A NEGLECTED METHOD IN EZEKIEL RESEARCH

Editorial Criticism

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In Ezekiel's final verdict against the Moabite enemy an unexpected detail has troubled many an exegete: the Ammonites are mentioned along with Moab to whom the oracle is addressed (Ezek. xxv 10). "I will give it (i.e., the Moabite territory) along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations, and I will execute judgments upon Moab" (vv. 10-11). J. W. Rothstein and many others have judged the Ammonites to be an obvious intrusion: they have no place in an oracle concerning solely the Moabites, for the Ammonites (a) seem to overload the sentence, make it clumsy and almost unreadable; (b) receive their own judgement oracle, which in fact is the preceding pericope (Ezek. xxv 1-7). Accordingly, literary critics have every reason to remove the bny'mwn from the incriminated sentence, and I myself hasten to subscribe to this critical operation and the logic involved. However, one important question remains: how can we account for the presence of the Ammonites who are in fact twice introduced into our problematic text? In this article I try to answer this question which has never been answered conclusively and has thus up to now left the whole critical undertaking without a vital piece of justification.

Pursuing this question we hit upon a complicated situation which becomes clear only through a careful analysis of a particular expres-

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1) Translations follow the RSV except for slight modifications, whereas the verse numbers of the Hebrew text are retained.
sion in the suspect sentence; the expression is: "the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations". To the ancients this did not mean the threat of being forgotten and relegated to political unimportance, but utter destruction of the population, so that there will be no one who may be called an Ammonite. No reality will henceforth correspond to the Ammonite name. In the Hebrew Bible there are several other occurrences of such a terrible threat against a people; some of them use the same vocabulary as Ezek. xxv 10).

\begin{verbatim}
Exod. xvii 14  mhh 'mhh 't-zkr 'mlq m't hšnym
Dtn. xxv 19  tmhh 't-zkr 'mlq m't hšnym
Dtn. xxxii 26  'athy th m'nwš zšrm
Ezek. xxi 37  l' tzkr
Ezek. xxv 10  l' tzkr 'n'y 'mwn bgwym
Ps. lxxiii 5  w'l jzkr šm jšt'l 'wd
\end{verbatim}

A comparison of these parallel texts clearly shows that only Ezek. xxi 37 is closely related to our problematic text: in both cases, the niphal of zkr is used with reference to the Ammonites. Some authors understood Ezek. xxi 37 as referring to the Babylonians\(^4\)), but from the context there can be no doubt that it is the Ammonites whose memory will be destroyed, and in v. 33 the Ammonites are explicitly referred to. In this verse the prophet is told to address the Ammonites with a threatening message: "And you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the lord Yahweh concerning the Ammonites and concerning their scorn; and say, A sword, a sword ... " (v. 33). However, the bny 'mwn did not remain unquestioned even in this sentence: Irwin and von Rabenau\(^5\)) removed the Ammonites from the text, so that the rest reads: "And you, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the lord Yahweh ( ), A sword, a sword ... "; von Rabenau rightly points out that Ezekiel never introduces an oracle in such a complicated fashion: "and say, Thus says the lord Yahweh concerning ... and say ... "; apart from this the biblical tradition mentions only the Ammonites' scorn for the destroyed city

\(^3\) Some passages use different vocabulary and therefore do not belong here: Dtn. vii 24, ix 14; Josh. vii 9; 2 Kings xiv 27; Is, xiv 22, xlviii 19; Ps. ix 6-7.
\(^4\) A. van den Born, Ezekiel (Roermond, 1954); M. Greenberg, "Ezekiel", Encyclopaedia Judaica 6 (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 1078-95 (see 1085-86).