Charles T. Fritsch wrote in *The Interpreter’s Bible* of 1955 that Prov. xxvi 10 was “probably the most obscure verse in Proverbs”, and most who have considered it would heartily agree with him. Commentators believe that there has been some sort of textual corruption that renders the verse difficult to comprehend.

The Massoretic text reads:

rab mebølel-kõl ze?esoker kesil ze?esoker ciberim

This would appear to mean “A great one pierces everything, and one who hires a fool and hires passers-by.” All modern translations translate something else on the basis of speculations like the present suggestion. In their recent commentary L. Alonso Schökel and J. Vilchez list a number of possible translations while declining to speculate what Hebrew was reconstructed by the translators to read as they do. It seems to me valuable to do exactly that with a few ancient translations to try to tease out a new and different understanding of the verse.

The LXX reads:

πολλὰ χειμάζεται πᾶσα σάρξ ἀφρόνων· συντριβέται γὰρ ἡ ἕκστασις αὐτῶν

*Vetus Testamentum* XLI, 3 (1991)
All the flesh of fools is greatly distressed, for their excitement is shattered.

The Hebrew is understood as:

rab mehulleh kol-basär kesil wrenisbar 'ebra'am

The last word has to be related to 'ebra '‘anger’. hillâ can mean ‘‘he made sick’; its pu'al may mean ‘‘he became sick’’, and perhaps by extension ‘‘he suffered’’. The LXX has interpreted the first w'sôkêr ‘‘and hires’’ as basâr ‘‘flesh’’. It is not clear from where ‘‘is shattered’’ comes.

The Targum is similar in its understanding:

sgy hys bsh dskl? wrwy 24 br ym2

The flesh of the fool suffers much, and the drunkard passes over the sea.

The Hebrew is understood as:

rab mehulleh basâr kesil w'sôkkêr 'ôbêr yâm

The differences from the LXX are as follows: (1) ‘‘all’’ is omitted; 3 (2) the second ‘‘and hires’’ is seen as ‘‘and a drunkard’’ instead of as ‘‘is shattered’’; (3) ‘‘passers-by’’ is split into ‘‘passes over the sea’’ instead of ‘‘their excitement’’.

The omission in (1) is not easy to explain, but the understanding in (2) makes good sense in the context, since the verse immediately preceding speaks clearly of a drunkard: xxvi 9 ‘‘A thorn goes up in the hand of a drunkard, and a proverb in the mouth of fools.’’ 6 That drunkenness is at issue may be obliquely implied by the following verse too: xxvi 11 reads, ‘‘Like a dog returning on his vomit is a fool repeating his stupidity.’’

Interpretation (3) does not seem likely, and it may imply a post-Second Temple context in which people leaving the land of Israel for the Diaspora were a growing problem to be deplored. 7 But of course at an early date there may well not have been spaces between the words in the Hebrew text, and such a reading was legitimate, if strained.

Jerome perpetrates a really creative series of interpretations:

iudicium determinat causas et qui inponit stulto silentium iras mitigat

Judgement determines cases, and he who lays silence on the fool alleviates rages.

He must be reading the Hebrew as:

rib...w'sôkêr kesil sokêr 'ebra't

Probably the first part of the verse is just a guess from the context assumed in reading rb as rib ‘‘judgement, case at law’’. In the