

ISAIAH LXVI 3-4a

by

JACK MURAD SASSON

Chapel Hill

Bernard H. Boyd, in memoriam.

This paper will proceed as follows: it will establish a plausible translation for Isa. lxvi 3-4a, discuss a Mari letter, ARM II:37, and allude to other Near Eastern documentation in order to focus on an unusual practice preserved in the prophet's messages.

I. Isa. lxvi 3-4a reads as follows:

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| 3. <i>šôḫēṭ haššôr</i> | <i>makkēḫ — 'iš</i> |
| <i>zôḇēah hasseh</i> | <i>'ôrēp keleb</i> |
| <i>ma'alēh minḥāh</i> | <i>dam-ḥazîr</i> |
| <i>maẓkâr lebônāh</i> | <i>mebārēk 'āwen</i> |
| <i>gam-hēm māh bāḥarū bedarkēyhem</i> | <i>ūbešiqqūšēyhem napšām ḥāpēšāh</i> |
| 4. <i>gam-'anī 'ebḥar beta'alūlēyhem</i> | <i>ūmegūrōtām 'ābī lāhem</i> |

This passage is one of a few in Deutero- (or, if one insists, Trito-) Isaiah which alludes to rituals abhorrent to Israel's God¹). It is composed of four short phrases, each of which contains a pair of statements. These are followed by concluding remarks. The laconic nature of each of these phrases has led to a variety of translations which differ mainly in the choice of conjunctive element. Because any rendering receives minimum guidance from the requirements of grammar, a translator is left to interpret Isaiah's message according to his own understanding of its content. As an example, *šôḫēṭ haššôr makkēḫ—'iš* has been translated "He that killeth an ox *is as if* he slew a man" (KJV; JPS; Skinner, *Isaiah*), "But to sacrifice an ox *or* to kill a man" (NEB); "He who slaughters an ox *is like him* who kills a man" (Anchor, RSV); "They who slaughter oxen *and* slay humans" (JPS (1972); cf. NEB).

The Septuagint, the Vulgate and the Dead Sea Scrolls use words of comparisons, respectively *hōs*, *quasi*, *kmeḫ*. This, however, results in a condemnation of lawful rituals the terms and sweep of which

¹) See also, lvii 3-13; lxv 3b-5a, 11; lxvi 17.

find no parallel elsewhere in the O.T. It seems to me that those who prefer to join each pair of statements with the conjunction "and" offer a better founded solution of the problem. Theirs is an argument that has the prophet condemning syncretistic tendencies among the Hebrews ²⁾. Yet, I could imagine still a third solution which would record Isaiah as anguished by the rejection of inherited traditions in favor of pagan rituals. I base this opinion on an analysis of the concluding remarks in verses 3 and 4a. Each of these forms a pair of statements, the first of which begins with *gam*, the second with the conjunction *waw*. Such clauses are not unknown to Hebrew constructions. Although most examples are best rendered as intensive or asseverative clauses (cf. Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar* § 153), Gesenius § 160b collects a few that highlight the concessive quality of a sentence. An example of this last type is to be found in Isa. xlix 15 "(Does a woman forget her nursling, and have no compassion on the child of her womb?) *But even if* these should forget, I will not forget you (*gam-'elleh tiškahñāh we'anōkī lō' 'eškāhēk*). " JPS (1972)'s version is one of many which elects to translate both phrases as intensive clauses. "Just as they have chosen their ways and take pleasure in their abomination/so will I choose to mock them, to bring on them the very thing they dread." I would argue, however, that Isaiah, a prophet who was keenly aware of the possibilities of the Hebrew language ³⁾, sought to add tension to his message. He constructs his main argument out of two sentences which follow an identical pattern in syntax. By contrasting the intent of each sentence, however, he imposes upon the whole passage a strong disjunctive element. This achievement, no doubt, could not but jolt his audience into an awareness of the magnitude of its crime.

I would, therefore, propose the following translation:

He who slaughtered an ox	(would now) slay a man,
who sacrificed a lamb	(would now) break a dog's neck,
who presented cereal offering	(would now present) the blood, of a swine
who burnt commemorative incense	(would now) worship an idol
for, although they had chosen their	they (now) delight in abomina-
(own) way	tion;
I too will choose ways to mock them	to bring upon them the very things they fear.

²⁾ For discussion, see further. De Vaux, *Bible et Orient* (1967), pp. 514-515; J. Muilenberg, *Interpreter's Bible*, V, pp. 761-762.

³⁾ Muilenberg, *ibid.*, pp. 386 ff.

The forbidden worship that Israel was so eager to adopt is exposed in a vocabulary that is worth investigating. In itself, the *hiph'ʿl* of *nākāb* does not necessarily imply the dealing of a mortal blow. In our phrase, however, its linkage on the one hand with the verb *šāḥaṭ* as applied to oxen, and *ʿarap* as applied to dogs on the other, certainly suggests not merely killing a human being, but offering him as a sacrifice. The use of *ʿiṣ*, “man,” is not accidental. It refers to the sacrifice of male adults. Hence, the prophet is differentiating it from the immolation of children. Biblical writers ascribed the latter ritual, perhaps defamatorily, to the Canaanites.

The verb *ʿarap*, “to ‘break’ the neck (by striking the nape)” is used in connection with calves (Deut. xxi 4, 6), donkeys (Ex. xiii 13, xxxiv 20), and dogs (Isa. lxvi 3). Once, in Hos. x 2, it conveys figuratively the sense of “overturning” altars. In all these attestations, it is not clear whether or not blood was to be shed. In other words, it is not possible to determine whether the sacrifice was carried out by “braining” the animal or, as was common among the Harranites, by severing the neck at one fell swoop⁴). In either case, it is very probable that no parts of the animals thus sacrificed were to be offered as food for the deity. *Keleb* must be understood as “dog” and not as a “male temple-prostitute”. For, even in Deut. xxiii 19, which forbids “the fee of a whore or the pay of a *keleb* into the house of the Lord . . . in fulfillment of a vow . . .,” the meaning “male prostitute” for *keleb* is a euphemism; one that is, incidentally, peculiar to the Hebrews. In Isa. lxvi, such a euphemism is hardly needed. Additionally, material will be presented below to parallel our passage.

Some scholars believe the text of the third stichos to be deficient. A participle of a verb such as *nāsak*, “to pour, libate” is therefore often added. This solution, however, does violence to a pattern that consistently uses four words in each of the four phrases. P. Volz would transpose the consonants of *dam* and borrow a *ḥeth*, supposedly

4) Al-Nadim, *The Fibrist*, (trans. B. Dodge), 1970, pp. 764-765. On Deut. xxi, see A. Roifer, *Tarbitz*, 3 (1961-62), pp. 119-143.

The sacrifice of a pigeon on behalf of a man who incurred guilt was undertaken by a priest who would: “snap its head at the nape without severing it (*ʾumālaq ʿet-rōʿšô mimmul ʿorpô welô yabdêl*)” (Lev. v 8; cf. i 15). As suggested to me by Z. Zevit, the use of (*le*)*hakkôt* (*ʿiṣ*), (*la*)*ʿarop* (*keleb*), and (*li*)*mloq* (*rōʿš hayyônāb*) might describe the manner in which sacrificial victims, depending on their size, were dispatched. The man was probably clubbed with a mace head; the dog’s neck was broken with a hard blow; the pigeon’s head was snapped from the body.

lost by haplography, from *minḥab* and would thus produce the participle *ḥōmēd*. Referring to Isa. lxxv 4 and lxxvi 17, verses which speak of pig's flesh, he would render: "He who brings food offering 'lusts' after swine" ⁵). De Vaux accepts Volz's emendation but translates: "An offering is brought, swineflesh is savoured" ⁶). Such a usage for the verb *ḥāmad*, however, would be singular, if not awkward, in the Old Testament. JPS (1972)'s new translation of *Isaiah* sidesteps the problem with: "[They . . .] who present as libation the blood of swine".

There is ample evidence, however, for verbs to play double-duty, especially in Hebrew poetry. The H-stem of *'ālāb*, "to present (offering)" has a precise cultic connotation. Its usage in connection with cereal offering is beyond reproach. It becomes monstrously abused, however, when it is applied to the sacrifice of swine whose blood, furthermore, is offered to the deity rather than spilled toward the earth.

The worship of idols, of course, is well-known to Israel's neighbors. Isa. lxxvi 3 is noteworthy, however, in that it preserves the only O.T. attestation of the verb *bārak* in the *pi'*"*ēl* used to describe worship other than that of Yahweh.

II. ARM II : 37 is a Mari letter that has received wide notice. Most of the attention was focused on covenantal techniques in Mari and Israel ⁷). Our interest, however, will be to reconstruct the circumstances that led to the writing of this missive. In turn, we hope to appreciate better the role played by those mentioned in its contents.

Sent around 1765 B.C. by the Mari itinerant diplomat Ibal-El to his king Zimri-Lim, ARM II : 37 reads as follows:

The message of Ibal-Addu has reached me from Ašlakka. So I went to Ašlakka. They brought me a puppy-dog and a goat in order to "kill a donkey-foal" between the Ḥaneans and the Land of Idamaras. But I did fear my Lord! (So) I would not allow (the use of) a puppy-dog and a goat. Instead, I (myself) sacrificed a donkey-foal, the young of a she-ass. (Thus) I established conciliation between the Ḥaneans and the land of Idamaras. In the city of Ḥurra, in the land of Idamaras, the Ḥaneans will be satisfied, and "a satiated man bears no hostility" ⁸).

⁵) *Jesaja II* (= *Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, IX/2), 1932, p. 290.

⁶) *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 1964, p. 69.

⁷) A recent study of this text was published by M. Held, *BASOR*, 200 (1970), p. 32-40.

⁸) Ch. F. Jean, *Archives Royales de Mari*, II (= *TCL*, 23), 1941.

Ašlakka was a city in the Ḥabur triangle, not far from the city of Naḥur. Date-formulae indicate that, twice in his career, Zimri-Lim conquered the city. Our information on its ruler Ibal-Addu reveals him to be an ambitious kinglet, not above forging secret alliances with Mari's enemies ⁹⁾. It is safe to assume, however, that at the time of Ibal-El's writing, Ašlakka was within Mari's sphere of influence. Ibal-El's mission was to bring together two hostile factions, to establish a peace treaty between them, and, not incidentally, to promote Mari as an influential mediator of their affairs. The two parties were to meet in Ašlakka, presumably because a temple existed that housed powerful gods, and because Ibal-Addu was trusted by at least one of the belligerents.

J. R. Kupper's study *Les Nomades en Mésopotamie au temps des rois de Mari*, (1957), is still the work to consult on the Ḥanean tribesmen of the Old Babylonian period. For our purpose, suffice it to recall that of all the "semi-nomadic" tribes that lived in the middle and upper Euphrates region, the Ḥaneans were the most sedentary. Furthermore, the power of the Ḥanean tribal leadership had so waned that Mari's rulers had even usurped the tribe's right to determine the pattern of its seasonal migration. It should, therefore, not be surprising to find Mari sponsoring the Ḥaneans at the Ašlakka meeting.

Ibal-El speaks of Idamaraš as the other member of the forthcoming alliance. According to ARM V :51 :6-7, the Ḥaneans had settled in Upper Idamaraš around the major cities of Naḥur, Talḥayum, Kirdaḥat, and Ašnakkum. ARM II :37, our text, adds that Ḥurra was another city in Idamaraš around whose walls Ḥaneans encamped. ARM IX : 298 ia a list of 1218 men, drawn from Idamaraš, that were grouped around the kings who supplied them ¹⁰⁾. Prosopography of the royal names which occur in IX :298 allows the adding of a few more cities to our roster: Ilaṣura, Šuša, Urkiš, Kaḥat, and even Carchemich. Therefore, to the mind of the Mari chancellery, Idamaraš stretched from the west bank of the Baliḥ river to the east bank of the Euphrates. In a recently published text, Zimri-Lim insists, perhaps too strongly, that Idamaraš was under his control. Yet we know of many instances in which the supposedly tamed rulers of Idamaraš joined forces against Mari ¹¹⁾. Among these were

⁹⁾ On Ašlakka and Ibal-Addu, see J. M. Sasson, *JCS* 25 (1973), pp. 63-67.

¹⁰⁾ But cf., M. Birot in *ARMT* IX, pp. 348-349 (S. 146).

¹¹⁾ See, as one example, G. Dossin, *Syria* 20 (1939), p. 104.

leaders who bore Hurrian names. Indeed, Idamaras was peopled by a mixture of East and West Semites as well as Hurrians¹²). Now, according to a letter published long ago by Dossin, the king of Hurra bore the Hurrian name, Ilulli¹³).

When Ibal-El arrived at Ašlakka, he was met by representatives of the Haneans and men of Hurra, the last apparently acting for Idamaras. A puppy-dog and a goat were brought as sacrificial victims for the covenant-making ceremony. No doubt, the animals were to be split in halves, their fate serving as warning to those who would break solemn vows. But Ibal-El "feared" his Lord, that is he recognized Zimri-Lim's desire to impose his stamp on the peacemakings. He therefore immolated a donkey-foal. We do not know why this animal was singled out by Mari's envoy. We can only note that Ibal-El's vocabulary equated the "killing of a donkey-foal" with establishing a covenant, and that Biblical passages have been alluded to by scholars as parallel to this ritual. For all it is worth, we could mention, however, that riding a donkey was a symbol of *royal* prerogative among *urban* rulers; a practice which, as I have shown elsewhere¹⁴), is attested as early as the days of Gilgamesh, is known in the Old and New Testaments, and is, indeed, documented in the modern Middle East.

From ARM II:37 it is clear that the goat and the puppy-dog were chosen as sacrifices by the Haneans, a folk of West-Semitic stock, and the Hurrian leaders of Hurra. The offering of a goat in covenantal procedure is a phenomenon which is well attested among the West-Semites. The Bible preserves an instance of the practice in Gen. xv 9-10. It would not be too bold to attribute, therefore, the killing of a dog to Hurrian circles.

III. The text from Mari permits us to assign with some plausibility the sacrifice of a canine to Hurrian practices. Evidence could be drawn from Hittite documents to support this hypothesis. In an article published by H. G. Guterbock, the role played by Hurrian elements in the Hittite empire is shown to be all pervasive¹⁵). Not only was the cult thoroughly impregnated with Hurrian rituals, but the royal family of the Empire period may well have been Hurrian

¹²) See further J. M. Sasson, *Ugarit Forschung* 6 (1974), p. 392, sub "Geographical Horizon"

¹³) G. Dossin, *Revue d'Assyriologie* 35 (1938), p. 184

¹⁴) *Supplement to Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, sub "Ass" (forthcoming)

¹⁵) *Journal of World History*, 2 (1954-55), pp. 383-393

in origin. It should, therefore, not be surprising to meet with dog sacrifice in a text from the Hittite archives of the Empire period.

When the army is defeated by an enemy, then the following sacrifice is prepared "behind" the river: "behind" the river, a man, a kid, a puppy-dog, and a suckling pig are cut in half. One half is placed on one side, the (other) half on the other. Before it, one makes a door out of *hatalkenas* wood and pull over it a cord(?). Then one lights a fire before the door on one side, and also on the other side one lights a fire. The troops go through the middle. But as soon as it [the troops] reaches the bank of the river, one sprinkle water on them. Afterwards one goes through the field-ritual as is the custom of doing the field-ritual¹⁶).

We do know of other instances in ancient traditions in which dogs and their pups were offered to deities. O. Masson has collected impressive evidence for its occurrence, mostly from Greek and Roman sources, in an article published in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*¹⁷). The immolation of male adults seems to have been limited to outstanding moments when fear of defeat threatened the armies of nations such as Greece and Rome. On such occasions, prisoners were likely to be prime candidates for sacrifice¹⁸). Its usage in a regular, yearly expiatory ritual is attested, however, in the *thargelia* festival of Ionian Asia Minor¹⁹). Libation of swine's blood seems to be most favored among the Greeks as an effective method of ritual purification, especially when necessitated by the shedding of innocent blood²⁰). But only Hatti's archives have yielded documents in which human, canine, and porcine offerings are described in one single ritual. In addition to the above-quoted document, about half a dozen texts either similar or slightly differing in contents have been found. These have been collected in H. M. Kümmel's *Ersatzrituale für den hethitischen König*²¹). Unfortunately most of these texts are so fragmentary in nature that little can be said of their proper usage in Hittite celebrations.

IV. What are we to make of all the data we have gathered? We have

¹⁶) This translation follows H. M. Kümmel, *Ersatzrituale für den Hethitischen König* [Studien zu den Boghazköy-texten, 3], 1967, p. 151.

¹⁷) 137 (1950), pp. 5-25.

¹⁸) R. De Vaux, *Sacrifices*, pp. 57 ff.

¹⁹) *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 3, p. 1051.

²⁰) Bibliography in G. Thompson (ed.), *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, II, 1966, p. 202 (commentary, to C. 283). See now also, F. J. Stendebach, *BZ*, N.F. 18 (1974), p. 263-273.

²¹) *Op. cit.*, pp. 150-168.

suggested that dog sacrifice might have been a Hurrian practice attested in covenantal observances. We have noted it in a Hittite ritual for the purification of a defeated army, a ceremony which employed techniques best known from covenantal or oath-taking rites. No doubt this ritual aimed at avoiding further calamity by uprooting transgressions, real or imagined, from Hatti's midst. For our purpose, what is most noteworthy, indeed remarkable, is that three of the four victims mentioned in the Hittite document quoted above parallel those listed in Isaiah lxvi 3. Furthermore, the sequence of offerings is identical in both texts, that is human sacrifice is followed by that of a dog and a swine ²²).

Our study lacks reliable testimony which would link a ritual performed in Anatolia of the Late Bronze Ages to a prophetic utterance made in Israel at least half a millennium later. We could note that in the realm of religion and in the practice of cults, parallel behavior which spanned long distances and centuries has repeatedly been observed ²³). Scholars, however, have accumulated a fair amount of data on the presence of Hurrians in the region of Jerusalem ²⁴). Connections have been made between the Hittites and the Hebrews in legal, social, and religious matters. J. Milgrom has recently drawn attention to very interesting parallels between Hittites and Hebrews in the matter of custody and policing of religious sanctuaries ²⁵). H. A. Hoffner has recently gathered an impressive array of evidence for Anatolian magic and ritual that is preserved in the O.T. ²⁶) Of particular interest is his example of a phrase from a Hittite prayer which found its way into (Deutero-) Isaiah xl 3-4 ²⁷). *The weight of cumulative evidence, therefore, could justifiably be considered an adequate substitute for a clearly delineated channel of transmission.*

The circumstances that led to Deutero/Trito-Isaiah's messages are not without their vagueness. If the statement recorded in lxvi 3 is made after the Exile, as most scholars hold, it is difficult to reconstruct a situation in which Israel's martial fortunes demanded recourse

²²) Note that the Septuagint of Isa. lxvi 3, and the Sahidic version for that matter, do not mention human sacrifice.

²³) A parade example is the occurrence of a type of temple personnel in Ugarit and in post-exilic Israel, see B. Levine, "The Netinim", *JBL*, 82 (1963), pp. 207-212.

²⁴) Cf., for example, Speiser, *IDB*, II sub "Hurrians", pp. 664-666.

²⁵) J. Milgrom, *JAOS*, 90 (1970), 204-209.

²⁶) H. A. Hoffner, Jr., *Peoples of the Old Testament*, (1973), pp. 213-221; *Tyndale Bulletin*, 20 (1969), pp. 44-45.

²⁷) *Peoples . . .*, pp. 215-216.

to such extreme forms of sacrifices. Muilenberg has, at one point, noted similarities between chapters lxv-lxvi and xxxiv-xxxv of First Isaiah ²⁸⁾. It would be tempting to follow his lead and claim a pre-exilic date for prophecies such as the one of lxvi 3. If so, a setting for Isa. lxvi 3-4a could be plausibly reconstructed, proceeding from the following understanding of Isaiah's message. Israel had once, voluntarily, chosen a covenant with God. This covenant required Israel to perform rituals that were imposed by God. Such rituals included slaughtering oxen, sacrificing lambs, presenting cereal-offerings, and burning incense. But now, for as yet undetermined reasons, Israel was abandoning its chosen path. Perhaps an anguished nation had, in desperation, shifted its search for respite elsewhere. Thus rites, unusual even to pagan nations, were now being added; or, as I would have it, substituted for the proper acts of worship. These included human sacrifice libation of swine's blood, worship of idols, and, for the lack of a Hebrew word for "puppy", the immolation of a dog.

But God will mock their fruitless efforts. Because of their acts of abomination, He will see to it that their worst fears will be realized ²⁹⁾.

²⁸⁾ *Op. cit.*, p. 354.

²⁹⁾ Professor J. Milgrom was kind enough to refer me to Y. Kaufmann, *Tōledōt hā'emūnāh bay-yisrā'ēlīti*, IV (1947), p. 147, where an idolatrous setting is suggested for our passage. However, Kaufmann's approach and understanding of Isaiah lxvi 3-4a differ radically from mine.