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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

THE CURSE ON THE SERPENT

In the third edition of his commentary on *Genesis* (Göttingen, 1910) p. 20 Gunkel translates the last line of the Curse on the Serpent: *He may tread upon thy head, and thou mayest snap at his heel*. In the Notes he states, Gressmann had called his attention to the fact that we had here a paronomasia: in the first hemistich the verb *šuf* meant *to tread down*; in the second, *to snap*. I pointed out more than 33 years ago (BAL 102)¹ that we had a play upon words in the last line of the Protevangelium, adding that I failed to see why *šuf* could not have two different meanings in the two hemistichs; the Heb. verb *šuf*, to tread under foot, was connected with Assyr. *šepu*, foot, and *iššûfêka rôš* meant *he will crush thy head*. My explanation is recorded in n. 157 of Casanowicz's *Paronomasia in the OT* (JBL 12, 160). In the same year (1893) I published a *Note on the Protevangelium* in JHUC, No. 106, p. 107. I showed there that we have in Assyrian a Piel *ušip*, he crushed. In the last line of the additions to iv R² 15, col. 1 (cf. CT 16, 43, 1. 63) we read: *nišê mâti ušîpû*, they crushed the people of the land, just as 𐎢 has in Ps. 94:5 '*ammâk Iahûê iššûfûn* for 𐎢 '*ammêkâ Iahûê iqdakkê'û*, they crush Thy people, O JHVH; cf. Lam. 3: 34: *lê-dâkkê tâht raglân kol-âsîre 'ârç*, to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the land, and Ps. 143:3: *dikkâ la'ârç haïïatî*, he crushed my life to the ground.

In the OT the verb *šâf*, he crushed, is generally spelled *plene* with an *Aleph* (GK § 72, p). In the gloss Am. 2:7^a we must read: *Haš-šâfim lû-'afâr dallîm uš-darôk 'ânûîm la-'ârç*, who crush the poor to the dust, and tread the humble to the ground. *Bê-rôš* is a gloss to *šâfim* as in Gen. 3:15; for the prefixed *bê*-see JBL 32, 112, n. 19; 113, n. 23; contrast WF 217, iii. For

¹ For the abbreviations see vol. 34 of this JOURNAL, p. 41.

'*al-'afar* read *lä-'afar*, and for *ärç* read *la-'ärç* which must be inserted after '*anaüm* (read '*änüüm*). For *lä-'afar* and *la-'ärç* see JBL 29, 97, n. 12; *Mic.* 77, 1. 6. *İaṭṭû* after '*anaüm* in Am. 2:7^a is dittography of *iaṭṭû* in the following verse. In Am. 8:4 we must read: *Šim'û-zôṭ haš-šâfîm äbiön u-maššîkîm la-'änüie 'ärç*, Hear this, ye who crush the poor, extortioners of the humble in the land! Secondary and tertiary additions to this passage are preserved in 5:10-12 and 9:13-15. The *la-* of *la-ä-läšbîṭ* must be prefixed to the following word (cf. Deut. 23:20).

The *scriptio plena* of *šâf*, he crushed, must not be confounded with *ša'áf*, he snapped, snuffed, snorted, panted, puffed, blew. In my paper on the Semitic roots *qr*, *kr*, *xr* (AJSL 23, 248) I explained this stem as an old causative of *af*, nose. I have subsequently noticed that Tuch in his commentary on *Genesis* (Halle, 1871) p. 70 assumed a connection between *ša'af* and *anaf*. In Ethiopic, *af* means, not *nose*, but *mouth* (NBSS 174). The *n* in Eth. and Arab. *anf*, nose, may be secondary as it is in Aram. *qēnāṭ* = Heb. *qūç* (*Nah.* 31, below). In Assyrian, *appu* means, not only *nose*, but also *face*, Syr. *appê*, Heb. *appâim*; cf. our *to nose* = to face. The original meaning of both *pa*, mouth (AJSL 22, 258) and *af*, nose, is *blower*, respiratory organ: *pa* expresses expiration, and *af*, inspiration; cf. our exclamations *pooh*, *puff*, *ouf*, and our privative *to blow* = to put out of breath.

In iv R² 19, 46^b we find: *nakru dannu kîma qanî êḏî ušîpânî*, the mighty foe has crushed me like a single reed (cf. Halévy's translation in RP 11, 160). The reading *udîšannî* (Zimmern, *Russpsalmen*, p. 57, l. 55) is unwarranted; see Pinches' autographed text in BOR 1, 22. SGI 240 reads instead of *šûpu*, to crush, *šubbu*, to knock down, overpower, but GB¹⁰ 815^a gives now Assy. *šâpu*, to overpower. The inf. Piel is *šûpu* = *šuijupu*, not *šuppu* or *šubbu* (AJSL 1, 180, n. 1).

Syr. *šûf*, to rub, is not connected with Assy. *šêpu*, foot, but with Assy. *šîpu*, grease (cf. BL 128) = Syr. *šĕîfâ*, salve, paste (AJSL 26, 16). The stem of Assy. *šêpu*, foot, would appear in Syriac, not as *šûf*, but as *tûf*. Assy. *šîpu*, wooden lining or boarding, corresponds to Heb. *saḥîf* (Ezek. 41:16) which means *covered*, *wainscoted* (GB¹⁰ 781^a). The noun *šûbu* in

the phrase *kīma šūbe ušnā'il* (HW 645^b) is the Syr. *šāyḇā* in *rūhā dē-šāyḇā*, simoom, sand storm (EB¹¹ 18, 181^a) from *šūb*, to be scorched by a hot wind. A byform of *šūpu*, to tread, is *šuppū* (or *šubbū*, HW 637) from a stem *tertiē i*, corresponding to Arab. *ṭaffā*. The participle *šāpū* means *conqueror*.

Jensen combines Assyr. *šēpu*, foot, with Heb. *pasá'*, to step (GB¹⁰ 664^a). This is possible from a phonetic point of view: Assyr. *šēpu* could stand for *ša'pu*, with transposition of the 'Ain, just as Assyr. *zenú*, to be angry (= *zanā'u*) corresponds to Heb. *za'am*, the 'Ain being transposed, and *n* representing a partial assimilation of *m* to *z* (AJSL 26, 3, below). I prefer, however, to adhere to Guyard's combination of Assyr. *šēpu*, foot, with Arab. *uṭfiḥ* or *itfiḥ*, tripod, or *stand* set upon a fire, especially the stones on which a pot is set (ZDMG 58, 632). They were regarded as the feet of the caldron. In the Song of Deborah we find this stem in the form *mīšpaṭāim* which does not mean *sheepfolds*, but *hearths* (WF 204, n. 44; JAOS 34, 422): *Reuben dwelt at the fire-places to listen to pastoral flutes*.

W. R. Smith showed in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1894) p. 377 that *Topheth*, the place of sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom, represented an Aramaic form of this stem, with the vowels of *bošt*, shame (*Kings* 294, 28). The original pronunciation may have been *tēfāt*, and the genuine Hebrew form would have been *šēfāt*, a form like *mēnāt*, part, or *qēšāt*, end. In Syriac, *tēfāiā* (or *tēfāiā*; Nöldeke, *Syr. Gr.*² § 79, A) denotes a three-legged caldron or kettle, or hearth; this cannot be derived from *ēfā*, to bake. The Hebrew verb *šafāt*, to set a pot on the fire, is denominative.² Also the noun *ašpôt*, which is generally mistranslated *dung-hill*, belongs to the same stem; the correct meaning is *ash-heap*, and the primary connotation is *fire-place*. In the Song of Hannah (ZDMG 58, 621) we must translate:

From dust He raises the lowly, from the ash-heap He lifts up the needy.

In nomad life the fire place of one day is the ash-heap of the next (W. R. Smith, *l. c.*).

² The feminine *t* (JAOS 28, 115) appears here as third stem-consonant as in Aram. *bīt*, to spend the night, from *baīt*, house (AJSL 22, 259) and *qaššātā*, archer.

If I called, would He answer my call?
 I trow not He would heed my voice;
 For He would pursue me with a storm,
 and increase my wounds without cause.

In Ps. 139:11 we have:

ואמר אך-חשך ישופני ולילה אור בעדני:

If I thought that darkness would stalk me,
 night would be daylight about me.

The translation *to fall on, to assail*, suggested in Friedrich Delitzsch's *Iliob*, p. 150, is inaccurate.

The Curse on the Serpent consists of two triplets with 2 + 2 beats in each line. Skinner, *Genesis* (1910) p. 78, says, The form of the oracle is poetic; but the structure is irregular, and no definite metrical scheme can be made out.³ In the second line *u-mik-kól haïïát has-šadê* after *mik-kól hab-bĕhemâ* is scribal expansion based on the first line of the chapter, *uĕ-hannahás haïâ 'arûm mik-kól haïïát has-šadê*. Stade (ZAT 17, 209) advocated excision of *mik-kól hab-bĕhemâ u;* but *mik-kól hab-bĕhemâ* includes all animals, both wild and domestic. The preposition *min* in this case does not mean *more than all*, but *singled out from*, i. e. *thou alone of all animals*; cf. my translation of Am. 3:2 in TOCR 1, 269. The phrase *thou wilt eat dust* (bite the dust) means *thou wilt be prone on the ground or thou wilt grovel*. We use *to bite the dust* for *to fall*, be thrown,

³ The view that not only the poetical and prophetic books, but also the historical books of the OT were metrical was advanced more than sixty years ago by Archdeacon Leopold Haupt, of Görlitz. An abstract of his investigation *Über die Metrik und Musik der Gesänge des Alten Testaments* is printed in vol. 54 of the *Neue Lausitzische Magazin*, but the manuscript was completed in 1853; see p. 5 of Leopold Haupt's preliminary publication (Leipzig, 1854) cited by Franz Delitzsch in his *Psalmen*⁵, p. 28, n. 1. The report on the fiftieth meeting of the *Oberlausitzer Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Feb. 5, 1861, states that vol. 31 of the *Neue Lausitzische Magazin* (Görlitz) records the fact that during the winter 1853/4 Archdeacon Haupt delivered some lectures on ancient Hebrew poetry, in which he tried to show that the historical books of the OT were metrical. See now Sievers, *Metrische Studien* (Leipzig, 1901) p. 379, § 249 (cf. also p. 78) and *Die hebr. Genesis* (Leipzig, 1904) p. 163 (cf. IN vii; TLZ 32, 630; Cornill's *Einleitung*⁷, p. 15, be

vanquished. J. D. Michaelis compared the German phrase *ins Gras beissen* = to fall, to die. Grotius (1644) cited Mic. 7:17; Ps. 72:9; Is. 49:23, and Vogel (1775) added: *Haec loca clarissime docent dictionem terram comedere nil aliud significare quam toto corpore in terram projectum esse* (cf. Mic. 42, n. 10).

The last clause of v. 14, *kol-iĕmê haiiĕka*, should stand at the end of the second line, not at the end of the third. For *u-bĕn ha-'iššâ* in the fourth line we must read *u-bĕnâh*; *rôš* and *'aqēb* in the last line (GK²⁸ § 117, ll) are secondary additions. There is no connection between the verb *šûf* in this passage and the noun *šĕfifôn* in Gen. 49:17; this word must be derived from Aram. *šaff*, to crawl; cf. Delitzsch, *Gen.* (1887) p. 106, n. 1.

The two triplets should be read as follows:

יהוה ^a אל-הנחש אָרוּר אַתָּה {כל-ימי חיך} ועפר תאכל: בינך ובינה ^γ ובין זרעה ואתה תשופנו ^ε :	ויאמר כִּי-עֲשִׂית זֹאת מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה ^β עַל-גַּחְנוֹךְ תֵּלֵךְ וַאֲיִבָּהּ אֲשִׁית ¹⁵ וּבִין זֶרַעַךְ הִוא יִשׁוּפֶךָ ^δ	14 15
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14 אלהים (α) ומכל חית השרה (β) וכל ימי חיך (γ) 15 אשה (δ) ראש (ε) עקב

This may be translated as follows:

14 JHWH ^a said to the Serpent: Since thou hast done this Of all the beasts ^β Thou shalt crawl on thy belly, 15 I'll put enmity Between thy progeny They will persecute thee, ^δ	thou art accursed all the days of thy life . biting the dust { } . between thee and her, ^γ and her progeny; thou wilt persecute them. ^ε
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(α) 14 God

(γ) 15 woman

(β) and of all the wild animals

(δ) head

(ε) heel

The persecution of serpents on the part of man is supposed to be due to an atavistic belief that snakes lie in wait for all

human beings, although very few poisonous snakes will follow a man and attack him when he retreats (EB¹¹ 25, 287^a).⁴ Dangerous snakes generally keep away from inhabited places. Most people have an instinctive dread of snakes and a longing to destroy them, even if they are harmless. Some people in Europe even think that the small lizard, commonly known as blind-worm or slow-worm, is noxious. The Hebrew name of the gecko, *šēmamîṭ* (more correctly *sammamîṭ*) means *poisonous*; the geckos are commonly regarded as poisonous, although they are harmless and useful; see my paper on Arab. *samm* poison = Sumer. *šem*, ἄρωμα in BA 10, part 2.

A communication (by T. G. Dabney) to *Science* (reprinted in the *Literary Digest*, Feb. 19, 1916, p. 431) states that the great majority of the snakes to be encountered in this country are entirely innocuous, yet any intelligent person when unexpectedly brought into close proximity to any kind of snake, large or small, venomous or non-venomous, or even a semblance of a snake, is suddenly seized by a panic of horror and fear, with an impulse to spring away out of the serpent's reach as quickly as possible in a sort of blind terror. According to Mr. Dabney the probable origin of this instinctive horror of serpents, that still dominates the mind of civilized man, was during the countless generations when early man was slowly climbing up from his animal ancestry to his present eminence as *Homo sapiens*. Being without fire, and without clothing and shelter, he was peculiarly defenseless in an environment beset by deadly serpents against this, probably the greatest danger and greatest menace to racial survival that he had to encounter. Hence his instinctive horror of the serpent form. Among the inhabitants of India at the present time the annual mortality from attacks of serpents exceeds 20,000, notwithstanding the efforts of the British authorities to suppress the evil (EB¹¹ 25, 287).

Mr. Dabney's theory has been contested by the director of the International Herpetological Society, Allen S. Williams, who states that he can refer to tests innumerable with small children from two years of age upwards who showed no signs

⁴EB¹¹ 22, 920^a states, Every snake prefers being left alone to being forced to bite.

of fear of serpents, but readily handled them, and were loath to part with pets which evidently pleased them. Mr. Williams thinks that the fear of serpents cherished by many adult human beings in the temperate zone on this hemisphere is chiefly due to the absorption of misinformation imparted to them in childhood by their elders who in turn were similarly misled (see *Lit. Digest*, April 8, 1916, p. 966).

This is no doubt true to a certain extent, but the fear of serpents is evidently based on the experience that the bite of some serpents is fatal. In a recent letter to the *New York Times* Mr. Williams emphasizes the fact that the average serpent is the most gentle and timid animal alive. Of all wild creatures serpents of most species are more quickly tamed and accustomed to proximity of human beings and contact with them than any creature, whether it wears scales, fur, fins, or feathers (*cf.* the *Baltimore News*, July 3, 1916, p. 6, col. 1).

Serpents abound in Palestine, and several species are highly venomous, but deaths from snake-bites are rare (*cf.* Bædeker's *Palästina*,⁷ p. liii). In the Story of Paradise the serpent symbolizes carnal desire, sexual appetite, concupiscence (see *JBL* 34, 75).

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