphasizes in vs. 5.

If vs. 3b-c is omitted, the "aloneness" of the vintner stands out in strong relief and is strikingly impressive, but if retained the picture is blurred because the connection between vs. 3a and vs. 5 is obscured.

There should remain little doubt that vs. 3b-c did not originally occur in its present position and the real question is as to whether it should be substituted for vs. 6 or simply be used to complete that verse.

The reasons for adopting the latter course form the final reasons for deleting vs. 3b-c.

5. *In the word אֲנִי־אֵלֹהִים vs. 3c2 introduces an alien idea.*

As to the form of this word opinion is divided; some explain it as an Aramaic form, hiphil first pers. perf., others as a mixed form. The latter are probably right, the preformative of the imperf. being added to a verb in the perf. to indicate that it should be read as an imperf. in conformity with the preceding verbs. This note was made, most likely, by those responsible for the present pointing of the waw in this passage.

The quarrel here is not with the form but with the word itself, for it makes the vintner say that his raiment is "defiled" and this does not harmonize with the description of that raiment given by the watchman in vss. 1-2.

The watchman mentions the garments four times. In vs. 1b

he calls them "glorious" and it is probable that **קָדוֹשׁ** in vs. 1a is meant to convey the same impression.

In any case he nowhere uses a word involving the idea of "defilement". Either the idea does not occur to him or he carefully avoids suggesting it. Under these circumstances the vintner's use of **נָאֵל** is suspicious.

The difficulty is usually met by understanding it to mean simply "stain" or "soil", but it has this meaning only in a moral or ritual sense. According to Driver (*LOT.*, 418, note) its primary meaning is "to assert (by purchase) a right, hence fig. to reclaim, rescue, esp. from servitude, oppression".

Thus it came to mean to free, to liberate, and since holy things were not free to the uninitiated, **נָאֵל** gained use to describe things common, profane, things not acceptable to Yahweh (cf. Mal. 1 7, 12) or persons ritually disqualified from eating of "the most holy things" (cf. Ezra 2 62-63). In Isa. 59 3 the word occurs in the phrase **כִּי כָפִיכֶם נָאֵלְתֶם**. Here even if it is translated by the word "stain" it still carries the idea of defilement, for it is not the actual stains that the prophet condemns or of which he speaks, but the guilt of shedding innocent blood.

There is no warrant for understanding **נָאֵל** to mean "defile" apart from this moral or ritual implication, and to translate it otherwise is arbitrary.

The usual connotation of the word is against its use here, for it is only innocent blood that defiles in this sense. Mere blood does not defile, else the blood of the sacrifice would defile the altar. Nor does the blood of the guilty defile, for when the land is defiled by the blood of the innocent the blood of the guilty is the only thing that can cleanse it; cf. Numb. 35 33.

Independently therefore of the lack of consistency in calling the garments glorious in one line and defiled in another, there are two reasons for doubting whether this word originally appeared in this poem:—

- a. The blood on the garments is not that of the innocent but of the guilty.
- b. In the terms of the metaphor, the garments are not stained with blood but with juice.

6. *Vs. 3b-c was probably wanting in the Septuagint.*

So far only internal evidence has been considered and it shows that all the real difficulties concentrate in these two lines. It is not surprising therefore to find that the external evidence is also against their retention.

The heading of this section does not mean that there are not two descriptions of the treading of the wine-press in the Sept.; for there are, and they occupy the same relative positions there that they do in the Masoretic text.

Both descriptions, however, agree with that given in vs. 6 rather than that in vs. 3b-c. These passages are quoted from Swete's edition.

Vs. 3b-c:

καὶ κατεπάτησα αὐτοὺς ἐν θυμῷ μου
καὶ κατέθλασα αὐτοὺς ὡς γῆν
καὶ κατήγαγον τὸ αἶμα αὐτῶν (εἰς γῆν).

Vs. 6:

καὶ κατεπάτησα αὐτοὺς τῇ ὀργῇ μου
καὶ κατήγαγον τὸ αἶμα αὐτῶν εἰς γῆν

It will be seen that vs. 3b-c in the Sept. almost exactly duplicates vs. 6 of the Masoretic text. Incidentally *κατέθλασα* in the second member of vs. 3b in the Sept. confirms the change of שָׁר to שָׁר in the second member of vs. 6a in the Masoretic text. It is possible too that *ὡς γῆν* in vs. 3b2 above is a corruption of *ὀργῇ μου*. The only reference to the garments in the Sept. codices is in Cod. Sin. where a very early corrector, perhaps the original copyist himself, has written in the word *ἱμάτια* in vs. 6. Strangely it does not take the place of *γῆν* but of *αἶμα* which is manifestly wrong. This is a vague hint that such a word existed in the MSS. back of the Sept., but that its relation to the context was indistinct.

On the basis of the foregoing arguments it is fair to conclude that vs. 3b-c was originally an interpolation of vs. 6 (at an earlier point in the poem) which in the Masoretic text has become a paraphrase. We are indebted to it for preserving the reference to the garments, but after using it to complete vs. 6 it should be deleted.

The attempt may now be made to supply the missing member

in vs. 6. The exact wording is of course more or less a matter of conjecture but perhaps not altogether so. For instance we may be reasonably certain that it had the word *garments* and that it carried on the figure of the wine-press.

The subject would therefore be **נִצְתָּם** which in vs. 6 b is made to spurt down to the earth, i. e. to the floor of the wine-press, and would reach the garments by "splashing up". It is not necessary to repeat **נִצְתָּם** since it occurs as the object in the preceding measure, and all that we need to complete the missing measure is a verb in the 3. pers. and a preposition expressing the idea of "splashing upon". Such a verb and preposition appear in vs. 3c1 where **וַיַּעַל** so exactly meets the requirements of the words we are seeking; where indeed the whole measure so fits the needs of the situation; that it is a question if it should not be regarded as the one which originally completed verse 6. It is here that the element of conjecture comes in, for we have the whole of vs. 3c from which to select.

The verb **נִאֵל** need not be considered, for, aside from the objections already urged, it does not suit the figure so well as **וַיַּעַל**. The only real element of conjecture is as to whether the subject was repeated and which of the two words for garments was used.

The line reads better without the repetition of the subject and with the inclusive phrase **כָּל-מַלְבוּשֵׁי**.

Transferring the new measure to the end of vs. 6 the last line would read:

וַאֲרִיד לְאָרֶץ נִצְתָּם
וַיַּעַל כָּל-מַלְבוּשֵׁי

If this is not an exact restoration of the original it is probable that it does not essentially differ from it.

C. *A unity in Isa. 63 1-6 and Isa. 59 16-17.*

The following considerations suggest the inclusion of Isa. 59 17 between vss. 5 and 6 of Isa. 63.

- a. Vss. 16-17 of Isa. 59 form a poetic fragment which does not unite with the context.

b. This fragment does unite with Isa. 63 at the place designated.

a. 1. *Vss. 16-17 do not unite with vss. 1-15 a.*

Isa. 59 1-15a is a prophecy addressed to a people distressed and distracted. The point of the prophecy is that the distress is not due to any lack of power or willingness in Yahweh (cf. vs. 1) but to the sins of the people (cf. vs. 2).

These sins are catalogued in vss. 3-8 though it is doubtful if these verses are a unity. In vss. 9-11 the prophet identifies himself with the people and voices their complaint of the unhappy conditions; and in vss. 12-15 a he voices their confession. The people is Israel and the prophet is dealing with existing conditions.

In vs. 15 b the waw consecutive of the imperfect following a waw consecutive of the perfect and a participle marks an abrupt transition from a description of the present to a narrative of the past. The unusual feature is not the fact of the transition but that it involves an illogical situation; for vs. 15 b implies that the conditions described as present in vs. 1-15a were the cause of events narrated as past in vs. 16-17, and so makes present conditions cause something to happen in the past. Neither grammatically nor logically do the two sections unite.

2. *Vss. 16-17 do not unite with vss. 18-21.*

The imperfect with waw consecutive in vss. 16-17 is followed by pure imperfects in vs. 18, which causes another abrupt transition, this time from the past to the future.

If vss. 16-17 are a description of the way in which Yahweh prepared himself to execute the judgment described in vs. 18, the third pers. perf. should continue at least through that verse. But the two sections do not belong together, vs. 16 b shows that the judgment is past and vs. 17 is a part of a description of how it took place. The judgment in vs. 18, however, is yet in the future. The redactor attempts to unite the judgment in vs. 16-17 with the preceding section by means of vs. 15 b. The Sept. includes this redaction and unites vs. 17 and 18 in a peculiar way. It omits the second member of vs. 17 b and continues into vs. 18 without punctuation as follows:—

“And he wrapped on a garment of vengeance
 And his clothing^z / was as one repaying a recompense.”
 (καὶ τὸ περιβόλαιον αὐτοῦ / ὡς
 ἀνταποδώσων ἀνταπόδοσιν).

The sign / indicates the place where 17b1 runs into vs. 18. Whatever textual conditions lie behind this translation it is at least possible that this represents an attempt to bridge what was felt to be a noticeable gap.

The fact that the redactor and the Sept. translator both seem to have noticed the lack of connection between vss. 16-17 and the context supports the contention that they constitute a fragment which does not belong in ch. 59.

b. The connection between 59 16-17 and 63 5 is widely recognized, but the exact nature of this connection seems to have escaped observation. The view argued here is that 59 16 is a free quotation in the third pers. of 63 5, and that 59 17 is similarly a quotation of a verse which once followed 63 5. The first of these propositions can be demonstrated by a comparison of the two verses involved.

Isa. 59 16:

“And he looked but there was no man,
 And he was astounded but there was no attacker;
 Therefore his own arm got him victory,
 And his righteousness it sustained him.”

Isa. 63 5:

“And I looked but there was no helper,
 And I was astounded but there was no supporter;
 Therefore mine own arm got me victory,
 And my fury it sustained me.”

It is clear that both in structure and ideas these strophes are alike. The wording too is such as to show dependence of one upon the other.

The hithpael of **סמח** in the second measure of both strophes is of itself convincing and the **ס׳י** emphatic in the fourth measure should not be overlooked.

The first measure is the only place where the verbs differ and there they are practically synonymous.

The other differences are interesting. **שׂוֹן אֵין** may have come from 63 3a. **שׂוֹן** in the second measure is translated in the Sept. as though it were **שׂוֹן** as in the second measure of 63 5, the same word *ἀντιληφόμενος* being used at both places. **שׂוֹן** in the fourth measure can hardly be correct since **שׂוֹן** is a part of the apparel in the first measure of vs. 17. The verbal differences favor the priority of 63 5 and the dependence of 59 16 upon it. The chief difference is the change in the person of the verb; but since from the above considerations one of these strophes must have been a quotation of the other, the congruity of 63 5 with its context suggests that *it* is the quoted, and the other the quotation, in which the change is made to the third pers. in the effort to make it fit its new position.

If vs. 16 is a quotation of Isa. 63 5, then, because the two strophes belong together, vs. 17 is in all likelihood a quotation of a strophe which at the time of the quoting appeared between vs. 5 and 6 of ch. 63. This is confirmed by the fact that when it is given this place it is found to fit exactly in meter, strophical form, subject matter, and position. Now, the watchman's reference to the glorious garments is filled with meaning, and the manner in which the vintner uses the opportunity to display the splendor of his array and, at the same time, to tell how he prepared himself for his fearful task, is a stroke so deft and sure as to establish beyond question the author's genius.

The reconstructed poem is a literary gem and is in itself a strong argument for the changes which have been proposed and defended on purely critical grounds, as this translation will show.

Watchman.—

“Who is this coming from Edom,
Brilliant of garment from Bozrah;
This glorious in his raiment,
Marching in the strength of his might?”

Vintner.—

“I that speak in righteousness,
I mighty to save.”

Watchman.—

“Wherefore the red on thy garments,
And thy raiment as one treading a wine-press?”

Vintner.—

“A wine-trough I have trodden alone,
And of the nations none was with me;
For a day of vengeance was in my heart,
And the year of my deliverance was come.

And I looked but there was no helper,
And I was astounded but there was no supporter;
Therefore mine own arm got me victory,
And my fury it sustained me.

And I put on righteousness as a coat of mail,
And a helmet, salvation on my head,
And I put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
And I wrapped on zeal as a cloak.

And I trampled the peoples in mine anger,
And crushed them in my fury;
And I spilled to the earth their juice,
And it hath splashed upon all my raiment.”

Note on the pointing of “Waw” in Isa. 63 1-6.

The Masoretic pointing is probably due to the pronominal suffix in vs. 3 b. Thinking that its antecedent was the “peoples” of the preceding line, it was natural that the Masoretes should refer this destruction to the future. The pointing therefore was not arbitrarily made but was due to the obscurity in vs. 3. The arbitrary changes, if such there be, were made at an earlier time by those who interpolated vs. 3 b-c which may have been done with the purpose of obliterating the distinction between the two classes of “peoples” and to make the judgment both future and general. In this case it is probable that an original **וְאֵל** has been changed to **וְאֵלָי** either in vs. 3 or vs. 6.

*Note on the meaning of **וְאֵלָי** in vs. 1a.*

The addition of the new strophe increases the probability that *hāmūš* is intended to parallel *hādūr*. It has commonly been held to refer to the *ādōm* in vs. 2, in which case *hādūr* is

difficult to explain unless the garments are glorious because they are stained. The new strophe allows us to think that it was the splendor of the garments which first attracted the watchman's attention as he saw the majestic figure approaching from a distance, and that it is this alone to which he refers in his first challenge. The red stains appear when the vintner comes into closer view and naturally rouse the watchman's curiosity.

It is to be noticed too that the אָרָם in vs. 2 is *upon* the garments, it is not their original color, while in vs. 1 the raiment itself is אָרָם and this, if it refers to any particular color, is not to be confused with the *ādōm* but must be distinguished from it as the original color of the garments upon which the *ādōm* is plainly distinguishable. It is doubtful if *ḥ^amūṣ* means any particular color and it is better translated "brilliant" = *hādūr*.

Note on the stage setting.

It is not common to find the dramatic element so prominent in Hebrew poetry as it is in this poem.

The stage is evidently a vineyard, in which as usual there is a wine-press, from the trampling of which the chief character approaches some other point; the part he plays is therefore that of a vintner.

Carrying on the figure, the interlocutor may be a watchman occupying a tower in a neighboring vineyard. These towers are common in Judean vineyards and upon them are placed watchmen to guard against marauders both animal and human, cf. Isa. 52; Matt. 21 33. The neighboring vineyards would appear to be Edom and Judea. Bozrah is the wine-press and it may be guessed that Jerusalem is the watchtower.

Israel's near-by foes, typified by the Edomites, are the grapes and Yahweh is the vintner. This interpretation so far as it concerns Edom and Bozrah depends on the retention of vs. 1 without emendation. Lagarde, Marti, Duhm and others change מֵאָהָם to מֵאָדָם and מִבְּעֵרָה to מִבְּעֵר in vs. 1 on the assumption that the poem is apocalyptic and refers to the final "Day of Yahweh". With these changes they read vs. 1a as follows:—

"Who is this coming reddened

With redder garments than a vintner."

But the distinction between the *absent* peoples and the peoples who are *trod*den and *trampled* is so necessary to a full appreciation of the poet's argument that clearly it is of a particular and not of a general judgment that he writes. This being so, since the verbs are all perfects, there is no reason for these emendations; the judgment is past and not future, and the poem is commemorative of a historic event rather than prophetic of one yet to be.

Note on the event commemorated.

We know too little about the later history of Edom to be able to say with any certainty what this event was.

The difficulty in thinking it was the return of Judas Maccabaeus from his slaughter of the Edomites was shown long ago by Lowth in his commentary on Isaiah (cf. p. 389).

Lowth's objections are still valid and to my mind conclusive. He that "speaks in righteousness" can hardly be any other than Yahweh; he executes the judgment himself, unaided; the word "peoples" in vs. 6 seems to involve others beside the Edomites in the destruction, and the total impression given by the passage is that this was a deliverance wrought for and not by Israel.

The story in II Chron. 20 1-30 shows some curious affinities with this ode. Stripped of its miraculous and spectacular elements the narrative states that Ammon and Moab joined forces and that Judah thought the coalition was formed against her (cf. vs. 1-2).

The event, however, intimates that Edom was the objective for it is upon her the allies turn (cf. vs. 23).

After attacking and defeating the Edomites the allies fell to fighting each other; a series of events which had a recent parallel in the Balkans.

The divergence of this story from that in II Kings 3, for which it seems to have been substituted, does not prohibit the possibility that it had a historic basis, but since Kings shows no place for it, the incident, if historical, probably belongs to the early days of the post-exilic period, say somewhere between Ezra 6 and 7, or, better still, somewhere in the period covered by the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The reference to the new court of the house of Yahweh in vs. 5, to the sanctuary as though recently built in vs. 8, the sense of feebleness and the feeling that deliverance must come from Yahweh expressed in vs. 12, and the gathering of men, women and children before the house of Yahweh, are all suggestive of conditions in the restoration period as set forth in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is curious, too, that in II Chron. 19 Jehoshaphat does the important things that the decree of Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra to do (cf. Ezra 7 25). This is a subject to which I hope to return in another connection and in another paper.

For the present it is sufficient to observe that the event narrated in II Chron. 20 1-30 more nearly fits the requirements of the one celebrated in Isa. 63 1-6 than any other that we know. In both God is the champion; in both He works the deliverance alone; in both the slaughter is complete; and in both, while Edom is prominent, other near-by foes of Israel are included in the destruction.

These affinities suggest that if the story has a substratum of historicity it gives the event which inspired Isa. 63 1-6.