SHORT NOTES

A NOTE ON ŠÁLĬŠĪM

In his article, "The list of David's officers (šálîšîm)", VT 38 (1988), pp. 72-9, N. Na'aman suggests that šelšîm in 2 Sam. xxiii should be emended to read šálîšîm and translated "knights", while D.G. Schley in "The šálîšîm: officers or special three-man squads?", VT 40 (1990), pp. 321-6, disagrees with him. Presumably, their arguments apply also to Ex. xiv 7, "and he took six hundred chariots ... and šálîšîm over every one of them", and to 2 Kgs x 25, "and Jehu said lârāšîm urlāššâlîšîm. However, they make no mention of the fact that ṣlî in Ugaritic means bronze (or copper). In my article "The Meaning of the Word šlî in the Bible in the Light of Ugaritic TLT", Beth Mikra 72 (1978), p. 126, I attempted to show that the Ugaritic word ṣlî means not only "metal" but also "armoured" and may be the designation of soldiers wearing metal armour, similar to qallāśîm (2 Kgs iii 25; 2 Chr. xxvi 14), môrîm (1 Sam. xxxi 3; 2 Sam. xi 24; 2 Chr. xxxv 23), and râśîm (1 Sam. xxii 16; 1 Kgs xiv 27; 2 Kgs x 25), who were called after their distinctive arms, like the German designation "Ritter" for mounted soldiers.

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NOTES ON GENESIS XV

1. Janus Parallelism in v. 1

The poetic device known as Janus parallelism was first identified by C. H. Gordon. He defined it as a "kind of parallelism [that] hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings, one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning, what follows". The example he used was Song ii 12 where the word zâmîr means both "pruning season" (parallel to nisišânîm "blossoms" in the preceding stich) and "music" (parallel to qôl hat-tôr "voice of the turtledove" in the following stich).

Vetus Testamentum XLII, 2 (1992)
After Gordon put forward this initial illustration, other examples of Janus parallelism were identified in the biblical corpus. In addition, books devoted to biblical poetry began to include Janus parallelism in their descriptions of the literary devices available to the ancient Hebrew poets.

A hitherto unrecognized example of Janus parallelism occurs in Gen. xv 1. Although older translations of the Bible (e.g., Jewish Publication Society version) understood the entire verse as prose, several more recent works (e.g., New American Bible, New Jewish version) correctly render God’s words to Abram as poetry. The result is a tristich:

\[ \text{‘al tîrâ’ ̀abrâm} \\
\text{‘ánôkî mágên lûk} \\
\text{sîkârkâ harhêh mêrôd} \]

which may be rendered (as in the NJV):

Fear not, Abram,
I am a shield to you,
Your reward shall be very great.

The word on which the Janus usage pivots in this passage is consonantal mgn. When vocalized mâģên and understood as “shield”, as in the Masorah, the word parallels what precedes it. A mâģên “shield,” even when used metaphorically as in the present instance, is an appropriate item to combat fear (root yr’, as in tîrâ’). C. Westermann has bolstered this understanding of the word by collecting the collateral Near Eastern evidence.

However, consonantal mgn may also derive from the verbal root mgn “give, bestow”, in which case it parallels what follows. A sâkâr “reward” is something which is given (root ntn usually), as other biblical passages such as Exod. ii 9; 1 Kgs v 20 clearly indicate.

There has been considerable scholarly debate in recent years as to whether mâģên in Gen. xv 1 should be retained and translated “shield”, or whether it should be revocalized to either a verbal (presumably Qal môģên) or nominal (mâģân) form of the root mgn “give”.

My point is that the choice need not be made. The poet intended both meanings simultaneously. The orthograph mgn was to be understood as both “shield” and “giver/donor”. This is the beauty of Janus parallelism.

A conscious attempt to incorporate both meanings of mgn proba-