

Two Hebrew Cruxes

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I. ומקום תגור על-ידך ...

(*Ben-Sira* 41:18 = *MS III:22*)

The line in question occurs as the sixth in a list of admonitions introduced by the sage (*MS III:18a*) as „Instruction on Shame“ (*mwsr. bšr*).

In the *ed. pr.* of the Scroll, Y. Yadin commented on this line as follows (p. 20):

„^c[I] *yd* [:] Thus *Bmarg*. All the editors read in *Bmarg*: *zd*, but a study of the facsimile clearly indicates that the reading is: ...*yd*. *Btext* [reads] ...*zr* [which] does not suit ... contextually, nor does it serve as a fitting parallel to *m^cl* in col. A.⁴¹

This translation of the line (p. 42) reads: „(Be ashamed) of a place where thou sojournest o[f] sleight of hand“. The translation ostensibly draws its inspiration from 42:6 (= *MS IV:12*):

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„And where many hands are – (be not ashamed of) a key“.

Despite some superficial similarity of terminology, however, the two texts are scarcely comparable; for they differ markedly in their syntactic usage of the problematic **yad*. In 42:6, the meaning of *yād* (*dayim*) is thus straightforward, unlike 41:18, where the syntax appears to preclude this meaning. Nor does Yadin's interpretive 'sleight-of-' find support in 42:6. It is rather an inference from context; specifically, a presumed (synonymous) parallelism with *m^cl* of col. A. Yet even a casual look at the parallelisms in this section suffices to show that in most cases the parallelism is more 'formal', or 'complementary' than 'synonymous'. We find *phz* // *kḥš* (41:17); *qšr* // *[p]š^c* (41:18); and *ʿlh* // *bryt* // *lḥm* in 41:19, the latter in particular noteworthy in this connection.

It is thus with good reason that J. Strugnell (EI 9 [1969]: 113) observed, in his review of Yadin's *ed. pr.*, that Yadin's translation was 'awkward', through he himself could suggest no plausible alternative. More precisely, it is the Hebrew of Ben-Sira which is awkward if his intention was to express the thought contained in Yadin's translation.

It is my opinion, and submission, that the word *yd* in 41:22 has nothing to do with 'hand', at least on the semantic level; it is identical with O.T. *yd* as used in Deut. 23:13f., viz., a 'privy', or - by virtue of its location - an 'out-house', constructed an acceptable distance away from human habitation.²

¹ Yadin's pronouncement on *Bmarg* is confirmed by the critical edition of *Ben-Sira* published by the Israeli Academy of Hebrew Language (ed. Z. Ben-Hayyim [1973]), p. 46. But *Bmarg* has *wngyd* for Scroll's (= *Btext*) *tgwr*, the latter supported also by the LXX (... οὐ παροικεῖς).

² The treatment of the Biblical attestation by scholars ancient and modern is less than satisfactory. Like their medieval Jewish counterparts who followed the Targumim (T^o and Ps.-J.), modern lexicographers and commentators have followed LXX, all rendering identically

What the sage is warning his (upper-class) student/client against is the construction of such a building – whether for personal use or commercial gain remains unclear – in the proximity of his residence. Such an act has a deleterious effect on the neighborhood (reducing property-value?) and it constitutes an anti-social act; hence it is in ‘bad taste’ and shameful.

Together with the parallel clause in col. A, render accordingly 41:22 as follows:

„(Feel shame) towards a partner and friend for (an act of) treachery,
(And) towards your neighborhood for (making) a privy.⁴³

II. Qumran-Heb. ([?]) *bdn*

The word in question, without prothetic *aleph* and (mostly) in construct plural form, occurs frequently in the newly published *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.⁴ Outside the *Shîrôt*, it is known only from the *War Scroll*, where it is found twice, once with prothetic *aleph*. The term has yet to find satisfactory explanation.⁵ The editor of the *Shîrôt*, C. Newsom, has summarized the situation as follows:

‘place’ or the like. Yet convincing support, be it contextual or etymological, for *yd* = (non-euphemistic) ‘place’ is virtually non-existent. Ges.-B. (= BDB) cite Nu. 2:17 (thus already Rashi and Ibn-Janah), Isa. 57:8, and Jer. 6:2. But HAL, while echoing Ges.-B. (‘Platz’ = ‘Abort’), distinguishes this meaning from that of ‘Seite’ which Ges.-B. (= BDB) posit as the underlying meaning of *yad* ‘place’; and Nu. 2:17 is subsumed by HAL under ‘Seite’ rather than under ‘Platz’. As for Isa. 57:8, it is classified under ‘penis’, while Jer. 6:2 is not cited anywhere in the entry. Thus *yd* = ‘Platz’ = ‘Abort’ is, for HAL, *hap. leg.* in Deut. 23:13.

The solution lies readily at hand once the Ugaritic evidence is properly considered. Ug. *ydy* (I) denotes ‘expel, drive (out/off), cast, hurl’, and is used in such diverse contexts as the ‘expulsion’ of disease (*mrš* [1.16:V:10ff.]), and venom (*hmt* [1.100 *passim*]), the ‘driving off’ of an enemy laying siege (1.119:26ff.), and the ‘casting’ of speech (*rgm*) by an ailing cow (1.93:1). (In 1.100:64, *ydy* is used of ‘uprooting’ a tree. The idea is that Hrn, as a chthonic deity, uproots the tree by pushing – i.e., ‘expelling’ – it out of the ground.) If properly restored in 1.82:1f. – *wygl. wynsk. [qltn]/[wyd]y. lars* – *ydy* can also be used to describe Baal’s ‘hurling’ of Leviathan-*Tannîn* (back) into the Netherworld.

It is thus likely, if not altogether certain, that *yd* in Deut. 23:13 derives from \sqrt{ydh} and is an abbreviation of **b(y)t*. *yd* ‘House-of-Excreta’ (or the like), on the analogy of *b(y)t*. (*h*)*ks*² used (euphemistically) for the same object in Rabbinic Hebrew.

³ After this note had been completed, and just prior to its submission for publication, the *Anchor Bible Commentary* by Skehan and Di Lella came to my attention. Although their translation of the pericope (41:14ff. = § 49) as a whole differs considerably, and favourably, from Yadin’s, they are of one mind as regards the phrase under discussion. The similarity extends even to the support sought in 42:6. The appended note (p. 478) is however less than clear. The Hebrew text of the Scroll and *Bmrg* is rendered literally ‘of [your] hand’. Either the square brackets are a misprint for rounded ones, or else Skehan and Di Lella are proposing a reconstructed Urtext of *^c*l yd[k]*.

⁴ C. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27 [1985]): 283f.

⁵ Cf. Y. Yadin, *The Scroll of the War* (1962): 280; J. van der Ploeg, *Le Rouleau de la Guerre* (1959): 93. The latter cites Arabic *badanun* ‘qui peut signifier une sorte d’ornement que les femmes portent sur la poitrine’, while Yadin draws attention to Sa^cadiah’s use of the term to render BH *hošen*, the ornamented breast-plate worn by the high-priest for purposes of divination.

„whatever the etymology of the word, its approximate meaning can be discerned from its close association with the parallel terms *dmwt*, *mr ʔy*, and *šwrwt*.⁶

We offer the following suggestion: The word (^ʔ)*bdn* derives from the root \sqrt{bdh} (< PS **b-d-y*) = ‘invent, fabricate’, used both in the positive sense of ‘invention, composition, creation (of an artifact)’ and in the negative sense of ‘fabrication, deception, lie’.

In BH, we find the phrase *badā ʔ millibô* ‘he made up (a story); he lied’, lit., ‘he invented from his heart’ (1 Kgs. 12:33). A nominal form *bad(dîm)* ‘lie(s)’ is also attested.

In Ugaritic we find the root in the positive sense of ‘invent a story; compose a song/poem’.⁷ Thus the goddess Anat, in her ardent desire to obtain the precious composite-bow fashioned by the artisan-god Koshar-Ḥasis as a ‘coming-of-age’ present for the lad Aqht, promises literary as well as mythical immortality: Aqht, she avers, will be the subject of epic song (*ybd. wyšr. ʔlh* ‘One will compose and sing of him’ [KTU 1.17:VI:31]).⁸ The negative connotation is reserved for $\sqrt{šrg}$, probably a synonym of \sqrt{bdy} , to judge by the Arabic cognate *šaraga*, ‘deceive’ by ‘embellishing the truth’. By no co-incidence, $\sqrt{šrg}$ is found in the lad Aqht’s response to the goddess’s offer which he designates as *šrgk* ‘thy fairy-tale(s)’.

In sum, it would appear that \sqrt{bdh} has, as its basic meaning, ‘invent; embellish; adorn’ from which there develop both positively and negatively connotative meanings.⁹ Qumran (^ʔ)*bdn* seems to preserve this basic meaning, and can best be rendered ‘artifact; work-of-art’.

Abstract:

This paper proposes solutions to two lexicographic cruxes in Second Commonwealth Hebrew literature. A difficult passage in *Ben Sira* (41:18 = *Masada Scroll* III:22) is explained on the assumption that the word *yād* means here, as in Deut. 23:13f, a ‘privy’; and that the word (^ʔ)*bdn* attested in Qumranic literature derives from **bdy* (> Heb. *bdh*) ‘invent; fabricate’, both in the positive sense of ‘create (a poem or artifact)’ and in the negative sense of ‘invent (a story); lie’.

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⁶ *Loc. cit.*, 284.

⁷ Cf. German *Dichtung* ‘poem’ < *erdichten* ‘invent, fabricate’.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of this well-known passage in the epic of *Aqht*, cf. my Commentary (BZAW 182 [1989]: 304ff.).

⁹ A similar picture presents itself in English: ‘artifact’ is positive, ‘artificial’ is (usually) negative (as contrasting with ‘genuine, authentic’). An ‘invention’ can lead to both a Nobel prize and to a prison-term. A ‘story’ can be a work of literary art as well as a ‘lie’. And even ‘art’ can bear the unsavoury meaning of ‘wile’.