PARONOMASIA IN THE SAMSON NARRATIVE IN JUDGES XIII-XVI

by

STANISLAV SEGERT

Los Angeles

1. Paronomasia in the Hebrew Bible.

While in his classical monograph on paronomasia in the Semitic languages Heinrich Reckendorf understood the word as a linguistic term, most authors, among them Immanuel M. Casanowicz, considered the paronomasia in the Old Testament as a term for a stylistic figure. Overtones of general words and especially of names of places, persons and gods served to enhance the literary value of a narrative by providing connections simultaneously on phonological and semantic levels. The listeners had to find for themselves the appropriate connections from synonyms and from similar words or roots, and then to enjoy them. Even the concealing of such connections can be considered a specific stylistic intention.

---

1 This linguistic aim is clearly indicated by the sub-title of Reckendorf's book.

From Judg. xiii-xvi the following instances are quoted in appropriate sections: xvi 20 kpd'am kpd'am, p. 39; xvi 9 (waynatteq—yinnatq), p. 61; xvi 28 'innar'ma nqam'ahal miss'el enay, p. 191; xiv 6 way'sass'ehu k'sassa'h kagg'di, p. 132.

2 Casanowicz presents the definition (pp. 1-4), delimitation (pp. 4-5) and function (pp. 5-7) of this figure as well as its main varieties (pp. 12-20) and its use in Semitic languages (pp. 20-5). The references to older literature are given in the note on p. iii. Paronomasia in the OT is characterized (pp. 27-44, cf. 84-6), and 502 cases of it are listed in the alphabetic arrangement (pp. 44-84).

3 Cf. Böhl, limited to Genesis; Guillaume; Gläck, with useful general considerations and classification (cf. p. 52); Peeters; Gevirtz, with bibliographical references, p. 33, n. 1; Sasson, with bibliographical references.

4 For a recent general study cf. Hill, with references, p. 383, n. 2.

5 This device was discussed with Professor Robert Hetzron, University of California, Santa Barbara, who reckons with its extensive use. The author gratefully acknowledges this stimulating exchange of opinions.
2. Paronomasia in the story of Samson

Paronomasia appears with high frequency\(^6\) in the Samson narrative, which can be considered the most fictitious section of the book of Judges.\(^7\) The homonymy of words and roots is used in a poetically formulated riddle (cf. Judg. xiv 14, 18) and in a boastful saying (cf. Judg. xv 16). Among the literary devices\(^8\) which were used to enliven this story, the use of numerical patterns\(^9\) and of overly rich rhymes\(^10\) in Judg. xvi 23 and 24, which had to demonstrate the ineptitude of the Philistines, can also be adduced. Some of these features provided rather comical effect.

While some folk etymologies of names are clear in the present form of the Samson story, it seems that there were more such etymologies and puns in its original wording or understanding. Some of them were probably not understood and thus not respected by the later editors. Some dialectal—the story concerned the small tribe of Dan—or obsolete words may have been replaced by better-known words, and in this process the original connections between words may have been destroyed. The other possibility, that the paronomastic figures were concealed from the very beginning by the intention of the original narrator, is to be taken into consideration as well.

3. Double meaning of words

3.1. Samson’s riddle and its solution (Judg. xiv 14, 18)

The riddle which Samson presented to his thirty companions (Judg. xiv 14) was formulated:

\[\text{mē hādōkēl yāqār mē erekēl umețaz yāxār mātōq } \text{“Out of the eater came food, and out of the strong came sweetness.”}\]

\(^6\) Cf. the instructive table in Casanowicz, p. 93 (and cf. also p. 94), in which the proportionate numbers for the entire book of Judges appear as slightly above average among the historical books. But Casanowicz notes only two examples of paronomasia in Judg. xiii-xvi: no. 25, xiv 14, p. 46; no. 129, xv 16, pp. 56-7 and n. 54.

\(^7\) Cf. Zapletal, pp. 243-52; Boling, pp. 223-4; Soggin, p. 197.

\(^8\) Cf. Crenshaw, pp. 27-64, esp. 30-1, 35-6.

\(^9\) Judg. xvi 28 one revenge for two eyes; cf. a. 29: two columns; Judg. xvi 27, three thousand; Judg. xv 4, three hundred foxes; Judg. xvi 15, three incorrectly answered questions; thus the next one will be answered correctly; Judg. xiv 11, thirty companions; Judg. xiv 15, seven days; Judg. xvii 7, etc., seven strings; Judg. xvi 13-14, seven locks, cf. Mayer-Opifício.

\(^10\) Two cola in Judg. xvi 23 contain three words ending in -ēnu, four cola in Judg. xvi 24 contain five such words.