

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (old series) can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

A HITTITE WORD IN HEBREW.

THE precise meaning of the title שְׁלִישׁ in the O.T. has been unsuccessfully discussed since the days of Origen. An obvious derivation from שָׁלוֹשׁ would make it mean 'a third man' or 'one of three', and it is accordingly rendered by the LXX as *τριστύτης*. This has been explained by Origen, and most scholars since, as meaning 'the third man in a chariot'. (See Gesenius *Thesaurus* s.v.) But even if it were the fact that a chariot carried three men, of whom one was an officer, the explanation would be unsuitable to the passages in which the word occurs. (See Burney on 1 Kings ix 22.)

In Exod. xiv 7 we have 'all the cavalry (chariots) of the Egyptians and *šališim* over all of it'.

Exod. xv 4 'the best of his *šališim*'.

1 Kings ix 22 'his *šališim* and the officers of his cavalry'.

2 Kings vii 2 'the *šališ* of the king, on whose hand he leaned'. Cf. *v.* 17, 19.

2 Kings ix 25 'and he (Jehu) said to Bidkar his *šališ*'.

„ x 25 'and Jehu said to the guard and the *šališim*'.

„ xv 25 'and Pekah his *šališ* conspired against him (the king)'.

In 2 Sam. xxiii 8, 18, 1 Chr. xi 11, xii 18, Prov. xxii 20, the reading is uncertain.

In Ezek. xxiii 15 the prophet collects rhetorically all the honorific titles he knows, and the use of *šališim* is artificial.

Thus in Exodus and 1 Kings the *šališ* is a high officer connected with cavalry. In 2 Kings he is a high official in close attendance on the king; note ix 25, xv 25, *his šališ*.

In the excavations at Boghaz-keui, the ancient capital of the Hittites, Winckler found a large number of cuneiform tablets, some in Semitic Babylonian and some in a strange language which must be that of the Hittite inhabitants. Among them were fragments of vocabularies, giving Sumerian and Babylonian words with their Hittite equivalents. These were published in 1914 by Delitzsch in the *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie*. On p. 9, l. 10, is the equation *šá rapáti* = *šal-la-e-š*, so that the Hittite word is a title expressing greatness. Hrozný in *Die Sprache der Hethiter* (1917), p. 22, rightly takes it to be a plural form, and quotes as the singular a form *šal-li-š*. This occurs, in a cuneiform Hittite text from Boghaz-keui, as a title between 'King' and

'Lord'. There can be little doubt, therefore, that it was a title of high distinction, like נָבוֹר and נָרוֹל in Hebrew, or רַבִּיָא in the Aramaic fragments of Aḥikar.

I suggest that the word was borrowed by Hebrew at a time when the Hittites were still powerful in Syria. In that case it has nothing to do with 'three', but means an important official in close attendance on the king. If its use in Exod. xiv 7 for a cavalry commander and in 2 Kings x 25 for the king's special commissioner correctly represents its meaning in Hittite, there is every reason why the title should have been familiar to the other inhabitants of Syria. Considering the close relations of Israel with the Hittites, and the large number of Hittites who must have remained in the land even after their power was broken, it would be surprising if traces of their language were not found in Hebrew. Other, but more doubtful, instances are perhaps:

בִּירָה a 'fortress' or 'large house' (Bab. *birtu*), for which there is no etymology in Semitic. Hittite *bi-ir* is 'house' (cf. Hrozný *op. cit.* p. 60), the substantial dwelling of a city people, and may have been borrowed to express something other than בֵּית, the nomad's dwelling. But this is not certain, since בִּירָה is not found in the earlier parts of the O.T. Cf. also the Hittite gloss *buru* = 'fortress'.

יין 'wine', for וַיִּין, is a borrowed word found in most languages, but its origin is not yet ascertained. Sayce has suggested that it is Hittite, and Hrozný (*op. cit.* p. 5 n. 5) takes *win* as the probable reading of the ideogram for 'wine' in his texts. The question really is, where was wine first made and exported?

Possibly כֹּהֵן may be Hittite, and when we know more of the language we shall no doubt find that it will explain many of the difficult words in Hebrew.

To return to שָׁלִישׁ = *šallīš*. It has the peculiarity that in the plural, or with a suffix, it retains the *ḵamez* in the first syllable (שָׁלִישִׁים) instead of reducing it to *sewa*. Is this due to the Hittite form with a closed first syllable? Then שָׁלִישׁ would be for שָׁלִישׁ and would naturally be retained in the plural. If so, it is a great testimony to the trustworthiness of the Masoretic tradition.

It is perhaps not too far-fetched to regard תְּלִיתָא 'third in the kingdom' in Dan. v 16, 29, as a translation of שְׁלִישׁ, as though it were from שְׁלֹשׁ, after the true meaning was forgotten. Then Dan. vi 3 סֹרְבִין תְּלִיתָא דִּי מִנְהוֹן דְּנִינָאֵל חַד מִנְהוֹן is meant to insist on this derivation more explicitly. Such an explanation is at any rate not less satisfactory than others that have been proposed.