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"The Lord of Hosts, Seated over the Cherubs"

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There is disagreement about how to render a phrase in II Sam. 6,2 that is concerned with the movement of the divine ark. David had picked 30,000 of Israel's best and with them had proceeded to fetch it, intending to bring it to Jerusalem. In this note, dedicated with much affection to John Van Seters, a fine colleague for over two decades, I evade the issues on which he is a master sleuth: the composition, date, and permutations of this tradition¹. Nor do I entertain the contextual issues raised by the passage, such as the reasons (theological or political) for relocating the ark, who participated in the enter-

1 The bibliography on the ark, its origins, and transfigurations is enormous; so too is the literature on the many names and epithets of Yahweh and on the cherubs. II Sam. 6,2 tends to be featured or dissected in practically every study on the above topics. It might be useful nonetheless to classify (below) how the ark is labelled (only one citation for each). For succinct details and documentary assignment, see H.-J. Zobel, *'ārôn*, TDOT, I, 363-74; C. L. Seow, *Ark of the Covenant*, ABD, I, 386-93. There is a wonderful chart for the usage of the *'ārôn* in the otherwise eccentric study of W.R. Arnold, *Ephod and Ark. A Study in the Records and Religion of the Ancient Hebrews*, HTS 3, 1917, 59-61.

a. "Ark" simply: I Kgs 8,21 (= II Chr. 6,11).

b. With an adjective: "The holy ark" (II Chr. 35,3); "(your) mighty ark (so for *'ārôn* *'uzzekā*)" (Ps. 132,8).

c. Attached to the (Hebrew) God: "The ark of Yhwh" (Josh. 4,11); "The ark of the Lord Yhwh" (I Kgs 2,26); "The ark of God" (I Sam. 3,3); "The ark of God himself" (I Sam. 4,13);

- plus specific to people: "The ark of the god of Israel" (I Sam. 5,8, attributed to the Philistines);
- plus epithet of God: "The ark of Yhwh, lord of all the earth" (Josh. 3,13);
- plus manifestation of God: "The ark of God, 'Lord of Hosts, Seated on cherubs'" (I Chr. 13,6; see II Sam. 6,2).

d. Covenant linkage: "The ark of the pact" (Ex. 25,22); "The ark of the covenant" (Josh. 3,6);

- plus specific to the Hebrew God: "The ark of the covenant of Yhwh" (Num. 10,33); "The ark of the covenant of God" (Judg. 20,27);
- plus specific to an epithet for God: "The ark of the covenant of the lord of all the earth" (Josh. 3,11);
- plus specific to a manifestation of God: "The ark of the covenant of Yhwh of Hosts, Seated on cherubs" (I Sam. 4,4).

prise, from where it proceeded, or the precise itinerary it took. Here I tackle only the syntactic problems associated with this verse and propose a rendering that I hope John finds plausible.

The difficulties associated with this verse have long been recognized, and they can be sharpened by collating the relevant clauses in II Sam. 6,2 and its "parallel" in I Chr. 13,6². The two texts read³:

II Sam. 6,2

wayyāqom wayyelæk dāwidl
w^ekol-hā'ām 'ašær 'ittôl
mibba'alê y^ehūdāhll l^eha'alôt
miššāml 'et-'arôn hā'elōhîml
'ašær-niqrā' šeml šem Yhwh
šebā'ôt yošeb hakk^erûbîml
'ālāyw

I Chr. 13,6

wayya'al dāwid w^ekol-yiśrā'êl
ba'alātāhl 'el-qiryat y^e'ārîml
'ašær lîhūdāhll l^eha'alôt
miššāml 'et-'arôn hā'elōhîml
Yhwh yōšeb hakk^erûbîml
'ašær-niqrā' šem

These two passages differ about who accompanied David (all the army vs. all of Israel⁴), the itinerary of the *cortège* (belaboredly specific in Chr. rather than potentially unstated in Sam.⁵), and the specific manifestation of

2 Commentators generally review the differences between the two accounts, and often cite the testimony of the versions (among them diverse manuscripts of the LXX and 4QSam^a), more or less certain that they could patch from them the "original" version of the narrative (if not also the event). Among the more recent literature, see S.L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler's Use of the Deuteronomistic History*, HSM 33, 1985, 47-48; S. Pisano, *Additions or Omissions in the Books of Samuel: The Significant Pluses and Minuses in the Massoretic, LXX and Qumran Texts*, OBO 57, 1984, 101-104; A.F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative, 1 Sam 4-6, 2 Sam 6: A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study*, SBLDS 16, 1975, 128. E.C. Ulrich (*The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus*, HSM 19, 1978, 194-207) is particularly creative (and certain) in judging textual quality among the differing versions.

3 Piping signs [] here connote disjunctive accents.

4 In II Sam. 6,1 there is reference to 30,000 picked men, so *hā'ām* of the verse following obviously refers to a military group. I Chr. 13,2-5, not available in I Sam. 6, records a speech David made in summoning Israel to the task.

5 In II Sam. 6, 2, *mibba'alê y^ehūdāh* may refer to the group accompanying David ("... among leaders of Judah") rather than to a location (see LXX). In the verse following we are told that the ark was brought from the "house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah." In Chr., however, the ark is brought from Kiriath-jearim. Chr. is painfully specific, *ba'alātāhl 'el-qiryat y^e'ārîml 'ašær lîhūdāh* ("... toward Baalah, the Kiriath-Jearim of Judah ..."). Worth noting is Pisano's reference (*Additions or Omissions*, 102) to Wellhausen's interesting suggestion (*Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*, 1871, 166) that *bm'ly* be read (rather than MT's *mb'ly*) *yhwdh*. Many commentators have noted that Kiriath-jearim is called *ba'alāh* in Josh. 15,9-11 and Kiriath-Baal in Josh. 15,60 and 18,14.

God (Yahweh Sebaoth in Sam., Yhwh in Chr.⁶). But most conspicuous is the divergence in the treatment of the clause *'ašær-niqrā' šem*. In Sam., it precedes the allusion to Yhwh, while in Chr. it succeeds it. The shift makes the Chr. texts shorter, with one rather than the two references to *šem* in the Sam. passage, and with no mention of the seemingly oddly positioned *'ālāyw* in Sam. But this trimming does not make the Chr. text any clearer, for as it reads now, the clause *'ašær-niqrā' šem* seems just to dangle there. The idiom at stake here is *qārā'* (N-stem) *šem*, which essentially means "to bear a name," when a specific name is attached to the idiom. *b^e*- plus place-name might be added to specify the place where that name is to become known. However, there is a subtle shift in meaning when no specific name follows, making *šem* the direct object of the verb and turning the whole clause into a statement about acquiring a reputation or the like. This is clearest in Ruth 4,14 where we are told that after Ruth bears a child, women extol God for not withholding a redeemer from Naomi, so that "his reputation was set in Israel (*w^eyiqqārē' šemô b^eyiśrā'ēl*)". Here it is ambiguous who is the owner of this reputation, for we can make good sense whether it applies to God or to the long-awaited heir⁷. The phrase in Chr. also ends without a name, leaving us with a verse that is best rendered:

David and all Israel went up towards Baalah – to the Kiriath-jearim of Judah – to bring up from there the ark of God, "The Lord, Seated over Cherubs", who has a name.

All other renderings that differ substantially from this one (and there are many) are simply harmonizing with the text of Sam. or following the versions, which themselves may have struggled for a solution⁸. It is thus very

6 *šb't* was likely absent in the 4QSam^a parallel passage.

7 See J.M. Sasson, *Ruth. A New Translation With a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, 1979, 164-66.

8 For example, LXX has *hou epeklēthē onoma autou*. Here is a sampling of recent, interpretively accented, renderings:

KJV, "... whose name is called *on it*" (obviously depending on LXX).

Tanakh (JPS), "... to which the name was attached".

J.M. Myers (*I Chronicles*, AB, 1965, 100), "... whose legend reads: 'Yahweh who is enthroned above the Cherubs'" (an interesting reading that unfortunately is not annotated).

NAB, "... which was known by the name 'LORD enthroned upon the cherubim'".

NJB, "... which bears the title 'Yahweh enthroned on the winged creatures.'"

RSV, "... which is called by the name of the LORD who sits enthroned above the cherubim."

likely that in Chr. the clause '*ašær-niqrā*' *šem* is referring not to the ark's reputation, but to God's⁹.

What is at stake in the Sam. passage is more slippery, not least because of the way '*ālāyw* sits forlorn at the end of the verse, distant from '*ašær*, but also because of the seeming reduplication of *šem*. A survey of renderings (by no means exhaustive) and opinions reveals that they are classed into two categories, each displaying several proposals:

A.1. In these understandings the two mentions of *šem* are retained. The interpretive difference is in how they connect the information about the ark with the specific name of God or in how they treat '*ālāyw*. For example, *KJV* has the ark itself named after an epithet attached to God. '*ālāyw* itself is simply not taken into consideration:

And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim.

Keil and Delitzsch offer a similar rendering; but in translating the final clauses, "... upon which the name is called, the name of Jehovah of hosts, who is enthroned above the cherubim", they give the impression that '*ālāyw* has informed the way God levitates over the cherubs¹⁰.

A.2. The *Tanakh* (JPS) also retains both mentions of *šem*, but to arrive at a meaning "attach", '*ālāyw* was apparently made part of the clause preceding the information on the name of God:

Then David and all the troops that were with him set out from Baalim of Judah to bring from there the Ark of God to which the Name was attached, the name Lord of Hosts Enthroned on the Cherubim.

Such a translation is indefensible, especially since its central clause ('*ašær-niqrā*' *šem* ... '*ālāyw*) includes an idiom, *niqrā*' *šem* '*al-*, that invariably re-

9 S. Japhet (I & II Chronicles: A Commentary, OTL, 1993, 271 and 278) proposes a vocalic emendation for the verse's final clause ('*ašær-niqrā*' *šem*) and renders, "which happened to be there". In doing so, she adopts a proposal of A. Ehrlich for II Sam. 6.2. Ironically, this emendation is more plausible for Chr. than for Sam. See below, n. 15.

10 C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, 1963, 329-30. Somewhat similar are ASV ("... the ark of God, which is called by the Name, even the name of Jehovah of hosts that sitteth [above] the cherubim") and NAS ("... the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim").

flects ownership, dominion, or the like¹¹. Thus, in Deut. 28,10, it is said that "When all the peoples of the earth shall realize that the LORD's name is over you (i.e., you belong to him), they shall be afraid of you"¹². Yet, there is nothing in the Sam. passage to suggest that control or ownership of anything (including the ark) is at issue there.

B.1. A number of renderings depend on the excision of one of the two references to "name" (*šem*) in II Sam. 6,2 and on disregarding this verse's '*ālāyw*. Such is obviously the solution of the *RSV*:

And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baalejudah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who sits enthroned on the cherubim.

B.2. Another approach would similarly erase the second *šem*, but would take cognizance of the role '*ālāyw* plays in the final clauses. S.R. Driver was by no means the first to use the scalpel on this passage in this way. But in his first edition of his Samuel studies, he writes, "The repetition of *šm* is singular, and probably due to transcriptional error; it does not add to the emphasis or solemnity of the passage. LXX do not express *šm* more than once"¹³. In his second edition, however, he adds, "The distance of '*lyw* from '*šr* suggests that the clause is glossed; read probably '*šr nqr' šm Y' Š' 'lyw*"¹⁴.

Many commentators have essentially followed suit¹⁵. Thus, P.K. McCarter gives a rendering that is based on a heavily emended text, "... and

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- 11 *nīqrā' šem* ("to bear a name, to acquire a reputation") and *nīqrā' šem 'al-* ("to possess, control") are two different idioms; for the latter, see the bibliographically rich entries of C.J. Labuschagne, *qr'* to call, TLOT, 1161-62 and A.S. van der Woude, *šem* name, TLOT, 1363. Both of these idioms must be separated from *nīqrā' 'al-šem*, "to adopt someone's name," as in Ezr. 2,61 (= Neh. 7,63).
- 12 *In connection with God's dominion* – Temple: I Kgs 8,43; II Chr. 6,33, Jer. 7,8; 32,34; 34,15; City (Jerusalem): Dan. 9,18-19; Prophet: Jer. 15,16; Israel: Isa. 63,19, Jer. 14,9; II Chr. 7,14; Dan. 9,19; Other nations: Am. 9,12.
In connection with a person's control – City: II Sam. 12,28 (Joab re: the city of Rabbah); Women: Isa. 4,1 (men over women-prophetic).
- 13 S.R. Driver, Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel, 1890, 204.
- 14 S.J. Driver, Notes on the Hebrew Text, 1913, 266. The LXX of II Sam. 6,2 reads, "And David arose, and went, he and all the people that were with him, and some of the rulers of Juda, on the expedition to a distant place, to bring thence the ark of God, on which the name of the of Hosts who dwells between the cherubs upon it is called".
- 15 A.B. Ehrlich (Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches, 1914, s.v.) depends on a number of medieval manuscripts to revocalize the first *šem* to *šām*, citing Deut. 22,6 where *nīqrā' šām* seems to mean, "to happen to be". I.L. Seeligmann (Indications of Editorial Alteration and Adaptation in the

[David] and the entire army that was with him went to Baalah to bring up from there the holy ark over which the name of Yahweh Seated-upon-the-Cherubim is called"¹⁶. But in deleting one *šem* while retaining 'ālāyw, we get back to the problem we met with the *Tanakh* rendering: gratuitous (and hardly translatable in the context) reference to God's possession of the ark¹⁷.

In view of these difficulties in grasping the sense of II Sam. 6,2 whether through comparisons with Chr. or through emendations based on the testimony of the versions, we might go back to the Masoretic text. By retaining both occurrences of *šem*, however, we are forced to recognize that II Sam. 6,2 actually ends on *two* separate clauses, one that includes 'ašær-niqrā' *šem* hence, as in I Chr., referring to an acquired reputation, but here likely applicable to the ark rather than to God as in I Chr. The final clause would now be verbless, with the specific manifestation of Yhwh sandwiched between *šem* and 'ālāyw. We thus arrive at the following rendering:

David and all the troops with him set out from the Judean Baalah to bring up from there the ark of the God, which has name (i.e., reputation), the name "The Lord of Hosts, Seated over the Cherubs" (being) on it.

Sensitivity to Hebrew idiomatics has suggested this translation of II Sam. 6,2. Its implication is that in its travel from one locus to another the ark bore an inscription that identified the invisible deity riding upon it. But to explain what the passage *connotes*, I call on the testimony of a letter in the Mari

Massoretic Text and the Septuagint, VT 11, 1961, 204-205) sustains this interpretation by citing other examples, particularly II Sam. 20,1, "There was there a scoundrel whose name was Sheba son of Bichri ... (*wē šām niqrā' 'iš b'liya'al...*)." However, I do not see how this understanding is an improvement. In fact, not only is it redundant ("David went ... to bring from there [*miššām*] the ark ... which happened to be there..."), but what follows ("the name of Yhwh ...") would have no connection with what precedes. P.K. McCarter, Jr. (II Samuel, 1984, 163) gives some support to this suspect proposal, taking it from R. Carlson (David, the Chosen King: A Traditio-Historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel, 1964, 63). The emendation is plausible for I Chr. 13,6, because the clause is moved to the end of the passage; see above, n. 9. Syntactic shifts in seemingly parallel passages lead to potentially incompatible emendations. For some distinctly bizarre emendations to this passage, see W.R. Arnold, Ephod, 59-61.

16 McCarter, II Samuel, 161.

17 Commentators who accept this exegesis of the idiom are ingenious in explaining the context. McCarter (II Samuel, 168) thinks that the passage refers to the site where Yahweh can be invoked but, recognizing that the idiom "implies his having or taking possession of it," McCarter feels it necessary to deny it belonged to any other god. P.R. Ackroyd (The Second Book of Samuel, CBC, 1977, 63-64) thinks that it liberates God from constant attachment to the temple.

archives. This particular text (M. 7629 = *FM* 2,17) was sent to King Zimri-Lim (ca. 1770 BCE) and it was penned by his palace *šaddabakkum* (chief accountant of operations), Yasim-sumu¹⁸. He writes:

I am herewith sending the inscriptions for the chariot of Nergal and for the palanquin of Itur-Mer. The inscription for the chariot of Nergal: should it be inscribed on the chariot's face ("breast") or the rear ("tail")¹⁹? My lord might consider the matter; but this inscription should be inscribed on the rear where the weapon is now to be found, so that a *proclaimer* or reciter could read it²⁰. As to the inscription for the palanquin that God [Itur-Mer] will be riding, it could be inscribed on the face ("breast") and/or the back.

My lord should write me of his decision so that these inscriptions could be prepared before my lord makes his way here.

We unfortunately do not know what was written on the attachable inscriptions. Yasim-sumu, who was a scribe, hence literate, could easily have shared with us the wording; but as it was obviously not an issue the king cared about, the matter was not raised. The statement could well have extolled the eternal ties that linked kings and gods, for example something along the following lines taken from the Zimri-Lim epic, "Zimri-Lim, being Dagan's counterpart, is heroic / Itur-Mer, the champion, is his protection"²¹. But it is more likely that the inscribed statements were a brief paean to the gods or simply a particular epithet of those gods, for example, "Itur-Mer, King of Mari"²².

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- 18 The text was published by S. Maul, *Die Korrespondenz des Iasim-Sūmū*. Ein Nachtrag zu ARMT XIII 25-57, in: *Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot*, FM 2, *Mémoires de N.A.B.U.* 3, 1994, 48-50. The latest overview on Yasim-sumu and on his activities is given in Maul, *Zwischen Sparmaßnahme und Revolte... Die Aktivitäten des Iasim-Sūmū*, des *šandabakkum* von Mari, MARI 8, 1997, 755-74.
- 19 The noun *narūm* refers to an inscription, whether inscribed (verb *šaṭārum*) on a stela or any other medium. See J.G. Westenholz, *Writing for Posterity: Naram-Sin and Enmerkar*, in: *Kinattūtu ša dārāti*, Raphael Kutscher Memorial, Tel Aviv University, Occasional Publications 1, 1993.
- 20 The word for "proclaimer" is partially broken (Maul restores *šāsūm*). The second type of reader, the *muštassūm*, is mentioned in a colophon to a chronicle, "Handwriting ("hand") of Habdu-malik; Limi-Dagan is the reciter", MARI 4, 1985, 232.
- 21 *Zimri-Lim zikruš Dagan eṣilma / tuklassu Itūr-Mer uršanu* (lines II:137-138, cited from J.-M. Durand, *Archives Épistolaires de Mari*, 1/1, ARM 26/1, 1988, 393). This epic, the earliest of its type so far recovered, is not yet fully published.
- 22 As cited in G. Dossin and A. Finet, *Correspondance féminine*, ARMT 10, 1978, 63, 16.

Whatever the phrasings Yasim-sumu had in mind, what we learn from his letter to the king is not just that inscriptions were attached to the divine vehicles (from which presumably they could be detached), but that as the gods made their way from one place to another someone was there to read their message, to identify the gods to the masses that watched the *cortège*. Ordinarily, gods were recognizable by their contrastive attire, weapons, animals, or symbolic gestures. Because such a recitation may seem superfluous, it is possible that the reciters who followed these vehicles were there to instruct the spectators on the specific manifestation of the god.

In the case of the ark retrieved from the Judean Baalah, however, we read nothing in II Sam. about reciters. Normally, the biblical ark traveled on the shoulders of its devotees and when it was taken out in martial times, chants such as those recorded in Num. 10,35-36 (see Ps. 68,2) and Ps. 132,8 fulfilled the effects of the Mari reciters, identifying the god who associated himself with it as well as egging him on against the common enemy²³. In II Sam. 6, however, the ark rode a cart, a practice that was initiated by the Philistines (I Sam. 6). When disaster overtook Uzzah for daring to touch the ark, David tested its intent and, reassured that it was propitious, had it brought into Jerusalem, once more on human shoulders. Whether it retained its label from then on, identifying its host as the warlike (?) manifestation of Israel's god, cannot be known. But in the absence of a divine statue for Yhwh, a label identifying the invisible god hovering over the golden cherubs might not have been deemed superfluous.

23 Especially for the Psalms passages, see D. Hillers, *Ritual Procession of the Ark and Ps 132*, CBQ 30, 1968, 48-55.