Remarks on the Language of the Pesher Scrolls*

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The preparation of the database of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the Historical Dictionary Project at the Academy of the Hebrew Language in Jerusalem entails the reexamination of the readings of all the scrolls. During the process new readings and reconstructions are occasionally found, which could be preferred to those of the official editions. Here are presented three such innovative cases which have been revealed while editing the pesharim.¹

1 4Q163 4–7 i 4–11

In these lines a commentary on Isa 9:13–14 had been preserved. The editor of the text, John Allegro, restored the survived text as follows:²

ב֯וא והואה
ום אחד זקן
ו֯ב֯י
הואה הזנב

Regarding line 5 he noted: “apparently the end of a pešer on v. 13 and the beginning of the statement of v. 14.” Indeed, in chapter 9 of Isaiah we read וַיַּכְרֵת הָיְאָל רֹאשׁ וְזָנָב כִּפָּה וְאַגְמוֹן יוֹם אֶחָד׃ זָקֵן וּנְשׂוּא־פָנִים הוּא הָרֹאשׁ וְנָבִיא מֹרֶה־שֶּׁקֶר הוּוּא הַזָּנָב.

John Strugnell suggested an improved reading of line 5:³

מון ביום אחד זקן

As he has claimed, it should be better treated as the final words of v. 13, which contain a variant alternative to the Masoretic Text, whereas זוֹנָב begins the citation of v. 14. Thus, the text should be restored as follows:

1 We would like to thank Prof. Elisha Qimron for his valuable comments. Our thanks are also due to Dr. David Prebor who has styled the English text of the article.


2 See Allegro, DJD 5:18. These fragments consist of two partially survived columns, and the following text is situated in the right one. Since it has a full margin on the left, the preserved words should be posited in the end of the lines as presented below.

A careful examination of the photographs shows that Strugnell’s proposition should be preferred. But it raises another difficulty. Taking into account that the last words of line 6, ‘והואה’, concludes v. 14, one can easily reconstruct an estimated width of the column in this manuscript. It has to be about 30–35 letters. But this is just the length of v. 13 which, therefore, should be fully cited in line 5. As a result, the surviving remains of line 4 conclude the previous sentence. Yet, it is quite unusual and non-grammatical to finish a phrase by the word ‘והואה’, as correctly noted by Maurya Horgan.4

As a result of reexamining the photos we believe that line 4 should be deciphered otherwise. It seems that the surviving traces might be read as ‘יד נטואה’. The word ‘נטואה’ here is an allograph of ‘נטויה’, and such a spelling occurs elsewhere in the Scrolls.5 Fluctuations of glides spelled like this are quite common in Qumran Hebrew.6

This reading fits perfectly Isa 9:11 אֲרָם מִקֶּדֶם וּפְלִשְׁתִּים מֵאָחוֹר וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל פֶּה בְּכָל זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב אפֹו וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה. It is reasonable to assume that the commentary of verse 11 of chapter 9 concludes in the third line. The author or the redactor finished its Pesher with the phrase ‘ביד נטואה’ as an allusion to ‘והוא יד טועיה’ of v. 11.

In the editions of this scroll the reading is: ...[גדוד כיחכה איש7 and the remnants of ...] make possible the identification of the phrase as a citation of the book of Hosea. Hosea (6:8–9) says: וּכְחַכֵּי גִּלְעָד קִרְיַת פֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן עֲקֻבָּה מִדָּם איש גְּדוּדִים חֶבֶר כֹּהֲנִים דֶּרֶךְ יְרַצְּחוּ־שֶׁכְמָה כִּי זִמָּה עָשׂוּ. The scroll citation is similar to the biblical text, apart from the first word, which is ‘כיחכה’ in the Bible. How should it be understood?

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