THE ELIMINATION OF A CRUX? *

A Syntactic and Semantic Study of Isaiah xl 18-20

BY

TRYGGVE N. D. METTINGER

Lund

It is not without reason that ELLEGER, when commenting upon Isa xl 18-26, leaves v. 20a untranslated 1). The words *hamsukkan terūmā* are a classic *crux interpretum*. In spite of an almost embarrassing richness of contributions to the discussion, it seems to the present writer that there are still one or two things in vv. 18-20 that have so far escaped notice, and among these a possible clue to the understanding of the enigmatic words in v. 20a.

In the following paper I shall discuss vv. 18-20 on the basis of the assumption that they form an integrated part of the context. The attempt to excise vv. 19-20 as a later addition has been rightly criticized by PREUSS 2). These verses make sense as the "rhetoric" answers to the rhetoric questions in v. 18. I shall first offer my own translation and then present the basis for this interpretation of the text. In my analysis, I shall argue on two levels and pose the questions of (a) the syntactic texture of the passage, and (b) the semantic content of some highly problematic lexical items.

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18. With whom then will you compare God, or what counterpart will you put forward to match him?

19. Maybe an idol —
the craftsman casts it,
whether the goldsmith plates it with gold or the silversmith with silverplates?

20. Maybe an image, which is a prescribed offering —
a tree that will not rot one chooses,
seeking out a skilful craftsman
to set up an image that will not fall?

The interpretation of these verses must build on a general observation on their inner structure. V. 18 consists of two questions. These two questions are taken up by vv. 19-20, which contain two imagined answers and thus form a corollary to v. 18. According to this interpretation of the structure, the word mesukkan in v. 20a. must in some way correspond to the word pasa! in v. 19a. These verses both contain descriptions of how an idol is made. In both verses this description consists of three parts.

V. 18. Elliger’s interpretation of the expression ‘arâk demût as meaning “einen Vergleich anstellen” ¹) leans too heavily on the unwarranted excision of vv. 19-20 and seems to be a somewhat anaemic rendering of the Hebrew. The only other instance of the word ‘arâk in Isa xl — lv is in chap. xlv 7 in the context of a trial speech, where the word should best be taken to mean “arrange one’s arguments for ‘battle’ in a lawsuit”. We also find the expression ‘arâk mitpat twice in Job (xiii 18 and xxiii 4) with a similar reference. Liedke includes these instances in Job among his examples of mitpat meaning “Urteilsvorschlag”, a suggestion for arbitration put forward by the judge or by one of the parties in the lawsuit, and is thereby enabled to take ‘arâk in its pregnant sense “zum Kampf aufstellen” ²).

¹) Elliger, op. cit., pp. 65 and 73.