

The Meaning of *phz** in Classical Hebrew¹

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1 Introduction

In Gen. 49:4* Reuben is rebuked for having intercourse with his father's concubine (cf. Gen. 35:22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). The first word of this rebuke, *phz*, is a *hapax legomenon* which has troubled translators and lexicographers for centuries. The root *phz* occurs in three other instances, viz. Judg. 9:4*; Jer. 23:32*; Zeph. 3:4*. It is used both as a verb and as a noun there.² In these texts the derivatives of *phz* are paired with *ryq* "empty, futile",³ *šqr* "infidelity, lie",⁴ and *bgdwt* "unfaithfulness".⁵ Judging purely from its contextual use, *phz* in these texts seems to mean something like "to deceive", and as a noun *phzwt* "deceit". This view is found already with the medieval scholar Ibn Ġanāḥ, who states that *phz* means *bgd*.⁶

Modern lexica, however, offer translations like "to be insolent, reckless" for the verb, "recklessness, extravagance" for the noun in Jer. 23:32, and "wantonness, recklessness" for *phz* in Gen. 49:4.⁷ Often this specific meaning is defended by invoking the rather erratic testimony of the ancient versions⁸ as well as a dubious

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² KBL³, 872-3, where also Sir. 4:30; 8:2; 19:2; 41:17; 42:11 (= 42:10, RdH) are referred to. See p. 20 for more details.

³ KBL³, 1146; RSV: "reckless"; R.G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB 6A), Garden City, N.Y. 1975, 171: "empty".

⁴ KBL³, 1519-20; M.A. Klopfenstein, "שָׁקַר, *šqr*, täuschen," *THAT*, Bd. II, 1010-9.

⁵ KBL³, 104; Ges¹⁸, 123-4; *DBHE*, 85; *DCH*, vol. II, 93; M.A. Klopfenstein, "בָּגַד, *bgd*, treulos handeln," *THAT*, Bd. I, 261-4; cf. S. Erlandsson, "בָּגַד," *ThWAT*, Bd. I, 508: "Das Verb drückt das unbeständige Verhältnis des Menschen zu einer bestehenden festen Ordnung aus und kann mit "treulos handeln" übersetzt werden."

⁶ A.M. Ibn Ġanāḥ (R. Jona), *Sepher Haschoraschim: Wurzelwörterbuch der hebräischen Sprache*, Berlin 1896, 400. I am grateful to Dr. S.C. Reif, University of Cambridge, who drew my attention to this work.

⁷ GesThes, 1098-9; J. Fürst, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, Bd. 2, Leipzig 1876, 212; BDB, 808; GesB, 639; KBL², 757-8; KBL³, 872-3; *DBHE*, 582. König, *Wb*, 36, "sich überheben". Zorell, 646, prefers an adjective and some of the other modern dictionaries mention this as an alternative.

⁸ For the LXX, cf. in addition to n. 37 below, J.W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (SCS 35), Atlanta, Ga. 1993, 821. For the Targum, cf. R.P. Gordon, "Targum Onkelos to Genesis 49:4 and a Common Semitic Idiom," *JQR* 66 (1976) 224-6; M. Aberbach, B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis: A Critical Analysis together with an English Translation of the Text*, New

Arab. root *faḥaza*, “gloried, boasted”.⁹ Some scholars also point to Syriac *phz* “to act lewdly”, *phz* “wantonness, lasciviousness”,¹⁰ Middle-Hebrew and Palestinian Aramaic *phz* “to erupt (said of emotions), be reckless”, with the nouns *phz*, *phzwt* “recklessness, exuberance”,¹¹ or to Akk. *paḥāzu*, “etwa ‘anmaßend auftretend’”.¹² Finally, Rabin has proposed that *phz* in Gen. 49:4 is from an entirely different root, to be connected with Arab. *fhḏ* “to scatter” – it should be understood as a reference to Reuben’s semi-nomadic existence.¹³

None of these solutions is really satisfactory. To begin with the last one, this proposal is unacceptable because Gen. 49:4 does not concern Reuben as a tribe, but explicitly as a person. Yet a reference to Reuben as a tribe does not have to be unacceptable *per se*,¹⁴ but such a reference has to concern the ‘future’ of the tribe, while *phz knym** seems to give a characterization of Reuben because of his misbehaviour. However, Rabin himself does not even try a translation; indeed, who would have thought of semi-nomadism if he were confronted with a rendering like “dispersion like water”? The dubious nature of the Arabic and Akkadian cognates which have been adduced by others counsels against relying on them uncritically. Moreover, they do not provide us with a semantically intelligible translation of Gen. 49:4 either. What does “reckless(ness) like water”, or “boastful(ness) like water”, or “wanton(ness) like water” mean? No doubt ingenious exegetes can make sense of anything, but the circumstance that none of the other three passages where the root occurs seems to support any of these renderings suggests that a fresh investigation is worthwhile. In such an investigation semantic analysis of the context should take precedence over etymologizing.¹⁵

York 1982, 281; R. Syrén, *The Blessings in the Targums: A Study on the Targumic Interpretations of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33*, Åbo 1986, 39-40.

⁹ As far as I know, the first one to propose this connection was A. Schultens, *Opera minora*, Lugduni Batavorum 1769, 80-1, 128.

H. Pehlke, *An Exegetical and Theological Study of Genesis 49:1-28*, Theol. diss. Dallas, Ann Arbor 1985, 130 n. 2, refers to Lane, I/6, 2349; but this reference is incorrect because the word to be found at that page is *faḥara*. Cf. however G.W. Freytag, *Lexicon arabico-latinum*, t. 3, Halis Saxonis 1835, 322, and A. de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, t. 2. Paris 1860 (repr. Beyrouth, s.a.) 553, who follow the Qāmūs in admitting this root next to *faḥara* with approximately the same meaning.

J.C. Greenfield, “The Meaning of פִּזַּח,” in: Y. Avishur, J. Blau (eds.), *Studies in Bible and Ancient Near East ... S.E. Loewenstamm*, Jerusalem 1978, 39, n. 26, reckons with the possibility that *faḥaza* is a blend of *faḥara* and another verb, like *ta’azzaza*. Therefore, he thinks it is unwise to use the Arab. word for etymological purposes. In my opinion it is even more likely to assume a simple scribal error in the Arabic lexicographical tradition.

¹⁰ CSD, 441.

¹¹ Levy, WTM, 21.

¹² *AHW*, Bd. II, 811. The meaning of the root in Akk. is uncertain and it is not impossible that Von Soden’s rendering was partly based on etymological considerations.

¹³ C. Rabin, “Etymological Miscellanea,” *SerHier* 8 (1961), 398.

¹⁴ Cf. the saying concerning Simeon and Levi, where the reference to the ‘sons’ are mixed with the later scattering of their ‘tribes’.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford 1961; Idem, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, Oxford 1968; the contributions of J. Barr and J.C. de Moor in:

2 The Form

First of all it should be established that the word *paḥaz* in Gen. 49:4 can only be a noun. Although Zorrell and others have proposed to regard it as an adjective,¹⁶ this is not a valid option. A word with this vocalization can only be a noun of the *qatl*-class.¹⁷ The *qatl*-class did not produce any adjectives in Hebrew.¹⁸ Instead the *qatal*-class was used, but this should have developed into **pāhāz*.¹⁹ However, even if *paḥaz* is a noun it is possible to regard it as an *abstractum pro concreto* since it is apparently used to describe a person.²⁰ So it is justified to translate as if it were an adjective.²¹

3 Lewdness?

On the basis of a number of passages in the texts from Qumran and in the Book of Ben Sira,²² Greenfield has argued forcefully that the basic meaning of the root *phz* is “to be wanton, lewd”.²³ This meaning could possibly be found in Qumran; in 4Q172.4:3 *phz* *ṣmwrh* seems to be a reference to Gomorrah’s lewdness. The question is, however, whether this interpretation is correct, for it seems hardly possible to force all passages where the root occurs into Greenfield’s mold. The fragment 5Q16.4:3²⁴ speaks of [I]šwnw²⁵ *phz* “his tongue *phz*” and although again all kinds of erotic fantasies are possible, it seems more chaste and sobering to assume that a phrase like [ḥs I]šwnw *phz* [dbr] “his tongue is an arrow, deceit he speaks” (cf. Jer. 9:7) has to be restored.

This comes close to the parallelism of the root *phz* with *bgd* in Zeph. 3:4,

<i>nby²yh phzym</i>	Her prophets are <i>phzym</i> , (4aA)
<i>ṣnšy bgdwt</i>	treacherous men; (4aB)
<i>khnyh ḥllw-qdš</i>	her priests profane what is sacred, (4bA)
<i>ḥmsw twrh</i>	they do violence to the law. (4bB)

P. Fronzaroli (ed.), *Studies on Semitic Lexicography*, Firenze 1973. Further also ZAH 6 (1993) 3-127; and finally the presidential address of J.A. Emerton at the XV. IOSOT.-Congress at Cambridge, in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Cambridge 1995* (SVT), Leiden (forthcoming).

¹⁶ See n. 7 above.

¹⁷ König, *Gr*, Bd. 2/1, § 45; BLe, § 61k’.

¹⁸ Not a single instance is listed in F. Werner, *Die Wortbildung der hebräischen Adjektiva*, Wiesbaden 1983.

¹⁹ Werner, *Die Wortbildung*, 110-1.

²⁰ See the still useful treatment of this phenomenon by König, *Syntax*, §§ 242-243. The same phenomenon occurs in many other Semitic languages.

²¹ E.g. RSV: “unstable”; NIV: “turbulent”; REB: “uncontrollable”.

²² Greenfield discussed also some Jewish Aramaic texts where the root *phz* appears, but these will not be discussed in this article; although they match the proposed translation very well.

²³ Greenfield, “Meaning of 𐤐𐤆𐤅,” 36-38. Greenfield mentions 4Q184.1:2, 13, 15 and Ben Sira 19:2; 23:4; 41:17 (and 4:30; 42:10 in nn. 12 and 14, p. 37).

²⁴ M. Baillet *et al.*, *Les ‘petites grottes’ de Qumran: Exploration de la falaise; Les grottes 2Q, 3Q, 5Q, 6Q, 7Q, à 10Q; Le rouleau de cuivre* (DJD III), Oxford 1962, 193-4.

²⁵ This restoration is suggested by *ḥb²* in the preceding line. Cf. Job 5:21; 29:10.

Nothing in the context suggests wanton behaviour on the part of the prophets.²⁶ A translation like “are reckless men” has to lose its blandness by additional interpretative comments.²⁷ However, since *phz* and *bgd* are used in parallelism, Reymond is right in pointing to Job 6:15-20:²⁸

<i>ʰy bgdʷ kmw-nhl</i>	My brothers are treacherous like a wadi, (15aA)
<i>kʰpyq nhlym yʰbrw</i>	as freshets that pass away, (15aB)
<i>hqdrym mny-qrh</i>	which are dark with ice, (16aA)
<i>ʰlymw yʰlm-slḡ</i>	and where the snow hides itself; (16aB)
<i>bʰt yzrbw nšmtw</i>	In time of heat they disappear, (17aA)
<i>bh̄mw n̄kw mmqwm̄m</i>	when it is hot, they vanish from their place. (17aB)

<i>ylptw ʰrhwt drkm</i>	The caravans turn aside from their course; (18aA)
<i>yʰlw bthw wyʰbdw</i>	they go up into the waste, and perish. (18aB)
<i>hbytw ʰrhwt tmʰ</i>	The caravans of Tema look for it, (19aA)
<i>hlykt šbʰ qww-lmw</i>	the travellers of Sheba hope on it; (19aB)
<i>bšw ky-bth</i>	They are disappointed because they were confident, (20aA)
<i>bʰw ʰdyh wyhprw</i>	coming close, they are confounded. (20aB)

Reymond comments with regard to this text:

“Peut-être toutefois la ‘tromperie’ consiste-t-elle moins dans la violence momentanée que dans l’instabilité: à un moment donné le torrent est en crue; peu après il est couvert de glace; ensuite il se remet à couler puis disparaît totalement sous l’effet de la chaleur.”²⁹

In this connection Jer. 15:18 is important too:

<i>hyw thyh ly kmw ʰkzb</i>	You are to me a deceitful brook, (18bA)
<i>mym l̄ n̄mnw</i>	water, that is not trustworthy. (18bB) ³⁰

These texts demonstrate that water and brooks or rivers were considered “unreliable” (*bgd*), “uncertain” (*l̄ n̄mnw*) and “lying” (*kzb*). Since *phz* occurs next to *ryq* “empty”³¹ in Judg. 9:4 and next to *šqr* “infidelity, lie” in Jer. 23:32, a rendering by “deceitful(ness)” is the obvious choice there too. In Zeph. 3:4 “deceivers” would be a likely translation for *phzym*, parallel to *ʰnšy bgdwt* “treacherous men”. The expression *phz kmym* in Gen. 49:4 may well be rendered with “a deception like water” or “wily like water”, and the verb *phz* could be

²⁶ Contrast RSV.

²⁷ So, most recently, J. Vlaardingerbroek, *Sefanja verklaard en vertaald* (COT), Kampen 1993, 173-4; A. Berlin, *Zephaniah* (AB 25A), New York 1994, 129.

²⁸ Ph. Reymond, *L’eau, sa vie et sa signification dans l’Ancien Testament* (SVT 6), Leiden 1958, 108. For the metaphor used in Job 6:15-20, cf. A. Berlin, “On Reading Biblical Poetry: The Role of Metaphor,” in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume, Cambridge 1995* (SVT), Leiden (forthcoming).

²⁹ Reymond, *L’eau, sa vie et sa signification*, 108.

³⁰ For the “reliability” (*ʰmn*) of water, cf. Isa. 33:16. For “lying water” (*kzb*, the root of *ʰkzb* “deceitful brook”, cf. KBL³, 44, 446), see Isa 58:11.

³¹ In Ps. 4:3 *ryq* is used as a parallel to *kzb*, “lie”.

interpreted as “to deceive, act unfaithfully”.³² So all passages in the Hebrew Bible support the same basic meaning of *phz*.

4 Later Usage

4.1 *Ben Sira*³³

Did Jacob’s saying about his son’s shameful conduct influence the later usage so strongly that the notion of lewdness became a standard connotation of the root and its derivatives? We read in *Sira* 41:17 (Massada ms and ms B^{mrg}):³⁴

<i>l̄ kl bšt nʰh lšmr</i>	For not every kind of shame is shameful, (16b)
<i>wl̄ kl hkml nbhr</i>	nor every kind of abashment to be approved. (16c)
<i>bwš m̄b wʰm ʿl phz</i>	Before father and mother be ashamed of <i>phz</i> . (17a)
<i>mnšyʷ wsr ʿl khš</i>	before prince and ruler, of falsehood; (17b)
<i>mʰdwn wgbrt ʿl šqr</i>	before master and mistress of deceit, (18a)
<i>mʰdh wʰm ʿl pš</i>	before the public assembly, of crime. (18b)
<i>mḥbr wr ʿl mʰl</i>	before associate and friend, of disloyalty, (18c)
<i>wmmqwm tgwr ʿl zr</i>	and in the place where you settle, of theft. (19a)

The context of v. 17a definitely favours the proposed meaning of “deceit, unfaithfulness”. More or less synonymous are the following “falsehood”, “deceit” and “disloyalty”. There is no hint of sexual misbehaviour in this text. However, ms B^{bt} reads *ʷl znwʷt* “in fornication, harlotry” and the Gr. text has *περὶ πορνείας* “in harlotry”. These variant readings seem to confirm Greenfield’s interpretation of *phz*, although even “harlotry” might be taken as a metaphor for unfaithfulness.³⁵ Yet, it seems more likely that ms B^{bt} is due to a retroversion of the Greek *περὶ πορνείας*, a phenomenon which appears frequently in the Hebr. mss of *Sira*.³⁶ The grandson of

³² In addition, it may be noted that Akk. *paḥāzu* in ABL 1132 Rs 15 is used in parallelism to *i-sa-na-al-li*, from *salū* “to lie” in line 14: *a-ta-a man-nu in[a UGU] [i]-sa-na-al-li [i]-pa-ah-hi-iz* “Why does someone tell lies and ... about it?” Text according to S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA 10), Helsinki 1993, 54 (# 72).

³³ In sum there are six texts in *Sira* where reference is made to (cf. nn. 2 and 23 above): *Sira* 4:30; 8:2; 19:2; 23:4-6; 41:17 and 42:10. However, the use of *phz* in the last mentioned, 42:10 is very uncertain in view of textual criticism (only attested by B^{mrg}; Massada ms seems to support the other witnesses) and it is questionable therefore that it should originally belong to this text. For this reason discussion of this text will be abandoned, although when it would have been original, this would not refute the proposed translation.

³⁴ The text is quoted according to F. Vattioni, *Ecclesiastico: Testo ebraico con apparato critico e versioni greca, latina e siriana*, Napoli 1968, 222-223. In vv. 17ab the readings of the Massada Ms and B^{mrg} have been adopted; note that these mss use the preposition *ʿl* in accordance with the use of the same preposition in the other verses, contrary to ms B^{bt}, who reads in both cola *ʷl*. Cf. further the text below. Translation is according to P.W. Skehan, A.A. Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira* (AB 39), New York 1987, 476.

³⁵ Cf. Num. 14:33; KBL³, 264; S. Erlandsson, “*הַזֵּן*,” *ThWAT*, Bd. II, 612-619.

³⁶ For the complicated textual transmission of the book, cf. Skehan, Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 51-62; Di Lella, “Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 934-36. Since a possible second version of the Hebrew text, HT II (cf. Skehan, Di Lella, *op.cit.*, 57-9), mostly consists of expansions of a bicolon

Ben Sira, the Gr. translator, apparently interpreted the obscure *phz* as *περι πορνείας*. He might have been inspired by Gen. 49:4, for the first half of Sira 41:17 speaks of shame before one's father and mother (cf. Gen. 49:4b: "you went up to your father's bed"). This is nevertheless very unlikely because the LXX used in Gen. 49:4 a different word to translate Hebr. *phz*, namely *ἐξόβρισας* "reckless, turbulent". It cannot be excluded, therefore, that he just guessed at the meaning of the word *phz*.³⁷ The later transcriber of ms B removed *phz* to the margin, replacing it with *znwt* in the main text in accordance with the Greek.³⁸

Apparently the translator did not know the meaning of *phz* anymore. He translated the derivatives of the root *phz* in completely different ways. Also its expansion of Sira 19:2 reveals that the verb *phz* had not acquired an absolutely established meaning. The Hebrew text runs,

yyn wnšym yphyzw lb
wnpš^c zh tšhyt b^llh

Wine and women *yphyzw* the heart,
and strong desire destroys the one who harbours it.

This does not necessarily go beyond deceiving or leading astray. One might compare Hab. 2:5: *w²p ky-hyy n bwgd* "moreover, wine is treacherous".³⁹ Also harlotry and deceit are linked intimately, as in Isa. 57:3 and 4, *zr^c mn²p wtnzh // zr^c šqr* "offspring of the adulterer and the harlot" // "offspring of deceit". This connection is very clear in Jer. 3:8-10,

wl yr²h bgdh yhwth² h²wth
wtk wtn gm-hy²
whyh mql znwth
wthnp² t-h²rs
wtn²p² t-h²bn w²t-h²s
wgm-bkl-z²rt l²-šbh² ty
bgwdh² h²wth yhwth bkl-lbh
ky² m-bšqr ...

Yet Judah, her deceitful sister, did not fear, (8bA)
but she too went and harlotted. (8bB)
And harlotry was so light to her, (9aA)
she polluted the land, (9aB)
committing adultery with stone and tree. (9aC)
Yet, for all this, she did not return to me, (10aA)
her deceitful sister Judah, with her whole heart, (10aB)
but in pretense ... (10aC)

³⁷ Cf. the fact that Skehan, Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 59, even speak of "mistranslations, due to the grandson's failure to understand the underlying Hebrew". In the five or six texts (cf. n. 33 above) in Sira, where the word was used, the translator rendered in each case a different word for *phz*. The same phenomenon can already be found elsewhere in the LXX; cf. *ἐξόβρισας* "reckless, turbulent" (Gen. 49:4); *θαμβουμένους* "horrible" (Judg. 9:4); *ἐν τοῖς πλάνοις αὐτῶν* "in their rambling" (Jer. 23:32); *πνευματοφόρος* "bearing the spirit", probably ironically meant: "bearing wind" (Zeph. 3:4); cf. Vlaardingerbroek, *Sefanja* 173-4.

³⁸ Hebr. *znwt* and Gr. *πορνεία* are equivalents; in the book of Hosea LXX translated *znwt* with *πορνεία*; see H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton I: Hosea* (BK XIV/1). Neukirchen-Vluyn³ 1976, 89. Furthermore, LXX used *πορνείειν* and derivatives almost exclusively for *znh* and derivatives; cf. Hatch-Redp, 1194-5. Also *znwt* in the Aram. fragment of the *Testament of Levi* from the Geniza, was rendered in the Gr. text by *πορνείας*; cf. Greenfield, "Meaning of *זנה*," 36 with n. 5. It is plausible therefore that in the case of retroversion the Hebr. equivalent for *πορνεία* should be *znwt*.

³⁹ Cf. also Hos. 4:11; Mic. 2:11; Prov. 20:1; 31:3-5.

Such texts show that – not unexpectedly – adultery was associated with lying and deceit. For this reason it is possible to maintain that originally the verb *phz* in Sira 19:2 meant nothing more than “to deceive”.

The expanded Greek text, however, still not renders the reference to lewd behaviour explicit for *phz*,

οἶνος καὶ γυναῖκες ἀπο- στήσουσιν συνετούς καὶ κολλώμενος πόρναις τολμηρότερος ἔσται	Wine and women take away the sense, and whoever attaches himself to whores becomes reckless.
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It is very likely, that in this case the Greek translator interpreted the difficult verb *phz* with Hos. 4:11 in mind: *znwt wyyn wtyrwš yqh-lb* “my harlotry, wine and new wine takes away the heart of my people”.⁴⁰ The very fact that he did not choose to render the verb *phz* by “incite lewdness” or the like proves that he did not perceive that as the established meaning. He is simply interpreting a difficult text.⁴¹

The interpretation of *yphyzw* in Sira 19:2, discussed above, is confirmed by Sira 8:2, where the subject of *phz* is not a harlot or wine, but gold:⁴²

ʾl tryb ʿm ʾyš ʿšyr pn yšql mhyrk wʾbdt ky rbym hphyz zhb whwn yšgh lb ndybym	Do not quarrel with a rich man (2aA) lest he pays the price of your downfall; (2aB) For gold has made many unfaithful (2bA) and richness has led astray the heart of princes. (2bB)
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It can not be doubted that in this text *phz*, *hiph*. “make unfaithful” is parallel to *yšgh lb* “lead astray the heart” (v. 2bB) and *yphyzw lb* “deceive the heart” (19:2).⁴³ Here too the translator interpreted *phz*, since he rendered ἀπόλεσεν “to destroy”, differing from his rendering in 19:2. Although a difference between *qal* and *hiph*. are present, it seems primarily to be due to the difference between the subjects of the verb.

How about the two other texts in Sira? First we read Sira 4:30, and again different versions of the Hebrew text have been preserved and it is not easy to establish which is the original one.⁴⁴ The following reconstruction would seem a fair guess:

⁴⁰ Quoted from MT. For the difficult textual criticism of Hos. 4:11, cf. Wolff, *Hosea*, 89, 101-5; C. van Leeuwen, *Hosea* (PredOT), Nijkerk 1968, 107. Contrast W. Rudolph, *Hosea* (KAT XIII/1), Gütersloh 1966, 98, 106. However, in the context of the argument this is of minor importance.

⁴¹ Cf. his rendering of the second colon, which is a paraphrase of the Hebr. text rather than a translation.

⁴² For text and translation cf. Skehan, Di Lella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 209-10; Vattioni, *Ecclesiastico*, 41.

⁴³ Cf. the translation of Greenfield, “Meaning of פִּזַּח,” 37 of this verse: “wine and women arouse passion”, in which he has to leave *lb* “heart” untranslated.

⁴⁴ Cf. Vattioni, *Ecclesiastico*, 25; A.A. di Lella, *The Hebrew Text of Sirach* (SCL 1), The Hague 1966, 23-24.

²l thy kklb⁴⁵ bbytk
wmp^hz b^c bwdtk

Don't be a dog in your own home, (30a)
nor one who deceives himself at his work.⁴⁶ (30b)

The second colon runs differently in ms A which is supported by the Syriac tradition: *wmwzr wmtyr² bml² ktk* “(Don't be a fearful dog at home,) but be totally different and fearful at your work”. The fact that two easily recognizable verbs are chosen over against the single *wmp^hz* of C reveals the expository nature of the former and argues in favour of the latter as the original and more difficult reading.

Again the tradition appears to guess at the meaning of *phz*, but this time the Greek translator comes close to “one who deceives himself” with φαντασιοκοπῶν “one entertaining vain fancies”.⁴⁷ In any case a translation “to behave in a wanton manner” is definitely excluded in Sira 4:30, because neither the parallel colon nor the context contains any erotic overtones.

One text remains to be discussed, Sira 23:4-5 in the poetic version:⁴⁸

*gbh^c ^cynym² ²l ttyny
wlb phz hrh^c qmmny*

Do not give me haughty eyes,
and a *phz*-heart keep far from me.

Greenfield suggests to render *phz* by “lustful” here.⁴⁹ This is certainly possible because the next verse speaks of greed, another sin of the flesh. But “deceitful” is equally defensible. In Prov. 6:17 we find “haughty (*rmwt*) eyes” // “a lying (*šqr*) tongue” and in 21:4 “haughty (*rwm*) eyes” // “a proud (*rhb*) heart” (see also 21:6, where “lying” (*šqr*) is mentioned). Further, the heart could not only be filled by wantonness,⁵⁰ it could produce lies too, cf. Isa. 59:13b.⁵¹

⁴⁵ This reading of ms A is more authentic than the *k²ryh* of ms C. On the basis of an Ugaritic parallel it can be established that the meaning of the first colon is “don't feel subdued like a dog in your own home”. Cf. T. Penar, *Northwest Semitic Philology and the Hebrew Fragments of Ben Sira*, Rome 1975, 18, and for other oriental parallels, J.C. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*, Leiden 1987, 211, n. 69.

⁴⁶ The variant reading *bml² ktk* of ms A proves that this is the correct understanding of the text. So it is an antithetical proverb, contrasting the behaviour at home with that at work.

⁴⁷ Cf. Liddell-Scott, 1916. Greenfield, “Meaning of ׀פז,” 37, n. 14, considers *mp^hz* in this verse to be secondary “for φαντασιοκοπῶν does not match *phz*”. Contrast Di Lella, *Hebrew Text of Sirach*, 23; and already E. Nestle, “Sirach (Book of),” in J.Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Edinburgh 1902, 539-51, 547.

⁴⁸ The Hebr. text is quoted from J. Marcus, “A Fifth Ms. of Ben Sira,” *JQR* 21 (1931), 223-40, 238. In the next line *phz(y) ysr* occurs, which could be considered as a parallel of *lb phz*, since *y^sr* is a synonym of *lb*, according to Greenfield, “Meaning of ׀פז,” 37. The reading of the poetic version is confirmed by the Syriac version, and these two versions are considerably longer than the Gr. text and deviate also concerning the interpretation of the text. Because of this deviation and the uncertain value of this witness the usage in v. 5 will be discussed solely. The next lines in the poetic version confirm however our interpretation.

⁴⁹ Greenfield, “The Meaning of ׀פז,” 37.

⁵⁰ Cf. Ezek. 6:9; Hos. 4:11; Prov. 7:10.

⁵¹ Cf. also Prov. 12:19-20.

<i>dbr-^cšq wsrh</i>	speaking oppression and revolt, (13bA)
<i>hrw whgw mlb dbry-šqr</i>	conceiving and uttering words of lying from the heart. (13bB)

This text demonstrates that the heart was just as well the seat of lust as of lies (*šqr*).⁵² Obviously the “false prophets”, challenged by Zephaniah, are liars rather than lascivious men, as mentioned in connection with *phz* in Zeph. 3:4. The same is true for Jeremiah; cf. Jer. 23:26,⁵³

<i>*d-mty hyš blb hnb^bym nb^by hšqr</i>	How long shall there be in the hearts of the prophets
	prophesies of lies; (26a)
<i>wnby^by trmt lbm</i>	and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart. (26b)

In this connection the afore mentioned text could be cited too, Jer. 23:32,

<i>hnny^c l-nb^by hlmwt šqr ...</i>	Behold, I'm against the prophets of lying dreams ... (32aA)
<i>wysprwm wyf^cw t^cmw</i>	telling them, and leading my people (32aB)
<i>bšqryhm wbp^bhzwtm</i>	with their lies and deceit; (32aC)
<i>w^bnky l-šlhtym wl swywtym</i>	and I did not send nor charged them, (32bA)
<i>whw^cyl l-yw^cylw l m-hzh ...</i>	they surely do not profit this people at all ... (32bB)

From these texts it is obvious that *phz* in Sira 23:5 may just as well be understood in the same vein as “a deceitful heart”.

In sum, the root *phz* and its derivatives have the same basic meaning in the Book of Sira as in earlier biblical literature, namely “to deceive”. This meaning is the only possible one in 4:30 (orig.); 8:2; 19:2 (orig.); 41:17 (orig.) and is at least of equal merit in 23:4-5. However, in the course of transmission the meaning of *phz* became obscure and various attempts at interpretation were made. Apparently through misinterpretation and perhaps by exegetical comparison the root sometimes acquired the connotation of wanton behaviour in the translations of 19:2 (Greek) and 41:17 (Greek; with retroversion: ms B^{ext}).

4.2 Qumran

As indicated above, the connotation of wantonness might have found its way to the community of Qumran, namely in 4Q172.4:3,⁵⁴ ... [*phz* *mwrh*]... “Gomorrhah’s *phz*”. However, as we have seen the meaning “to deceive” of *phz* remained – almost certainly – preserved even in the texts of Sira. As a consequence, we should have to presume a shift in meaning between Sira and Qumran, unless the meaning “to be wanton, lewd” is not present in Qumran either. Since we have observed it is unlikely

⁵² See further F.H. von Meyenfeldt, *Het hart (LEB, LEBAB) in het Oude Testament*, Leiden 1950, 147-51.

⁵³ Reference could also be made to Jer. 14:14.

⁵⁴ The texts are cited according to the official edition J.M. Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I (4Q158-186)* (DJD V), Oxford 1968, 50. For the record, it may be mentioned here that 4Q511.24 contains an isolated word *phz*, cf. M. Baillet, *Qumrân Grotte 4: III (4Q482-4Q520)* (DJD VII), Oxford 1982, 233-4.

that this meaning was always present (5Q16.4:3), we now have to ask if it was ever present. Even in the text quoted above, with its reference to Gomorrah this is a legitimate question. The prophets connected all kinds of sins of Israel and Judah with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whereas the sexual aspect is of minor importance,⁵⁵ so a refutation of the sin of these cities does not necessarily relate to their sexual excesses. The problem of interpretation of 4Q172.4:3 is magnificently demonstrated by Jer. 23:14bc, *n^wwp whlk bšqr ... hyw ly klm ksdm wysbyh k^wmrh* “they commit adultery and walk in lies ... all of them become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah”. Furthermore, the only word in the small fragment from Qumran, from which we could deduce some more information is the word *‘wl*, “iniquity, injustice” in the preceding line, which gives absolutely no sexual connotation to the root *phz*.

Now we have to discuss 4Q184 and a conjectural reading in 4Q177.1-4:7.⁵⁶ To start with the latter, its badly damaged text runs: *pwh[zym ... ht] ‘wllw brwhy[... “deceivers ... have dealt ruthlessly with spirits of ...”*. The text is too fragmentary to establish its meaning beyond doubt. However, in connection with Zeph. 3:4, to which Allegro referred,⁵⁷ the interpretation reflected in the given translation is plausible. Whether or not a connotation of wanton behaviour is present cannot be established with certainty.⁵⁸

In 4Q184.1:2 *‘wl lbh ykyn phwz* “her heart’s perversion prepares *phwz*” occurs in a context describing a harlot’s shameful conduct. This renders a noun with the meaning of “wantonness” plausible. However, in the immediate context she is reproached for many other sins which have no direct connection with sexuality, like *hbl* “futility” (1.1), *tw^wwt* “errors” (1.1), *qls* “scorn” (1.2), *šw^w* “emptiness” (1.2) and *‘wl* “wrongdoing”. In other words, “deceit” would do just as well here. However, 4Q184.1:13 has *w^wp^w pyh bphz trym* “she raises her eyelashes with *phz*” and 4Q184.1:15 speaks of *lhbyl bphz* “to confound with *phz*”. Here too we would argue that “deceit” is an admissible translation because it is the woman’s wicked intention to lead the righteous astray, although a girl trying to “deceive” with her eyelashes uses her charm and therefore “wantonness, lasciviousness” was a possible translation in 4Q184.1,⁵⁹ be it *faute de mieux*.

⁵⁵ Cf. M.J. Mulder, “זָדִים; עֲמֹרָה,” *ThWAT*, Bd. V, 756-69; Idem, *Sodom en Gommora: Een verhaal van dode steden*, Kampen 1988, 24-35; J.A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities* (CBET 1), Kampen 1991.

⁵⁶ Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I*, resp. 67-8; 82-3.

⁵⁷ Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I*, 68.

⁵⁸ A connotation of wanton behaviour cannot be excluded because similar to 1QS IV.10, where we read *brwh znwt*, in our text *rwhy [znwt ...]* “spirits of harlotry” might be involved. However, the “appalling acts performed in a spirit of harlotry” in 1QS IV.10 belong “to the spirit of wickedness” (*lrwh ‘wlh*, line 9), to which also belong *šqr gwh wrwm lbb*, “deceit, pride and haughtiness of heart”. Such texts confirm the fact, as was indicated before, that deceit and harlotry are often linked together. This does not exclude the proposed meaning for *phz* but confirms it.

⁵⁹ Allegro, *Qumran Cave 4: I*, 83.

Abstract:

The current renderings of derivatives of the Hebrew root *phz* rest on etymologizing rather than careful analysis of the contextual evidence. The word *phz* in Gen. 49:4 is a noun meaning “deception” which may be translated as an adjective (“wily like water”). The other three occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (Judg. 9:4; Jer. 23:32; Zeph. 3:4) all suggest a basic meaning of “to deceive”. This meaning is also attested in the Book of Ben Sira and in the texts of Qumran. Variant readings and the Greek translations of the Book of Sira indicate in later times problems as to the proper understanding of the word. However, there is no reason to assume a shift in meaning in the use of the Hebrew word since the meaning “to deceive, act unfaithfully” was preserved even within Qumran.

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