Abstract

When applied to the numbers of the Levites, the proposed reading of the census numbers yields inconsistent results. Statistical peculiarities suggest a non-historical interpretation.

1 C.J. Humphreys, “The number of people in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers i and xxvi”, *VT* 48 (1998), pp. 196-213.


4 M. McEntire, “A response to Colin J. Humphreys’s ‘The number of people in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers i and xxvi’”, *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 262-264.

5 An earlier but more detailed discussion of this as well as a response by Prof. Humphreys can be found on my homepage (http://home.t-online.de/home/Ruediger.Heinzerling/).


7 Quite recently I found a reference to R.E.D. Clark and J.W. Wenham, who seem to have done something similar, in: G.J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 63-64.

8 G.E. Mendenhall, 1.c. p. 63.

9 M. McEntire, 1.c. p. 263.


TWO TERMS FOR WEALTH IN PROVERBS VIII
IN LIGHT OF AKKADIAN

Wealth and property are one of the major concerns of ancient near-eastern wisdom literature in general and the Book of Proverbs in particular. In the course of a paean of self-praise, Lady Wisdom promises to be a source of vast wealth to those who love her, seek her, and acquire her (Prov. viii 18-21). In the second and fourth lines of this quatrain appear two terms that have never been properly understood. Both may be given satisfactory explanations with the help of hitherto unnoticed Akkadian cognates.

1. (Prov. viii 18) = (kaspum...ittiq), “negotiable wealth”

This term has been translated in several manners such as: κτησις πολλων (LXX, “abundant possessions”);illac (Targum, “money and fortune” [good destiny]); (Saadiah Gaon, tremen-
dous wealth); “durable riches” (KJV; Oesterley, WC); “enduring riches” (JPS 1917); “enduring wealth” (RSV; NAB; NJPS); “lordly wealth” (Toy, ICC); “dazzling wealth” (Goodspeed, AT); “grandeur” (Moffatt); “boundless wealth” (NEB); “solid wealth” (McKane, OTL); “venerable dignity” (Scott, AB); “stattliches Gut” (Gemser, HAT).

These many renditions of the term are based on various uses of the root פֶּצֶר in biblical Hebrew. According to Jonah Ibn-Janah, Sefer Ha-Shorashim, the word means פֶּצֶר הָעָלָם, “thick and plenty and great”, while David Qimhi’s Sefer Ha-Shorashim abbreviates it to פֶּצֶר הָעָלָם, “plenty and great”. This interpretation is based on the use of the noun פֶּצֶר in 1 Sam. ii 3; Ps. xxxi 19; lxxv 6; xc 4 and Job xxi 7 as a designation of arrogant, haughty speech. But in his commentary on Proverbs, Qimhi interprets פֶּצֶר as strong, and therefore durable. Delitzsch first mentions that פֶּצֶר is the equivalent of פִּזְעָה in Prov. i 13. He then proceeds to trace the development of פֶּצֶר from its original meaning “old” to its use in expression: “Like Arab. ‘ataq, (it) denotes such goods as increase during long possession as an inheritance from father to son, and remain firm, and are not for the first time gained, but only need to be inherited . . .” Others suggests that פֶּצֶר, a hapax, is derived from the adjective פֶּצֶר (1 Chr. iv 22) meaning ancient and designates old money which is valuable because of its age. McKane, in a variation on this idea explains his rendition as solid wealth: “wealth with a basis in a traditional value of what constitutes the good life”. BDB s.v. פֶּצֶר cites Gesenius and explains: “(ancient and so) valuable”; but it then cites an Arabic etymology supporting a primary meaning of advance, eminent, surpassing and translates “eminent wealth”.

None of these explanations are convincing and none is based on terminology from the field of property and wealth that we would expect to find. They are all attempts to support a preconceived notion of what the term implies on the basis of nuances of other occurrences of one of the words in different passages. The most reasonable parallel adduced is Job xxi 7: מַעֶשֶׂה נַאם חֵרוֹת שֶׁבֵּית נֶפֶר דָּוִד, “Why do the wicked live on, Prosper and grow wealthy?” (NJPS), which combines in a single verse פֶּצֶר and פַּעַם which is a term often used to designate wealth. However, this correlation is coincidental and the meaning of the verse is probably something like “Why do the wicked enjoy long life, hale in old age, and great and powerful” (NEB). It is no wonder that there is no agreement.

I would like to suggest a new rendition that is not based on fanciful