HEBREW PHILOLOGICAL NOTES (II)*

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Five separate studies are presented. 1) הָרַעְשׁ in Prov 30:4 is to be understood as both “his fists” and “his clothing,” in line with the widespread use of word-play in Hebrew poetry. 2) The presence of the Egyptian expression ınttı kkti “valley of darkness” in the Book of the Dead confirms the meaning “darkness” for יָרֵעַ, especially in Ps 23:4 where the famous expression יִרְעֹת אָלֶית אִי is indeed to be rendered “valley of darkness.” 3) The unique feminine form שָׁנָה “seal” in Gen 38:25 is a deliberate creation of the author; the word is intended to evoke the sounds of נַעַה “robe” in Gen 37:32. 4) זְעָר in Exod 32:18 refers to sexual intercourse, as always with the Pi’el of the root זָע, and not to song. 5) בֹּשָׂה בָּרֶדֶם in Prov 22:19 is to be emended to הבואנה יִלַּמְדוּ = ı̂m-n-ıp t “Amen-em-opet,” the name of the author of the Egyptian “Thirty” referred to in Prov 22:20.

1. יָרֵעַ in PROV 30:4

The single word יָרֵעַ in Prov 30:4 has received considerable attention in recent years, with the discussion centering on whether the word denotes “his fists” or “his clothing.”¹ The former meaning, etymological הָרַעְשׁ, is well known in Hebrew.² The latter meaning has been proposed based on the Ugaritic cognate הָרַעְשׁ “item of clothing,”³ a term well attested in administrative texts.⁴ Both meanings fit the context of Prov 30:4 (of which the first three stichs are reproduced here):

Who has ascended to heaven and descended, who has gathered the wind in his fists/clothing, who has collected water in (his) garment.

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* “Hebrew Philological Notes (I)” was published in *HS* 40 (1999): 27–32.
² BDB, p. 342; KB, p. 321; *HALOT* 1, p. 339; and *DCH* 3, p. 286.
³ First proposed by K. J. Cathcart, “Proverbs 30:4 and Ugaritic הָרַעְשׁ ‘garment,’” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 418–420 (though questioned by Cathcart in his article cited above, n. 1); and accepted by M. Malul, “זָע (Ex 33,22).”
The idiom of gathering the wind in one’s fists is a common one in languages of the world, so there is no need to question its presence in Hebrew. But the second and third stichs of the verse are so closely parallel—the interrogative יִתְנָה appears in both, then follow the verbs וַיִּבְרֵאשׁ // וַיִּכְרֹס, then the nouns מַשְׁלָם // מַשְׁלָם, and the preposition -ֶם occurs in both—that it is only natural to expect the final two words in these stichs to be parallel. Accordingly, the interpretation “his clothing” for מַשְׁלָם is perfectly justified when parallel to מַשְׁלָם “(his) garment.”

The problem with the typical approach to this verse (and many other such examples) is that scholars feel the need to select only one of the possible meanings. But to do so is to miss the essence of poetry, especially ancient Hebrew poetry where wordplay is so abundant, and in particular the book of Proverbs with its stated aim of honing the reader’s talent הָקִים טַבּוּל וְשָׁמָּל תְּפִלָּה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִכָּאָה “to understand the proverb and the aphorism, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Prov 1:6).

In short, scholars need not select one of the above two meanings of מַשְׁלָם. The author intended both meanings and the clever reader will realize this. First the reader understands the term as “his fists,” in line with the idea of capturing the wind in one’s hands; a second later, when encountering the word מַשְׁלָם “(his) garment,” the reader realizes that “clothing” is also intended in מַשְׁלָם.

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5 For example, my former student Yoon Jong Yoo, now of Pyongtaek University (Pyongtaek, Korea), informs me that the same idiom occurs in Korean.

6 One might object that מַשְׁלָם is plural or dual, and therefore could not be an article of clothing. But note that the dual form מַשְׁלָם occurs in Ugaritic in CAT 5.11:16. In any case, I thus have rendered the term with the collective noun “clothing” (“clothes” also would be possible). Further afield note such forms as Hebrew מַשְׁלָם, English “pants” (similarly in other European languages), and so on.


8 True, Prov 30:2-3 presents the author of this section as less than wise, but this is the poet’s manner when describing his lack of מִרְיָמָה בְּנֵי “knowledge of holiness” (or perhaps “knowledge of the Holy One,” thus NJV).

9 The two words have different her’s: one would have been pronounced as a pharyngeal fricative (the first letter in the root הָפְנִים) and the other as a velar fricative (the first letter in the root הָפִים), since both phonemes were present in ancient Hebrew. On this phonological issue, see most importantly J. Blau, On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982); and the brief presentation in G. A. Rendsburg, “Ancient Hebrew Phonology,” in Phonologies of Asia and Africa, vol. 1, ed. A. S. Kaye (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 71-72. Accordingly, this wordplay works primarily on the visual plane. But at the same time we cannot discount the possibility that during the oral presentation of this poetry, the reader produced a compromise sound that his listeners could take as either sound; see S. B. Noegel, Janus Parallelistism in the Book of Job (JSOTSS 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 148, n. 1.
Finally, note that the word נָעַם "clothing" is an Israeli Hebrew lexeme. It appears commonly in Ugaritic, and occurs in Hebrew in this lone instance in a book replete with Israeli Hebrew features.10

2. נָעַּם "DARKNESS"

Chaim Cohen has written a thorough treatment of נָעַם and has shown beyond doubt that the word means "darkness," with no connection to notions of "shadow" (Hebrew נָעַם) or "death" (Hebrew נָעַם).11

The most famous usage of this word is in Ps 23:4, where it occurs within the expression נָעַם אֵל "valley of darkness." As far as I am able to determine, no one has pointed to the equivalent Egyptian expression ḫnt kkt "valley of darkness," occurring most notably in the Book of the Dead, spell 130, as a place to which the deceased will not go on account of his righteousness (parallel to "lake of criminals" and other expressions).12

The presence of this idiom in the literature of one of Israel’s neighbors is one more item in the arsenal amassed by Cohen to demonstrate the meaning of נָעַם "darkness."

3. נָעַּם "SEAL" IN GEN 38:25

The normal Hebrew word for "seal" is masculine נָעַם (Exod 28:21; Jer 22:24; Job 38:14; Song 8:6; etc.). Once, however, we encounter the feminine form: נָעַּם in Gen 38:25. The other Semitic languages know of only the masculine form, thus in other Canaanite dialects (Phoenician and Ammonite), in various Aramaic dialects (Old Aramaic, Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, Mandaic, etc.), and in Arabic.13

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10 See most comprehensively Y. Chen, "Israeli Hebrew in the Book of Proverbs," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2000, with this specific example discussed on pp. 215–216.
In Egyptian the common word for “seal” is also the masculine form *ḥtm.* However, in one instance a feminine form *ḥitm* is attested. Instead of the usual cylinder-seal determinative (Gardiner S20), the latter form bears the round cartouche determinative (Gardiner V9). This suggests that the word *ḥitm* means “ring,” rather than “seal.” The sole attestation of this word is from the tomb of Nebwenenef in Thebes, dated to the Nineteenth Dynasty. In theory, the unique Hebrew word נטף could be explained on the basis of this unique Egyptian word *ḥitm.*

But such seems rather unlikely. Earlier in the story, when Tamar asked Judah for the three items for a pledge, she used the word נטף (Gen 38:18), and there is every reason to think that this is exactly what Judah gave her. The extremely curt language נטף “and he gave to her” (Gen 38:18), omitting the object, may indicate the speed with which Judah complied with her request. Tamar’s use of the form נטף in 38:25 must be intended to convey something else.

The key to our analysis comes from the fuller context of 38:25 and the first two words of verse 26. The text reads as follows:

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	ext{הנה את חרב א' ל clases תחתותו א' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספţi

And she said, ‘Please recognize, to whom belongs these seal, cords, and staff.’
And Judah recognized.

As numerous scholars have recognized, this passage links the story of Judah and Tamar to the story of Joseph in the preceding chapter. The pertinent wording there is:

Gen 37:32–33

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	ext{וכנה את חרב א' ל clases תחתותו א' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספתיות ל' חספţi

And they said, "We found this, please recognize, is it the robe of your son or not." And he recognized it.

Because the key noun in the Joseph story is the feminine form הָכֹתַת "the robe," the author placed into Tamar’s mouth the feminine form הָכָה "the seal." The two are of similar morphological structure and they sound alike. Everyone who reads Gen 38:25 is taken back to Gen 37:32, and the author has solidified the link with the unique form הָכָה. It is possible that this form was a real word in ancient Hebrew (the Egyptian parallel suggests this), but we do not have to judge this issue. More likely the author of our story created the word for the specific literary purpose just described.

Finally, it is important to note that the reading tradition of the Torah seems to have noted the connection as well. The string of accent marks is the same for both phrases:

גֵּרֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל Gen 37:32
גֵּרֶם הָכָה גֵּרֶם הָכֹתַת Gen 38:25

In both cases we encounter darga, tevir, tifha, and sillus.17

4. תַּעֲנוֹג IN EXOD 32:18

The meaning of the Pi’el of the root חָשַׁךְ continues to dominate scholarly discussion. Most scholars matter-of-factly assume that the word connotes "rape," and thus they read this meaning into the well-known stories of Dinah (see Gen 34:2) and Tamar (see 2 Sam 13:12; 13:14).18 Other scholars opine that the word means simply "perform sexual intercourse," pointing to the usage of the root in the legal contexts of Deut 21:14; 22:24; 22:29.19 Two recent articles have treated the question in detail, both in support of the latter position. Pamela Tamarkin Reis presented a literary study of the Amnon and Tamar narrative, in which she argued quite convincingly that their sexual intimacy was consensual.20 Mayer Gruber put forward the evidence of social

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17 Admittedly, this is a common string in the Bible, occurring in closest proximity to our two crucial examples in the preceding Gen 37:15 and the following Gen 40:23. I have utilized the information provided in J. D. Price, Concordance of the Hebrew Accents in the Hebrew Bible, vol. 1 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 148, in order to isolate these examples.
scientific research, noting that Shechem’s conduct in the Dinah story does not follow the documented behavior of a rapist.21

In the scholarly discussion, including Reis’s and Gruber’s detailed presentations, one verse which has not been treated is Exod 32:18. Most likely, attention has not been paid to this verse because most scholars assume that תָּפֹר refers to song here (thus, for example, JPSV “those that sing”; NJV “song”).22 But clearly the passage makes a distinction between the Qal תָּפֹר, used twice in the verse in the expressions כִּהַלְפָּת אֹברָהָם “the sound of the song of victory” and כִּהַלְפָּת מַלְיָעָה “the sound of the song of defeat,” and the Pi’el תָּפֹר in the expression לְקַלְּפָּת. This latter expression refers to sexual intercourse, so that a translation such as “the sound of an orgy” (cf. NAB “the sound of revelry”) would capture the intention more or less. The author invokes a delightful wordplay through his use of separate conjugations of the same verbal root.

In fact, most likely the Pi’el of תָּפֹר never means “sing” in Hebrew; this meaning should be relegated to the Qal only.23 Thus, in Isa 27:2 בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל תָּפֹר נַחֲשָׁן (thus with Aleppo; St. Petersburg [Leningrad] reads נַחֲשָׁן), the context is fertility of the soil (cf. נַחֲשָׁן in 27:3, with reference to rain water), and thus intercourse may be understood in some sense. In Ps 88:1 the Pi’el form תָּפֹר is difficult; note that NJV simply transliterates it (along with the preceding word) and adds the note “Meaning of Heb. uncertain.”

In short, תָּפֹר in Exod 32:18 refers to consensual sexual intercourse among the carousing Israelites. As such, this passage can be used in support of the arguments by Reis and Gruber regarding the cases of Dinah in Genesis 34 and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13.

5. הָיְתָה אֲשֶׁר IN PROV 22:19

Prov 22:17 introduces a new section of the book of Proverbs, one which extends until Prov 24:22. All scholars agree that this section of the anthology is related in some manner to the Egyptian composition of Amen-em-opet (on the relationship, see further below, at the very end of this section). A troublesome passage near the beginning of this section is Prov 22:19b, reproduced here along with the beginning of verse 19 and the following verse 20:

23 See BDB, p. 777.
Following virtually all scholars who “split the difference” between the Ketiv and the Qeri, and who thereby recognize the word יָשִּׁים “thirty” in 24:20a, we may translate these two verses as follows:

24:19 That your trust may be with YHWH;
I make known to you, today, even you.
24:20 Have I not written for you “the Thirty,”
With counsel and with knowledge.

Verse 19a continues the thought of verses 17–18; and “the Thirty” in verse 20a refers to the aforementioned Wisdom of Amen-em-opet, a composition divided into thirty chapters. On these issues, there is a general consensus; but as noted above, scholars have found difficulty with verse 19b.

While the text of this stich is defensible—this would be an instance of the independent personal pronoun serving in the oblique case for emphasis—many have questioned the reading nonetheless. The main problem is that יֵדְוָם “I make known to you” should carry a direct object. What is it that the poet makes known to the reader?

This same question appears to have been asked by the translators of the Septuagint, because the Greek text (Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus) reads τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ “his way.” In addition, the verb appears in the third person, with YHWH in the first stich understood as subject. Thus the Septuagint reads verse 19b: “and that he may make known to you his way.” On this basis, a number of scholars have proposed to emend the Hebrew text to read either ח seri ָא “his way” or יֵדְוָם “his ways.”

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24 For other examples, see GKC, p. 438 (though the authors state that “the separate pronoun in such instances is not to be regarded as a casus obliquus”). This understanding is accepted explicitly by F. Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882), p. 96 (German original unavailable to me). See also O. Plöger, Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia) (Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), p. 262; and R. N. Whybray, Proverbs (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 327. Implicit acceptance of MT is indicated by R. J. Clifford, Proverbs: A Commentary (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), p. 200 (and many others, of course).

25 Alternatively, the LXX Vorlage supplied such a direct object, and the translators rendered faithfully such a Hebrew text.

26 For the former, see, for example, H. Ringgren and W. Zimmerli, Sprüche/Prediger (Das Alte Testament Deutsch; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), p. 88. For the latter, see, e.g., BHS, ad loc.; and D. A. Garrett, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Song of Songs (New American Commentary 14; Nashville: Broadman, 1993), p. 194 (though with the qualification that this emendation is “possible”). For still another option, based on an alternative LXX manuscript reading, see R. B. Y. Scott, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (AB 18; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. 135.
Ernst Sellin went even further. On the basis of the numerous parallels between this section of Proverbs (22:17–24:22) and the Egyptian teachings of Amen-em-opet, and with the LXX reading in mind, Sellin proposed that Prov 22:19 should be coordinated with Amen-em-opet 1:7 mIwh n ‘nh “the ways of life,” producing an emended Hebrew text שְׁמִי תַּבָּרָא.27 However, one certainly must agree with Franz-Josef Steiert’s estimation that this proposal is “rein hypothetisch.”28 In fact, I would extend Steiert’s characterization to the less radical changes to והִנֵּא נֶא or וְיהֵנֵא as well.

Instead, notwithstanding what is stated above, that MT in theory is defensible, I propose to emend the words והִנֵּא נֶא to התוּמָמַנְי, that is, ʔmn-m-ʔpt “Amen-em-opet,” the name of the author of the Egyptian “Thirty.”29 I admit to having taken the liberty of equating the first Egyptian ȋ with Hebrew yod and the second Egyptian ȋ with Hebrew ʔaleph, but both correspondences are amply attested.30 Note that both the Hebrew version of “Amen-em-opet” and the MT include the string of letters yod—mem—ʔaleph—pe—taw, that is, five of the seven letters in the reconstructed form. This emendation is much closer to MT than the aforesaid proposals which need to introduce resh and het into the text (to produce the word והִנֵּא “way”), and which must disregard or omit mem and pe. At some point in the transmission of the text, the string of letters התוּמָמַנְי no longer was understood, and in some fashion MT והִנֵּא arose.31 Furthermore, this emendation provides for us an object of the verb התוּמַן in a most fitting way.32 Verse 19b now reads “I make known to you Amen-em-opet,” and thus flows naturally into verse 20a “Indeed I have written for you ‘the Thirty’. ” In addition, note that several commentators

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28 F.-J. Steiert, Die Weisheit Israels—ein Fremdkörper im Alten Testament? (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), p. 203. Steiert (on p. 196) attributed this emendation to Brünner (see previous note), though, as indicated, the proposal originates with Sellin.

29 For the reading, see E. A. W. Budge, The Teaching, p. 186.

30 Note, however, that this accords with the evidence, for Egyptian ȋ corresponds to both Hebrew consonants. See Y. Muchiki, Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic (SBLDS 173; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), p. 265.


32 Anyone familiar with my teaching and publications will know that I am most reticent to emend MT. Textual emendation should be utilized only as a last resort, and only when there is overriding external evidence in support (which, I hasten to add, means not just the evidence of the LXX!). I believe that Prov 22:19b is such an example.
have stated the obvious, that verse 19 as a whole "is a distinctively Israelite contribution,"33 based on the presence of YHWH in the first stich. With the name of Amen-em-opet restored in the second stich, this position is confirmed. Finally, if this proposal is accepted, then we can confirm the majority opinion which holds that Prov 22:17–24:22 is borrowed from the Egyptian teaching of Amen-em-opet,34 and not vice versa.35