IS 2 KINGS XI 6 A GLOSS?

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In 2 Kgs. xi 4-16 we have the account of Jehoiada's successful coup d'état against Athaliah. [Athaliah, the unscrupulous queen-mother of Ahaziah seized the throne of Judah at the death of her son and sought to make herself secure by getting rid of the other possible heirs. Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, took Joash, the son of Ahaziah, and hid him in a "bed chamber" (v. 2). In the seventh year, Jehoiada summoned the centurions of the Carites and the runners and made them swear their loyalty to Joash and to help him to restore the kingship of Judah to the proper Davidic heir.] The day he chose for this coup d'état was a sabbath. He gave special instructions to the centurions so that both the outgoing and the incoming guards could be available at his disposal on this day (vv. 5-7).

The problem here is this: in vv. 5-6 mention is made of three groups of royal guards, and in v. 7 still two more divisions are mentioned: thus, according to the present text, there are apparently altogether five divisions. But v. 5 speaks only of "the third", and this obviously presupposes that there were in all only three divisions, including those who came in on duty and those who went off duty. Therefore, the reference to the two thirds in v. 6 has been a problem for many.

In 1878 Julius WELLHAUSEN proposed a solution ¹ which holds the scene of Old Testament scholarship until today. WELLHAUSEN saw v. 6 as "ein Geröll verfehlter Glossen" and proposed its omission. His main contention was that v. 9 did not show any knowledge of the commandment given in v. 6. His whole solution depends on his interpretation of the words מַזְמַז וּמַעֵל:

"Die Ausdrücke מַזְמַז und מַעֵל beziehen sich auf den natürlichen Standort der königlichen Leibwache, auf den Palast und bedeuten heimgehen und aufziehen."

He further suggested to read in v. 7b the participial construction instead of the MT reading . Thus he achieved the following text:

"... das Drittel von euch, die am Sabbath heimgehen und den Dienst im Königshause versehen und die zwei anderen Drittel von euch, die Sabbaths aufziehen und den Dienst in Yahwehause haben bei dem König: ihr(alle) sollt den König rings umgeben u.s.w. v. 5.7.8."

Wellhausen's above proposal has been accepted by the majority of the exegetes. It is also believed that this has cast more light on the pre-exilic observance of the sabbath. Because, according to this interpretation, during the week days there were only one third of the guards to guard the temple, while two thirds were posted at the palace; but on sabbaths, it is assumed, the two thirds from the palace came and guarded the temple, while the one third went and took their position at the palace. From this it is generally assumed that large crowds of pilgrims visited the temple on sabbaths and therefore sabbath was a special festival during the pre-exilic period.

An examination of Wellhausen's hypothesis, however, exposes its weakness. The following points may be noted:

1. Wellhausen's basic assumption that and mean "heimgehen" and "aufziehen" is not convincing. He does not explain why these two words should be so understood contrary to the normal dictionary meanings. Here it may be noted that all the standard dictionaries translate as "to come in" and as "to go out". Both these words occur in a similar context in Ch. xxvii 1 and there they are translated as "the divisions that came and went" (RSV). In Ex. xxi 2 refers to slaves going off duty in the seventh year. Ernst Kutsch has recently examined these two roots.

3) A. Klostermann does not omit v. 6, but makes arbitrary drastic changes in the text in order to get the sense he wants; Die Bücher Samuelis und der Könige, Nördlingen, 1887, p. 429; A. Šanda reverses vv. 6 & 7: Die Bücher der Könige, Bd. 2, Münster, 1912, pp. 124 f., 128. J. A. Montgomery rightly notes that "the omission of v. 6 with its exact local details is arbitrary"; but he too does not offer any alternate solution: The Books of Kings, ICC, Edinburgh, 1951, pp. 419 f. K. D. Frick notes the difficulty involved in understanding Jehoiada's commandment, still takes the text as it is, Das zweite Buch von den Königen, Stuttgart, 1972, p. 143.

4) Cf. BDB, GesHWB, KB.