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NOTES ON THE TEXT OF EXODUS

By E.G. STANLEY

Professor J.E. Cross's interest in Exodus, manifested especially in the work he did with the late Susie I. Tucker in two contributions published in Neophilologus 44 (1960) pp.38-9 and 122-7, is different from that which led me to produce the following notes. The quality of Exodus as a poem lies in part in the poet's use of language and imagery, at times startlingly different from other Old English poets, more often obscure and calling for elucidation of the text. As J.E. Cross says:

The number of debated words and meanings in the scholarship on this poem may suggest that the copyists found it too individual and obscure, and, apart from a loss of manuscript leaves in the middle of the poem and a possible lack of ending, it is certain that we do not have the poet's poem in places. Obviously it has been a quarry for philologists and antiquarians but yet it has value for readers of poetry. Startling images, unique compounds, stylistic subtleties, bold but relevant scriptural comparison and apt matching of Germanic phrase to scriptural concept invigorate the reader and impress on him the drama of the events and the wonder in God's awful power to destroy and save, but involved syntax in places perplexes and the unusual structural principle (if it is not lack of principle) needs some explanation. It is perhaps better to share the poet's excitement and rare skills, blame some of the difficult syntax on the transmission of the text, and offer some indication of influences on the structural principle.¹

The suggestion I offer below for sæcīr (291), in a context to which Cross and Tucker have given their wider interpretation, is in tune with the attractive individuality well characterized by Cross in the long quotation. Two editions have appeared recently: P.J. Lucas, Exodus (London, 1977); and Joan Turville-Petre's edition of The Old English Exodus Text, Translation and Commentary by J.R.R. Tolkien (Oxford, 1981; going back, in fact, to lectures given by Tolkien in the 1930s and 1940s). My notes assume knowledge of these two editions, as well as of the earlier editions listed in Stanley B. Greenfield and Fred C. Robinson, A Bibliography of Publications on Old English Literature to the end of 1972 (Toronto

37 mansceædan] If a reference to the angeli mali of Ps. lxxvii 49 were intended, we should expect hæfdon mansceædan pl.; but whereas malus can mean 'harmful, unfavourable', OE mán- means 'evil, wicked, sinful, flagitious', and that would not be a suitable first element to describe the angel(s) of the Lord, even when angel(s) of death; translating the compound 'the fell destroyer' is an attempt to search out a less explicitly sinful poeticism. There is no evidence for translating the compound as if the first element were short 'man' (instead of long, cf. Paris Psalter 105.16 maansceædan), i.e. 'destroyer(s) of men'. The subject of the sentence must be God, and unemended mansceædan 'evil ravagers' must refer to the Egyptian firstborn. 39 abrocæne burhweardas is best taken as a verbless absolute construction, not as object of gefylda parallel with frumbearna fela (or by emendation frumbearna gehwylc): 'He (i.e. God) had horridly laid low at midnight the sinful ravagers, many (or emended each) of the firstborn: the guardians of the city (were) crushed'. The burhweardas are unlikely to be the young firstborn (leaving aside the fact that among them were included the firstborn of cattle (see Exodus xii 29)), and they are unlikely to be the idols referred to in line 47; presumably the adult Egyptians in their lamentation (Exodus xii 30) are referred to.

40 dryrmyde (with -yde for normal -(e)de, cf. A. Campbell, OE Grammar (Oxford, 1959; rev. ed. 1983) §753(3)) is perhaps not to be emended to drysm- or Srysm-, but defended as ultimately from IE dhreu-s- (see J. Pokorny, Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, 2 vols. (Berne and Munich, 1959 and 1969) I, pp.274-5): a denominative verb from a noun with -mi- suffix (see W. Meid, Wortbildungslehre, Sammlung Göschen 1218 (Berlin, 1967) §106), morphologically like cierman. Derivatives occur with either r or s (see S. Feist, Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der gotischen Sprache (Leiden, 1939) s.v. driusan. Translate either 'The slayer (bana 39) strewed the land with corpses of the dead', or perhaps 'The land was strewn with the corpses of the dead'. 41 dugod 'old and tried ones' must refer to the Israelites of Exodus xii 28, not to the young firstborn (let alone the firstborn of cattle). That forð gewitan can mean 'die' is irrelevant; here it means 'departed'.

49-53 Though radical, the easiest solution of the many difficulties might be to read Israhela instead of Egypta (50) and to assume that hie nom. pl. (51) refers to the Egyptians, and hie acc. pl. (52) again to the Israelites. We could then translate: 'Thus the people of the Israelites, old and weary, endured that captivity for many a (half-)year, because they (the Egyptians meant to prevent Moses' kin from the journey long cherished with eagerness, if (only) the Lord had let them go'.

95 efngedælde 'equally shared out' looks like glossing language, with ef(e)n- for Latin 'con-'; cf. compartIrI (and OED s.v. Compart, v.): ' . . . two pillars each of which, the one by
day the other by night, comparted (more idiomatically shared out with the other) the journey of the valiant-hearted men in the high service of the Holy Spirit'. Though similar formations are not found in Old English, three Old High German compounds are close: ebenteil 'equal share' (corresponding to OFris evendel, and cf. Oicel jafndeildr pret. part. of an unrecorded *jafndeila, the closest parallel of efngedalde as if from efn(ge)dælan), epangiteilun masc. acc. sg. 'consort', and ebenteila fem. 'one who shares equally with (another)'. For other Latinisms in Exodus, note 266 ne willea eow ondraedan for Exodus xiv 13 nolite timere, and perhaps 206-7 mid him . . . tosomme for Exodus xiv 20 ad se invicem.

169 fleah fæge gast] The Israelites seem to be referred to, yet literally they are neither on the point of death, i.e. fæge, nor is their gast 'spirit of life' at a point likely to lead the poet to use of it either fleah 'fled' from fleon 'flee' or fleah 'moved rapidly' from fleogan 'fly'. Perhaps fæah here is an exceptional use of the preterite, as at Beowulf 1511 bræc 'was in the act of breaking, tried to pierce' (thus Klaeber's note) or at Beowulf 2854 wehte 'with 'imperfective' function, perhaps: 'tried to rouse (him)!' (Klaeber's note); for a Modern English parallel, see Archiv 214 (1977) p.136. Though the concept 'imperfective function' cannot be demonstrated generally for Old English, 'was ready to break, was about to break' and 'was ready to awaken' would fit the two Beowulf uses well. In the present context it seems that the frightened Israelites were ready to die, and perhaps we might translate: 'The life-spirit of those who thought themselves doomed to death was ready to flee'.

291 sacir span] This is, I suspect, a spinning metaphor. Emendation may be unnecessary, even though we may not be sure what cir is. As is usually accepted, cir is the noun related to cirran 'turn', and could refer to part of the turning mechanism of spinning, the reel or better the whorl. For details of the Old English vocabulary of spinning and related matters, see J. Hoops, Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde IV/2 (1918), s.v. Spinnrocken, pp.206-7. sacir is some technicality transferred, such as 'whorl of the sea', and the passage through the sea is described as if it were a sandy path spun by that sea-whorl, so that we may perhaps translate, 'The sea-whorl spun out sand'.

399 There is probably no need to emend. 398b-9 may be translated, 'The pyre blazed up, that chief slayer of life - he (Isaac) was none the more destined to die (because of that)!'. This follows from Tolkien's analysis of the structure of the sentence, based on his view that "Clearly there is an interjection in the manner of OE verse", without accepting the emendation of fyrst to fus, first suggested by F. Klaeber, "Zu altenglischen Dichtungen", Archiv 113 (1904) p.147.

427 ne not preceding a finite verb usually means 'nor' (or used correlatively, ne . . . ne 'neither . . . nor'); here the sense is looser, perhaps 'and . . . not': 'How needs the son of man a covenant? - and heaven and earth cannot contain the words of His
glory (or less literally His words of glory), [words] reaching wider and further than the corners of the earth can embrace, the circle of the world and the sky above, the gaping of the ocean and this sad air'. At 433 the scribe wrote ne for he, presumably because he thought that he was dealing with the correlative construction (427 . . . 433) 'neither . . . nor', but Genesis xxii 16 makes a negative impossible at 433.

442 If, in accordance with Genesis xxii 17, sund is emended to sand acc. pl. neuter 'sands', sæbeorga cannot easily be 'of the sea-cliffs', since there are no sands on the sea-cliffs. If -beorg were the word 'hill' at all we should have to translate 'the sands of the sea-dunes'; but most often, when beorg is used as the second element of compounds it means 'protection', a different word. Compounds like sæclif and sæweal(l) might make one incline towards 'sea-dune', especially since the clearest cases of -beorh 'protection' are words the first element of which is a part of the body. It is uncertain if licbeorh 'sarcophagus' is 'a mound for corpses' or, as seems better, 'a protective structure for a corpse'. At Ruin 5 scurbeorge must refer to 'structures giving protection from showers', either roofs or buildings more generally, and that is perhaps the closest parallel to sæbeorga interpreted as 'of the protecting enclosure of the sea'. Place-name evidence for compounds with second element -beorg 'hill' are well set out by A.H. Smith, English Place-Name Elements I, English Place-Name Society XXV (Cambridge, 1956) pp.29-30: it does not support the interpretation 'sea-cliff, sea-dune'. In place-names and elsewhere -beorg 'hill' is used when the material of which it is composed is named, e.g. sand-, stan-, or when the vegetation covering it is named, e.g. sealh- 'sallows', fearn- 'fern'. Andreas 305-10 is relevant. There the sæbeorgas are reached ofer cald cleofu, i.e. the cold cliffs are passed to reach the shore enclosing the sea like a shelter. 449 beorhlidu is usually explained as 'mountain slopes' here used with reference to the walls of sea-water on either side of the passage through the sea; in view of what seems to me the better interpretation of sæbeorga sand (442) as 'sands of the protecting shores of the sea', it seems better to render beorhlidu as 'shore slopes'.

465 meredeadr] This appears to be a compound of the type kyningwuldr 'King of Glory' and edelwyn 'delightful home'; so 'sea of death' or 'deadly sea'.

488 helpendra pað] The form pað for pað is unlikely, and the sense 'course, action', which has been proposed, has no parallel; helpendra 'of the helping ones', i.e. 'of the waves considered as the allies of the Israelites', is also difficult. Emendation of pað to lað does not cure the trouble completely, for helpendra lað would involve an unusual genitival construction with the sense 'inflicted by', 'injury inflicted by the helping waves'. To solve this desperate crux both words will probably have to be emended; perhaps the scribe's exemplar had damage at the end of the first and at the beginning of the second word: helpendum lað 'hateful to the reinforce-
proud people could not hold back the violence of the ocean-current hateful to the reinforcements' or 'hateful to anyone who might think of helping', with punctuation as in ASPR, though, as Lucas says, that would involve breach of Kuhn's Law of Sentence Particles, and the crux is likely to be more deepseated and to involve the preceding line (487).

540 ærdead is generally translated 'early or premature or untimely death'; but since poetic compounds with first element ær- (discussed by J. Hoops, Beowulfstudien, Anglistische Forschungen 74 (1932) pp.20-4) seem to convey the sense 'famed of old' or 'old and excellent for that reason' and since in this strongly personified context of the two arch-thieves, Old Age and Death, the sense of ær- in, for example, æræder would fit well, we should probably translate 'Death famed of old' or 'Old Death'.

547 Collective nouns like dugod can take plural verbs, like herigað; but here the heavenly hosts (pl.) are referred to (cf. weroda Wuldorcyning 548), and dugod is best taken as dugode with e elided before the following vowel, dugod 'on dreame 'the hosts in joy'.

556 hafað ufon is usually emended to us on with us on unusually 'into our hands'. A better emendation is hafað us ufon, 'He has from above granted to us the race of the Canaanites'. 