

HEBREW PHILOLOGICAL NOTES (III)*

Gary A. Rendsburg
Cornell University

Four separate studies are presented, along with an addendum to a previous article in this series. 1) The unique word מְהֻלְכִים in Zech 3:7 means “sacrifices,” cognate to Phoenician מֻלַּח “sacrifice.” 2) Contrary to three recent proposals, the final words in Psalm 22:17 כַּאֲרֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי “like a lion, my hands and my feet” are not to be emended. Instead, the absence of a verb in this stich is indicative of the suddenness of the evildoers’ attack against the psalmist. 3) The numeral “75” was expressed in a unique fashion in ancient Hebrew: it appears always as חֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁבְעִים or חֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁבְעִים, and never in the expected reverse order *שִׁבְעִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה or *שִׁבְעִים וְחֲמִשָּׁה. 4) The numeral מֵאָתָּים וְשָׁלֹשִׁים “two hundred two and thirty” in 1 Kgs 20:15 is an exceptional formulation, expressed as hundreds + units + tens, contrary to either the usual descending order of hundreds + tens + units or the occasional ascending order of units + tens + hundreds. Apparently this formulation was used to distinguish this numeral from the form שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁנָיִם “thirty and two” which occurs in the same chapter (1 Kgs 20:1, 16). 5) E. A. Knauf suggested that the personal name רֹוּת “Ruth” is related to the Moabite word רִית “offering” in Mesha Stele line 12. I responded to this proposal in *HS* 40 (1999): 27–28. Here I note further that the reading רִית has been superceded by Andre Lemaire’s reading הִית from the verb “to be,” thus greatly weakening Knauf’s argument.

1. מְהֻלְכִים “SACRIFICES” IN ZECH 3:7

The word מְהֻלְכִים in Zech 3:7 remains a puzzle to scholars. The text presents God speaking to Joshua the high priest as follows:

אם־בְּדַרְכֵי תֵלֶךְ וְאם־אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתִּי תִשְׁמֹר
וְגַם־אֶתֶּה תִּדְרִין אֶת־בֵּיתִי וְגַם־תִּשְׁמֹר אֶת־הַצִּדְרֵי
וְנָתַתִּי לָךְ מְהֻלְכִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה

If you walk in my ways, and if you keep my charge,
and also if you will judge my house, and also guard my courts,
then I will give you מְהֻלְכִים among those standing.¹

* The first two installments in this series appeared in *HS* 40 (1999), pp. 27–32, and *HS* 42 (2001), pp. 187–195. Please note the following abbreviations: *HALAT* = J. J. Stamm, ed., *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 5 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1996); and *HALOT* = M. E. J. Richardson, ed., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994–2000).

¹ There is some question as to whether the second stich is part of the protasis or the apodosis. Most translations take it as the latter (thus, for example, *KJV*, *RSV*, *NRSV*, *NJPSV*, etc.), but I have followed the Masora which appears to consider it as part of the former (note the placement of the ²*atah* on the word הַצִּדְרֵי). In addition, the use of וְגַם at the head of the second stich (and again later in the line) suggests that

The standard dictionaries include the form מְהַלְכִים under the word מְהַלֵךְ “walk, journey, distance,”² and assume that it means “access.”³ The form מְהַלֵךְ is limited to late biblical Hebrew (Ezek 42:4; Jonah 3:3; 3:4; Neh 2:6), so in theory there is no problem in positing another occurrence of this noun in Zechariah.⁴ However, several problems arise. Most importantly, the plural form of מְהַלֵךְ would be מְהַלְכִים*, based on such forms as מַעֲלָלִים “deeds” in 1 Sam 25:3 (though in this case, no singular form is attested) and מַעֲרָבִיךָ “your merchandise” in Ezek 27:33 (elsewhere, throughout the chapter, attested as singular מַעֲרָבֶךָ “your merchandise,” in Ezek 27:9, 13, 17, 19, 25, 27, 34).⁵ The form of מְהַלְכִים in Zech 3:7 bespeaks another interpretation, not directly related to מְהַלֵךְ “walk, journey, distance.” Based on the plural form, one would reconstruct a singular מְהַלֵךְ*, as noted by David Qimhi already.⁶

Furthermore, even if this grammatical difficulty could be bridged, one still must make a case for an interpretation which has God bestowing access on the high priest. This is especially true if the difficult expression הָאֵלֶּה בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים “among those standing” refers to the divine retinue, as per most interpreters⁷ (though see further below), since typically one associates prophets with such direct access to God (notwithstanding the end of prophetic activity in the Persian period and an increase in the standing of the priesthood at this time).⁸

An alternative approach takes note of the similarity between מְהַלְכִים and the Aramaic Haph^cel participle מְהַלְכִין in Dan 3:25; 4:34, with the same pointing, save final *nun* for final *mem*. An Aramaism in Zechariah would be perfectly acceptable. However, since a causative connotation is unbecoming here, W. A. M. Beuken argued that the Hiph^cil stem could have intransitive

these words are part of the protasis. See also W. A. M. Beuken, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), p. 293. Regardless of how this point is decided, it has only a minor impact on the main issue discussed herein.

² To be technical, the absolute form is not attested in the Bible, but the pointing as presented is certain based on the attestations in construct (3x) and with pronominal suffix (1x).

³ BDB, p. 237 (“pl. *goings*, i.e., *free access*”); and KB, p. 499 (“Zutritt *access*”). See below, n. 20, for the entry in *HALAT* vol. 2, p. 524 = *HALOT* vol. 2, p. 552.

⁴ See A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982), pp. 91–94, with reference to our form in Zech 3:7 on p. 93, n. 118*.

⁵ See also J. L. Sagarin, *Hebrew Noun Patterns (Mishqalim)* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987), p. 71. The statement by D. L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (OTL; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1984), p. 207, is incorrect (unless I have misunderstood Petersen): “If *mahl^ckîm* is related to the singular noun *mahl^alāk*, the MT consonants would have to be repointed as *mahlākîm*.” As just shown, the expected plural of מְהַלֵךְ is מְהַלְכִים*.

⁶ W. Chomsky, ed., *David Kimhi’s Hebrew Grammar (Mikhlol)* (New York, N. Y.: Bloch, 1952), p. 278.

⁷ See, e.g., D. L. Petersen, *Haggai*, p. 207; and E. H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1994), p. 139.

⁸ This problem is noted and discussed by C. L. Meyers and E. M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB 25B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), p. 197.

meaning in this passage, yielding the sense “those who walk about.”⁹ This interpretation comports well with that of the ancient versions (LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate, Targum).¹⁰ In the words of James Vanderkam, “It is quite possible, then, that the promise to Joshua is more indirect: he will be given individuals who have direct access to the divine presence.”¹¹

In a stimulating article, Raphael Kutscher proposed still another solution to מְהַלְכִים in Zech 3:7.¹² He believed that the form of the participle is not Hiph^{il} at all, but rather a variant form of the Pi^{el}. Kutscher supported this position by noting the presence of similar forms with a guttural consonant as the first root letter, for example, Jer 29:8 מְהַלְמִים, 2 Chr 28:23 מְעַזְרִים, and 1 Chr 15:24; 2 Chr 5:12; 7:6; 13:14; 29:28 מְהַצְרִים (always as the Qeri for the Ketiv מְהַצְצִרִים). This interpretation obviates the need for Beuken’s attempt to find an intransitive meaning for the Hiph^{il}, though it arrives at the same conclusion, understanding מְהַלְכִים to mean “those who walk about” (thus, it is equivalent to מְהַלְכִים in Qoh 4:15), again as per the versions.

From the view point of Hebrew grammar, Beuken’s suggestion and even more so Kutscher’s proposal are far preferable to that of the majority opinion described above. Still, I demur, for the plain reason that the reading offered by the versions and defended with grammatical evidence by Beuken and Kutscher does not fit the context here. It simply is not clear to me to whom “those who walk about” could refer. With all due respect to the scholars who have attempted such a reading, including Vanderkam’s understanding noted above, this interpretation is a bit far-fetched in my view. I much prefer to read the passage as referring to God giving something tangible to Joshua.

I propose that we see in the form מְהַלְכִים a cognate to the Phoenician noun מִלְךְ “sacrifice” (occurring as a feminine noun מַלְכָּה also), attested frequently in Punic inscriptions (e.g., KAI 61B:1, 99:2, 103:1, etc.).¹³ This Phoenician noun derives from the Phoenician verb יִלַךְ “go,”¹⁴ just as the Hebrew noun derives from the Hebrew verb הִלַךְ “go.” As is well known, terms for sacrifices often derive from verbs of motion, for example, קָרְבָן, קָרְבָּן,

⁹ W. A. M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja*, pp. 293–296.

¹⁰ See the summary of the data in R. Hanhart, *Sacharja* (BKAT 14/7:3; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, n.d.), p. 173.

¹¹ J. C. Vanderkam, “Joshua the High Priest and the Interpretation of Zechariah 3,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 560.

¹² R. Kutscher, “מְהַלְכִים וּמְהַלְכִים” (*Mahl kîm* and its congeners) *Leshonenu* 26 (1962): 93–96.

¹³ R. S. Tombaek, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages* (SBLDS 32; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 182; and J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 640–644 (with extensive bibliography).

¹⁴ As first noted by W. von Soden, “Review of O. Eissfeldt, *Molk als Opferbegriff*,” *TLZ* 61 (1936), col. 46.

from קרב “be near, approach,” עולה from עלה “go up,” etc., so it is not surprising to encounter a sacrificial term from the commonest verb of motion, namely, הלך (Phoenician ילך) “go.”¹⁵ Furthermore, just as Hebrew has Hiph^{il} verbs of the roots קרב and עלה, the Phoenician lexicon includes a Yiph^{il} form of the root ילך meaning “to offer, to sacrifice.”¹⁶ This verb is attested in the Karatepe inscription in the expression וילך זבה “shall offer a sacrifice” (KAI 26A:II:19; see also 26C:IV:2).¹⁷

Understanding מִהֶלְכִים in Zech 3:7 as “sacrifices” suits the context of this passage. Elsewhere in the Bible, God grants to the priests the sacrifices that their fellow Israelites will offer, with the same verb נתן “give” utilized. The prime passage in the Torah is Num 18:8–20, in which God bestows upon Aaron and his sons the various sacrifices forthcoming from the Israelites, with the verb נתן used four times (Num 18:8, 11, 12, 19). The summary passage in Num 18:19 reads אֶת־כָּל־עֹלֹתָם כָּל־תְּרוּמַת תִּקְדָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יָרִימוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִבְנֹתֶיךָ וְלִבְנֵיךָ וְלִבְנֹתֶיךָ לְיָהוָה נְתַתִּי לָךְ וְלִבְנֵיךָ וְלִבְנֹתֶיךָ “all the sacred donations that the Israelites donate to Yahweh, I give to you and to your sons and to your daughters with you, as an eternal portion.” Another relevant text is 1 Sam 2:28, where God reminds Eli, through the mediation of the man of God: אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֵׁי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֵׁי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “and I gave to your father’s house all the offerings of the children of Israel.” In similar fashion, see such statements as Josh 13:14, where the offerings are referred to as אֲשֵׁי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “the offerings of Yahweh the God of Israel,” implying that they are God’s offerings granted to the Levites; and Num 28:2 רִיתִי נִיחַחֲתִי אֶת־קָרְבָּנִי לְחֶמֶי לְאֲשֵׁי לֶחֶמִי “my sacrifice, my food, for my offerings, my sweet savour,” again with the implication that the offerings are God’s to grant to whomever he wishes. In general, Zech 3:1–7

¹⁵ Naturally, because the Phoenician form מִלְךְ “sacrifice” includes the same three consonants as the Hebrew form מִלְכֶךְ “Molech,” the former term has received much attention. But to my mind the two words are not related, notwithstanding some opinions to the contrary; thus I opt not to present here another discussion of Molech, especially given the wealth of recent publications devoted to the subject. For discussion, see the two well-known monographs: G. C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985); and J. Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). More recent treatments include: K. Koch, “Molek Astral,” in *Mythos im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Festschrift für Hans-Peter Müller zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. A. Lange, H. Lichtenberger, and D. Römhald (BZAW 278; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 29–50; and H.-P. Müller, “Hebräisch מִלְכֶךְ und punisch ml^(p)k(t),” in *Michael: Historical, Epigraphical and Biblical Studies in Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer*, ed. Y. Avishur and R. Deutsch (Tel-Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999), pp. 243–253.

¹⁶ As first noted by A. Alt, “Die phönikischen Inschriften von Karatepe,” *WO* 1 (1949), pp. 282–283. For the references to W. von Soden above (n. 14) and to A. Alt in this note, I am indebted to J. Day, *Molech*, p. 8.

¹⁷ See most recently K. L. Younger, “The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading,” *JSS* 43 (1998): 19 (and pp. 36–40 for an extended discussion of the entire line).

presents the investiture of Joshua as high priest;¹⁸ accordingly, one also may point to Exodus 29 with its description of the investiture ceremony of Aaron and his sons, replete with detail about the offerings that are to be theirs.¹⁹

In light of the above, I conclude that מִזְבְּחֵי is a rare Hebrew word for “sacrifices,” attested only at Zech 3:7.²⁰ In addition, I am not convinced that the following phrase בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה refers to the divine retinue (see above). It evokes the language of Zech 3:1–5, especially verse 4, where הָעֹמְדִים “those standing” refers clearly to the members of the heavenly court. But the phrase could just as well refer to the priests who accompany Joshua, the very individuals mentioned in the next verse: הַיֹּשְׁבִים לְפָנָיִךָ שָׁמַעְנָא יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הַכֹּהֵן “here now, Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you” (Zech 3:8). Read in this fashion, we can marvel at the technique employed by the author of our text; he rehearses the words used earlier in the pericope, but he gives them a different connotation altogether, segueing into what follows.

Finally, we may note the presence of alliteration as a factor in the choice of the unique word מִזְבְּחֵי in Zech 3:7. As noted in several previous publications, rare Hebrew words often are employed by biblical authors to elicit alliteration.²¹ In the present instance, we may observe the same phenomenon. The form מִזְבְּחֵי was selected in order to evoke the sounds of the key word מַלְאָךְ “angel” in Zech 3:1, 3, 5, 6.

2. PS 22:17B

Ps 22:17b is a half-verse that has received considerable attention of late. No less than three recent articles in *JBL*—by G. Vall, J. Kaltner, and B. A.

¹⁸ See most recently M. J. Boda, “Oil, Crowns and Thrones: Prophet, Priest and King in Zechariah 1:7–6:15,” *JHS* 3 (2000–2001), available at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/>. As the title of his article implies, Boda sees three leadership modes present in these chapters in Zechariah, but he also admits that “the greater focus of the vision in Zech 3 is on the renewal of the priestly house in restoration Yehud” (§2.4).

¹⁹ I have benefited greatly from an e-mail discussion with my friend Victor Hurowitz of Ben-Gurion University (January 2001) concerning these passages, though Prof. Hurowitz does not accede to my interpretation of Zech 3:7.

²⁰ *HALAT* vol. 2, p. 524 = *HALOT* vol. 2, p. 552, comes close to this conclusion, but does not reach it completely and in any case does not state so explicitly. At the end of the entry on מִזְבְּחֵי, regarding Zech 3:7, the dictionary simply directs the reader’s attention to the entry on מִלְאָךְ (in *HALAT* vol. 2, p. 560 = *HALOT* vol. 2, p. 592), where reference is made to W. von Soden’s proposal (see above, n. 14) that this word means “sacrifice.”

²¹ See, e.g., G. A. Rendsburg and S. L. Rendsburg, “Physiological and Philological Notes to Psalm 137,” *JQR* 83 (1993): 385–399, especially pp. 390–392; G. A. Rendsburg, “תִּלְפִיזָה (Song 4:4),” *JNSL* 20 (1994): 13–19, especially p. 17; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Psalm cx 3b,” *VT* 49 (1999): 548–553, especially p. 551. For the same technique in a well-known Egyptian tale, see G. A. Rendsburg, “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” *JAOS* 120 (2000): 13–23.

Strawn—have presented various solutions to the quandary proposed by the words *כְּאַרְי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי*, literally, “like a lion, my hands and my feet.”²² Strawn in particular advanced the discussion with his drawing our attention to “the existence of iconography that might make sense of *כְּאַרְי* in the MT of Ps 22:17b,” namely, artwork portraying lions with dismembered human limbs and other body parts, from locales such as Nineveh, Samaria, and elsewhere. In Strawn’s words, “It makes the MT again possible, even intelligible—*כְּאַרְי* may just mean ‘like a lion’ after all.” I agree with him on this point; I see no reason to emend *כְּאַרְי* as proposed by Vall and Kaltner, among many others. I part company with Strawn, however, when he continued as follows: “If so, then the problem in this passage must lie elsewhere, probably in a verb that has dropped out,”²³ such as *טָרַף* or any semantically similar root.

In my view, the lack of a verb in this stich is explicable along the following lines. The first two stichs read: *כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲרַת מְרַעִים הִקִּיפוּנִי* “for dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers encircles me,” after which follows the problematic *כְּאַרְי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי* “like a lion, my hands and my feet.” The absence of a verb indicates the suddenness with which the attack comes. We experience the anguish of the psalmist, he is surrounded by enemies, and suddenly, the pounce, and the immediate cry about hands and feet under attack. The lack of a verb is an example of form following content. The speed with which a lion (or better: lioness) pounces on its prey is indicated by the speed with which the verse reaches its climactic end, passing over the unnecessary verb, in order to highlight the pain of the psalmist as if his very limbs are rent asunder.

This would not be the only such instance of “form following content” in biblical literature. I have pointed to two examples, one in prose and one in poetry, in a previous publication,²⁴ and I am quite sure that many more instances could be isolated in the Bible with a concerted effort. The example from prose is Judg 18:17, where the expression *בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה לָקְחוּ* “they came there, they took,” without the expected conjunctive *waw*, indicates the speed with which the five men looted Micah’s house. The example from poetry is Song 5:6, where the wording *וְרַדְדִי הִמְקַ עָבַר* “my beloved had turned, had gone,” again without conjunctive *waw*, indicates the instantaneous disappearance of the male lover from the female lover’s fantasy.

²² G. Vall, “Psalm 22:17b: ‘The Old Guess,’” *JBL* 116 (1997): 45–56; J. Kaltner, “Psalm 22:17b: Second Guessing ‘The Old Guess,’” *JBL* 117 (1998): 503–506; and B. A. Strawn, “Psalm 22:17b: More Guessing,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 439–451.

²³ For this and the previous two quotes, see B. A. Strawn, “Psalm 22:17b: More Guessing,” p. 448.

²⁴ G. A. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *JHS* 2 (1998–1999): §5.5, available at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/>.

3. THE NUMERAL “75”

To express the numerals 21–99, Hebrew permits both the order units + tens and the order tens + units.²⁵ When such a numeral occurs attached to so many hundreds (e.g., 121–199, 221–299, etc.), the order is typically hundreds + tens + units, in an orderly decreasing fashion, for example, Ezra 2:4 וּשְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שְׁבַעִים “three hundred seventy and two”; though occasionally one finds the opposite order, that is, an orderly increasing fashion of units + tens + hundreds, for example, Num 3:46 וְהַמֵּאוֹתִים הַשְּׁלֹשָׁה וְהַשְּׁבַעִים “three and seventy and two hundred” (the presence of the definite article with each numeral is due to the particular syntax here, since the counted item is definite). The same pattern is true when such numbers accompany thousands: the more common form, with descending order, is exemplified by Ezra 2:65 שֶׁבַעַת אֲלָפִים שָׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשֶׁבַעַת “seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven”; while the less common form, with ascending order, is exemplified by Num 3:50 חֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁשִּׁים וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וְאַלְפֵי אֶחָד “five and sixty and three hundred and a thousand.”²⁶

Divergences from these norms, that is, with neither strictly descending or ascending order, are rare. The only examples that I have been able to identify, with the order (thousands +) hundreds + units + tens, are the following:²⁷

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Exod 38:25 | אֶלֶף וְשֶׁבַע מֵאוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה וְשֶׁבַעִים
“a thousand and seven hundred and five and seventy” |
| Exod 38:28 | הָאֶלֶף וְשֶׁבַע הַמֵּאוֹת וְחֲמִשָּׁה וְשֶׁבַעִים
“a thousand and seven hundred and five and seventy” |
| Num 31:37 | שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת חֲמִשׁ וְשֶׁבַעִים
“six hundred five and seventy” |
| 1 Kgs 20:15 | מֵאוֹתַיִם שְׁנַיִם וְשֹׁלְשִׁים
“two hundred two and thirty” |

²⁵ B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 280–281.

²⁶ B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction*, p. 283. Incidentally, one should correct the authors’ reference regarding Num 3:43 to “myriads → thousands → units → decimals → hundreds” since myriads do not occur in the numeral as presented in this verse.

²⁷ I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of several Miqra subscribers who responded to the query that I posted on said listserv. Among these Matthew Anstey, a graduate student at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, deserves special mention for having provided the most detailed response. In addition to the examples listed below, I mention here Num 3:43 which is atypical in a number of ways, most significantly in its order thousands + units + tens + hundreds.

Ezra 2:5 שבע מאות חמשה ושבעים
 “seven hundred five and seventy”

One is immediately struck by the fact that four of these five examples include the number “75” (for 1 Kgs 20:15, see below, section 4). This suggests that this numeral operates in a unique fashion in biblical Hebrew, a point which receives some confirmation from the lack of any counter examples. That is to say, there is not a single example in the Bible of so many hundreds followed by שבעים and then either חמש or חמשה.

A search for other instances of 75 in the Bible, not necessarily in a position following the hundreds place, but in any context, yields one additional example:

Esth 9:16 חמשה ושבעים אלף
 “five and seventy thousand”

Here one expects the reverse order *שבעים וחמשה אלף “seventy and five thousand.” I make this claim based on a survey of all instances of 21–99 thousands counted in the Bible. A clear pattern emerges. The census figures in Numbers 1 and Numbers 26 consistently use the formula units + tens when counting thousands; and the same holds true for Ezekiel (45:1, 3, 5, 6; 48:8, 9, 10 [2x], 13 [2x], 15, 20 [2x], 21 [2x]). But in *narrative* texts, the clear preference is for the formula tens + units when counting thousands, as the following list indicates: Judg 7:3; 12:6; 20:15, 35, 46; 2 Sam 8:5; 1 Kgs 8:63; 20:30; 1 Chr 5:18; 7:2, 4, 5, 7, 40; 12:34, 35; 18:5; 23:3, 4; 27:1, 2, 4, 5, 7–15 [9x]; 2 Chr 7:5 (and see also 2 Kgs 19:35 = Isa 37:36). I admit that many of these passages from Chronicles are not true narrative texts, but the examples from the Former Prophets show clearly that the order tens + units is the preferred method of counting thousands. The only counter examples that I have been able to identify are Judg 20:21 and 1 Chr 19:7, along with the aforementioned Esth 9:16. In light of this pattern, as noted above, one would expect *שבעים וחמשה אלף “seventy and five thousand” in Esth 9:16, but such does not occur; rather we find חמשה ושבעים אלף “five and seventy thousand.” Notwithstanding the two additional counter examples, I conclude that the presence of the number 75 here elicits the atypical order.²⁸

²⁸ There are other examples where 75 appears in the text, though in these cases, the components “70” and “5” are separated by a repetition of the item counted, so I do not consider them germane to our discussion. The passages are Gen 12:4; Gen 25:7; Num 31:32. The first of these actually has the order of units + tens, בן-חמש שנים ושבעים שנה “five years and seventy years old,” but I would not ascribe any relevance to this, especially as this formulation continues the pattern of Gen 11:32.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the numeral 75 in ancient Hebrew operated in a unique fashion, as *הַמֵּשֶׁה וְשִׁבְעִים* or *הַמֵּשֶׁבַע וְשִׁבְעִים* (note Num 31:37 above for the feminine form), and never in the reverse order *וְשִׁבְעִים *הַמֵּשֶׁה* or *וְשִׁבְעִים *הַמֵּשֶׁבַע*. Why this is so I cannot determine. But we all know of languages with unusual specific numerals, the most familiar being French *quatre-vingt* “80.”²⁹

A natural question to ask is whether closely related West Semitic languages also formed the numeral “75” in such manner. Unfortunately, however, the evidence is meager, and we can draw no conclusion. One instance of “75” is attested in Ugaritic, but alas this sole attestation is written in logographic form (*CAT* 4.610:12).³⁰ In ancient Aramaic, we also have one occurrence of “75,” in the expected form, specifically, as part of the numeral “275” in *TAD* A6.2:15 (= Cowley 26:15) *מֵאֲתַיִן שִׁבְעֵן וַחֲמִשָּׁה*.³¹

It is possible that the unusual nature of “75” was limited to Hebrew, in which case we may note the parallel situation in the Romance languages. Only French expresses “80” in the aforementioned atypical fashion; the other Romance languages have the expected forms (Spanish *ochenta*, Portuguese *oitenta*, Italian *ottanta*, Romanian *optzeci*).

4.1 KGS 20:15 *מֵאֲתַיִם וְשָׁלֹשִׁים* “TWO HUNDRED TWO AND THIRTY”

The above discussion concerning the numeral “75” leads naturally to our next question: so why is 1 Kgs 20:15 worded as *מֵאֲתַיִם וְשָׁלֹשִׁים* “two hundred two and thirty”? This clearly is an exceptional formulation. The most likely factor is the presence of the number *שָׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁנַיִם* “thirty and two” in 1 Kgs 20:1 and 16 (see also 1 Kgs 22:31), referring to the number of kings who aided Ben-Hadad in his campaign against Israel. Apparently, the author of Kings, or his underlying source, wished to distinguish the two 32’s, and therefore he utilized the unusual order—in fact, cases with 75 aside, a uniquely unusual order—in presenting the number of Israelite officers mustered.

²⁹ Incidentally, this system is operative in Libyco-Berber throughout, for expressing the numbers 20 through 100; cf. E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (OLA 80; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), pp. 290–291. For an oddity within Semitic, note that only Geʿez lacks a specific word for “thousand,” and instead uses *ʾašartū mʾt*, literally “ten hundreds” (see E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages*, pp. 282–283, 290).

³⁰ See the comprehensive list of attestations of *šbʿm* in J.-L. Cunchillos and J.-P. Vita, *Concordancia de Palabras Ugaríticas* (Banco de Datos Filológicos Semíticos Noroccidentales; Madrid: Institución Fernando el Católico, 1995), vol. 2, pp. 1862–1863.

³¹ See T. Muraoka and B. Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HdO; Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 89.

I admit that it would have made more sense for “32” in 1 Kgs 20:1 and 16 to be written as וְשָׁנִים וְשָׁלְשִׁים*, especially since this word order was available to the author of Kings (or his source), thus allowing the use of וְשָׁנִים וְשָׁלְשִׁים* for “232” in 1 Kgs 20:15, but such was not done. My attempt at an explanation is based on the facts on the ground, not on any posited alternatives.

5. A FURTHER NOTE ON רוּת “RUTH”

In the first section of the first article in this series, I dealt with the personal name רוּת “Ruth.”³² My main point was to demonstrate how this name could be derived from the root רוּה “refresh.” In reviewing alternative understandings of the name, I noted E. A. Knauf’s suggestion that רוּת be related to the term רוּת attested in Mesha Stele line 12, apparently to be understood as “offering.”

This short addendum is merely to call attention to a new reading of the word in question by Andre Lemaire, based on his examination of the squeeze of the Mesha Stele housed at the Louvre. According to Lemaire, the word רוּת does not occur, but rather the correct reading is רוּת, that is, the third feminine singular form of the suffix conjugation of the verb רוּה “be.”³³ If Lemaire is correct, and at this point all scholars should rely on his expertise in this matter, then the existence of the word רוּת evaporates and Knauf’s argument is greatly weakened.

³² G. A. Rendsburg, “Hebrew Philological Notes (I),” *HS* 40 (1999): 27–28.

³³ As far as I know, Lemaire has not published this specific observation yet. See, however, A. F. Rainey, “Syntax, Hermeneutics and History,” *IEJ* 48 (1998): 244 and n. 21, where this information is conveyed. On the other hand, as Rainey noted, Lemaire took this new reading into account in his translation of the Mesha Stele in A. Lemaire, “‘House of David’ Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *BAR* 20/3 (May–June 1994): 33, line 12 in the translation (where, as the title of this article indicates, his main point was something much more significant).

NOTE TO READER

Due to a problem with new software introduced by *Hebrew Studies* midway through the production of vol. 43 (2002), a reformatting of my article *after* I read proofs created all sorts of difficulties with the Hebrew text.

Every instance of Hebrew wordwrap appears incorrectly, and even in other places the Hebrew text is out-of-order.

This is especially problematic in sections 3 and 4 of the present article, in which I discuss the order of items within the syntax of the higher numerals.

Hopefully, the presence of English translations throughout will guide the reader on the proper order of the Hebrew text.

In addition, note one mistake for which I am responsible: on p. 25, the first word in the translation of Zech 3:8 should be 'hear', and not 'here'. *Mea culpa*.