SOME FALSE CLUES IN THE STUDY OF GENESIS XIV 1)

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Any light that can be shed on the obscure fourteenth chapter of Genesis is welcome. From time to time, two types of theory have been advanced, either of which, if it could be proved, would be very significant for the study of the passage and of the events recorded in it. The first type of theory is that the chapter is in verse, or at least shows signs of being based on a poetic original. The proof of such a theory would be of importance for the historian, for it would help him to understand the form in which the tradition was transmitted, and might strengthen the case for believing that reliable material was handed down over a period of some centuries. A comparison might be made with the Homeric poems, which preserved by means of their poetic form many historical reminiscences through several hundred years of oral transmission, although they also contain much that is later 2). The second type of theory is that the chapter betrays evidence of being based on an Accadian original written in the cuneiform script, and there can be no doubt that the demonstration of this view would be very important; it might even be possible to maintain that the chapter is based on a document dating from the time of Abraham himself. Since these two kinds of theory have far-reaching consequences, it is necessary to study them carefully, and the purpose of the present paper is to subject them to a critical examination.

1) I am grateful to Professor Sir Godfrey Driver and Mr. A. R. Millard for reading and commenting on a draft of the present paper, particularly because they are experts in Assyriology as well as in Hebrew and Old Testament studies; they are not to be held responsible for any errors of fact or judgement that the article may contain. In the article, G. K. stands for A. E. Cowley (ed.), Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar as edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch (2nd ed., Oxford, 1910), and the following works are cited by the names of the authors: A. Dillmann, Die Genesis (Leipzig, 1875); S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (12th ed., London, 1926); F. Hommel, Die alturaitische Überlieferung in inschriftlicher Beleuchtung (Munich, 1897); E. König, Die Genesis 2 & 3 (Gütersloh, 1925); O. Procksch, Die Genesis 2 & 3 (Leipzig and Erlangen, 1924); E. A. Speiser, Genesis (Garden City, 1964).

Various theories have been advanced about the dependence of the book of Genesis on poetic traditions, and it has been claimed by some scholars that the book as a whole is written in verse 1). For the present purpose, however, it is sufficient to consider only some attempts to show that Gen. xiv is in verse or is dependent on a poem.

E. Sievers, *Metrische Studien. II. Die hebräische Genesis, Zweiter Teil: Zur Quellscheidung und Textkritik* (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 267-74, argues that Gen. xiv is in verse, but his theory is unconvincing. One weakness is that he emends the text arbitrarily in order to obtain verse. For example, he postulates a lacuna after ‘in the days of’ in verse 1, and excises the names of the kings, but not of the places over which they ruled; most of verse 9 is also deleted, as are a number of words elsewhere in the chapter. Nor is his idea of what constitutes poetry likely to win wide agreement. It is not, for instance, very satisfactory to include in the metrical scheme the explanatory clauses ‘the same is Kadesh’ (verse 7) and ‘the same is the King’s vale’ (verse 17), which most scholars are doubtless right in regarding as glosses, and Sievers himself deletes similar expressions in verses 2 and 8. To give a further example, I cannot believe that Sievers is justified in regarding the following part of verse 24 as a line of poetry broken up into three groups of words:

The theory as a whole must be rejected, although Sievers is on safer ground in suggesting that the words of blessing in verses 19 and 20 are in poetry. It is not surprising that a priest should be represented as using verse for such a purpose, and it is possible to regard this passage in direct speech as poetry without ascribing to the whole chapter the same form.

A different arrangement of Gen. xiv as verse has been proposed by A. Bruno, *Die Bücher Genesis-Exodus: Eine Rhythmische Untersuchung* (Stockholm, 1953), pp. 44-6. Like Sievers, he includes some expressions that are probably glosses (in verses 3 and 17), although he deletes others (in verses 2, 7, and 8), and some of his supposed lines of poetry do not appear poetic. However, the greatest weakness in his arrangement of the chapter is the variation in length of line that he regards as permissible in Hebrew verse. While our understanding of

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1) On theories about the relation of Genesis to verse, see König, pp. 26-34.