THE PARWĀR: A PLACE OF RITUAL SEPARATION?

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While the meaning of the word parbār/parwār has never been clearly established in Biblical Hebrew lexicography, it has generally been assumed that the word has a foreign origin and that its meaning is to be found by identifying its foreign root. The word parwārim appears in 2 Kings xxiii 11 and lexicographers have taken this passage as providing the basic context for understanding the meaning of the word. The word appears in the description of Josiah’s temple reform as the area within which was located the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain: Josiah banished the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun to this location. As a result, two proposals about the origin of the word have been based on the assumption that it is related to a sun cult. On the basis of the occurrence of the word in the Temple Scroll I will suggest a totally different origin for the word and a modification in the original meaning which has been assumed for it.

In 1 Chr. xxvi 18 the word parbār occurs twice in the singular; despite the appearance of b for w, most scholars seem to agree that this is a variation of the word found in 2 Kgs xxiii. In 1 Chronicles it is used in a description of the divisions of the gatekeepers in the Temple and the areas for which they were responsible; it seems to refer to a structure which was located at the top of the road on the west side of the temple.¹

Because of the difficulty in determining the meaning of the word parbār/parwār from these two passages, a search for a foreign source was undertaken.

¹ In Ezek. xli 12 reference is made to a building on the west of the temple area, but the word parbār is not used for it. If the architectural descriptions in the Temple Scroll are based on the design of the Second Temple parbār, the structure to the west did not conform to the dimensions given by Ezekiel.
1. W. Gesenius suggested that the word came from Persian: *par* “light” and *-bār*, a termination meaning “possessing”. The resulting meaning would be a “summer-house” or an “open kiosk”. In late Biblical Hebrew it would have been a sun-lightened portico or colonnade. If we assume that *parwār* and *parbār* are variations of the same word, in Chronicles it would have referred to some kind of open structure on the western side of the Temple area.

In 1916 Enno Littmann published an Aramaic-Lydian inscription from Sardis which he dated to either 455 or 394 BCE (the 10th year of King Artaxerxes). Here the word *prbr* appears twice in the same line and, despite the fact that the published photograph clearly shows it to be *prbr*, Littmann read it as *prbd* and made the proposal that it had an Armenian origin. In this Aramaic/Lydian bilingual inscription the word *prbr* appears to refer to the open anteroom or vestibule of a tomb. H. Donner and W. Röllig

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3 S. R. Driver remarked about this suggestion: “By what means, however, a Persian word would have reached Judah before the Exile (2 K 23), is difficult to understand: if this explanation of the word in 2 K 23.11 is correct, the text would seem to have been adjusted to post-exilic usage”: “PARBAR”, in J. Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible* 3 (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 673. The majority of scholars seem to have accepted Driver’s explanation. For example, John Gray has assumed that the text shows the hand of a latter redactor: *I & II Kings* (2nd edn, London and Philadelphia, 1975), p. 737.

4 Littman, *Sardis: Volume VI, Lydian Inscriptions*, Part 1 (Leiden, 1916), p. 23, actually used the dates 445 or 394 BCE, but the mistake was noted by H. C. Butler, *Sardis: Volume I, The Excavations, Part 1 1910-1914* (Leiden, 1922), p. 117. According to Butler the inscription was one of a group which was discovered in the excavation of what may have been a retaining wall. The inscribed blocks “had been parts of tall stelae”. Because of this secondary use, it is impossible to know to which Artaxerxes it refers so that the suggestion of S. A. Cook that it be dated to 394 or 349 BCE is also possible. Cf. “A Lydian-Aramaic Bilingual”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 37 (1917), pp. 77-87.

5 p. 25. In reading the word as *prbd* Littmann was following a suggestion that the word was derived from the Armenian *hn apar* for which was postulated an old Persian *fra-padak*. This Armenian word means “place, court”. The proposal that the structure and meaning of the word comes into Hebrew from Armenian is based on a complex argument which depends upon a number of postulated forms that do not appear in known texts in either Armenian or Old Persian. Cf. C. C. Torrey, “The Bilingual Inscription from Sardis”, *AJSLL* 34 (1917-18), p. 194.

6 Discussions of this inscription are found in Paul Kahle and Ferdinand Sommer (ed. F. Sommer and Hans Ehelolf), *Kleinasiatische Forschungen* 1 (Weimar, 1927), p. 35, and in Ernst Herzfeld, *Altpersische Inschriften* (Berlin, 1938), p. 75.