CLARIFYING
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BIBLICAL PASSAGES

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

"STABBED ALONG
THE INLETS OF EGYPT"
PSALMS OF SOLOMON 2:26–27

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XXXIV

"STABBED ALONG THE INLETS OF EGYPT"

PSALMS OF SOLOMON 2:26–27

INTRODUCTION

> The sinner contemptuously used his battering-ram
> to smash down the strong walls, and you did not interfere.
> Foreign nations went up to your altar;
> they brazenly trampled around with their sandals on.
> For their part, the people of Jerusalem
> desecrated the sanctuary of the LORD.
> They profaned the gifts of God with their lawless acts.
> (PsSol 2:1–2).[1]

The contemptuous figure in the first line of these verses has been identified by many as Pompey the Great. With the assistance of Hyrcanus II, Pompey entered Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E., at which time the faction of Aristobulus II retreated to the security of the Temple Mount to resist him. Pompey besieged the Temple Mount for three months, bringing in siege engines from Tyre to facilitate a Roman victory. Josephus provided a detailed account of the Jewish civil war which prompted Pompey to intervene, and in summary noted ". . . of the Jews twelve thousand were slain, but of the Romans very few were slain . . . ."[2] Pompey, by right of conquest, entered the Jerusalem Temple and its Holy of Holies, where, according to Josephus, Pompey saw everything but took nothing. Following this victory, Pompey made Hyrcanus II the high-priest in Jerusalem and ordered the traditional Jewish sacrifices to be resumed.

This destruction of the Temple Mount by Pompey, his desecration of the Temple and entering the Holy of Holies, along with the thousands of Jewish casualties, well qualified Pompey for much subsequent Jewish vilification. Just fifteen years after the murder of twelve thousand Jews in Jerusalem, the author of the PsSol 2:26–27 was able to celebrate Pompey's assassination on September 12, 48 B.C.E., with these words:

> And I did not wait long until God showed me his arrogance,
> pierced through on the mountains of Egypt,
> scorned as worthless as anything on earth and sea.
> His body was violently carried on the waves,
> and there was no one to bury him,
> because God contemptuously despised him.

As is obvious even to the casual reader, the assertion that Pompey was killed on the *mountains* of Egypt and his corpse was carried away on the *waves* appears to be in and of itself inconsistent and in disagreement with other traditions about his assassination.

POMPEY'S DEATH IN CLASSICAL TRADITION

The murder of Pompey by Ptolemy III was recounted in great detail in classical sources. Dio Cassius, in his *Roman History*, provided the following account:

> [Pompey] set out for Egypt . . . to Pelusium where Ptolemy was encamped while making war against his sister Cleopatra. Bringing the ships to anchor, he sent some men to remind the prince of the favor shown his father and to ask that he be permitted to land under certain definite

guaranties; for he did not venture to disembark before obtaining some guaranty of safety. Ptolemy gave him no answer for he was still a mere boy, but some of the Egyptians and Lucius Septimus, a Roman who had once served with Pompey . . . and Achillas, the commander-in-chief, and others who were with them . . . embarked on small boats and sailed out to him. After many friendly greetings they begged him to come over to their boats, declaring that by reason of its size and shallow waters a ship could not come close to the land and that Ptolemy was very eager to see him promptly . . . Now when they drew near . . . they killed him before sailing into the harbour . . . . Although he had subdued the entire Roman sea, he perished on it; and although he had once been, as the saying is, "master of a thousand ships," he was destroyed in a tiny boat near Egypt (πρός τε τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ) . . . near Mount Casius (πρός τε τῷ Κασίῳ ὄρει). . . . following a certain oracle, he [Pompey] had been suspicious of all the citizens named Cassius (Κασσίου), but instead of being the object of a plot by any man named Cassius he died and was buried beside the mountain (ὄρει) that had this name. . . . . and [when Caesar at Alexandria] saw the head and finger-ring of the murdered man, sent him by Ptolemy, . . . he wept and lamented bitterly; . . . and he commanded that the head should be adorned, properly prepared, and buried.[3]

Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives* provided even greater detail in some respects, reporting as follows:

By this time, the Egyptian boat drew near, and Septimius standing up first, saluted Pompey in the Latin tongue, by the title of imperator. Then Achillas, saluting him in the Greek language, desired him to come aboard his vessel, telling him, that the sea was very shallow towards the

shore, and that a galley of that burden could not avoid striking upon the sands. At the same time they saw several of the king's galleys getting their men on board, and all the shore covered with soldiers; so that even if they changed their minds, it seemed impossible for them to escape, and besides, their distrust would have given the assassins a pretense for their cruelty. . . . When they drew near to the shore, Cornelia, together with the rest of his friends in the galley, was very impatient to see the event, and began to take courage at last, when she saw several of the royal escort coming to meet him, apparently to give him a more honorable reception; but in the meantime, as Pompey took Philip by the hand to rise up more easily, Septimius first stabbed him from behind with his sword; and after him likewise Salvius and Achillas drew out their swords. He, therefore, taking up his gown with both hands, drew it over his face, and neither saying nor doing anything unworthy of himself, only groaning a little, endured the wounds they gave him, and so ended his life, in the fifty-ninth year of his age, the very next day after the day of his birth. . . . they cut off Pompey's head, and threw the rest of his body overboard, leaving it naked upon the shore, to be viewed by any that had the curiosity to see so sad a spectacle. Philip stayed by and watched till they had glutted their eyes in viewing it; and then washing it with sea-water, having nothing else, he wrapped it up in a shirt of his own for a winding-sheet. Then seeking up and down about the sands, at last he found some rotten planks of a little fisher-boat, not much, but yet enough to make up a funeral pile for a naked body, and that not quite entire.[4]

Lucan, in a more poetic way, confirms Pompey's murder along the waterways of Egypt in his *Pharsalia* ("The Civil War"), of which the following lines are of particular interest:

. . . Where the treacherous shore
Runs out in sand below the Casian mount
And where the shallow waters of the sea
Attest the Syrtes [= a sandbank in the sea] near, in little boat
Achillas and his partners in the crime
With swords embark. (622–627)
. . . Furling now his sails,
Magnus [= Pompey] with oars approached th' accursed land,
When in their little boat the murderous crew
Drew nigh, and feigning from th' Egyptian court
A ready welcome, blamed the double tides
Broken by shallows, and their scanty beach
Unfit for fleets; and bade him to their craft
Leaving his loftier ship. (654-660)
. . . As Magnus passed,
A Roman soldier from the Pharian boat,
Septimius, salutes him. Gods of heaven!
There stood he, minion to a barbarous king,
Nor bearing still the javelin of Rome;
But vile in all his arms; giant in form
Fierce, brutal, thirsting as a beast may thirst
For carnage. (691–697)
. . . A Roman swordsman, once within thy ranks,
Slave to the orders of a puny prince,
Severed Pompeius' neck . . . (704–706)
. . . Thus did Pompeius die, Guarding his thoughts. (735)
. . . . Now beaten by the sands,
Torn upon rocks, the sport of ocean's waves
Poured through its wounds, his headless carcase lies,
Save by the lacerated trunk unknown. (825–829)
. . . Yet ere the victor touched the Pharian sands
Some scanty rites to Magnus Fortune gave,
Lest he should want all burial. Pale with fear
Came Cordus, hasting from his hiding place; (829–832)
. . . He knew the body. In a fast embrace

He holds it, wrestling with the greedy sea,
And deftly watching for a refluent wave
Gains help to bring his burden to the land.
Then clinging to the loved remains, the wounds
Washed with his tears, . . . (841–846)
Here upon a meagre stone
We draw the characters to mark thy tomb.
These letters reading may some kindly friend
Bring back thine head, dissevered, and may grant
Full funeral honours to thine earthly frame. (899–903)
. . . Now half consumed, and sinews; and the wave
Pours in upon them, and in shallow trench
Commits them to the earth; and lest some breeze
Might bear away the ashes, or by chance
Some sailor's anchor might disturb the tomb,
A stone he places, and with stick half burned
Traces the sacred name: HERE MAGNUS LIES.
(917–923)[5]

Dio Cassius, Plutarch, and Lucanus concur that Pompey's assassination occurred on a small boat in the shallow waters off Pelusium, on the eastern edge of the Egyptian delta. They also agree that the burial of the ashes from Pompey's decapitated body was along the sea coast near Pelusium[6] in the direction of Mons Casius[7] (see the Map of the Delta at the end of this chapter), a promontory which lies along the northern land barrier separating the Sirbonian Lagoon from the Mediterranean Sea, where, as stated above, "by chance some sailor's anchor might disturb the tomb."[8] This agreement that Pompey was assassinated while changing boats and that his partial burial was at sea level is in obvious disagreement with the PsSol 2:26 as literally translated and traditionally interpreted.

THE GREEK TEXT OF PSSOL 2:26

The Greek text of PsSol 2:26 reads in part ἐκκεκεν-
τημένον ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέων Αἰγύπτου, "he [Pompey] was
pierced through upon the mountains of Egypt." The corre-
sponding phrase in the Syriac text reads ܟܕ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܠܠ
ܕܡܨܪܝܢ ܠܛܘܪܐ, "when he [Pompey] was slain upon the
mountains in Egypt" (2:30). The Greek ὀρέων and the Syriac
ܠܛܘܪܐ mean "mountains," and either word could have trans-
lated the other or have been a translation of a Hebrew *Vorlage*
having הָרֵי. But ὀρέων and ܠܛܘܪܐ are problematic since
there are no mountains in the Egyptian Delta at Pelusium or
even at Mons Cassius.[9]

   Trafton (1985: 45) and Ward (1966:56) have summarized
earlier scholarly solutions for this problem, noting that Hil-
genfeld (1871: 388) emended ὀρέων "mountain" to ὁρίων
"borders." Ryle and James (1891: 24–25) suggested possibly
a Hebrew *Vorlage* with יאֹרֵי "rivers," but retained ὀρέων in
light of Dio Cassius' statement that Pompey was killed πρὸς
τε τῷ Κασσίῳ ὄρει, "near Mount Cassius." Ward (*op. cit.*)
proposed a Hebrew *Vorlage* with חֹרֵי "nobles, freemen"
which became corrupted to הָרֵי "mountains," resulting subse-
quently in the Greek ὀρέων and the Syriac ܠܛܘܪܐ.

   The confusion of ה and ח is so well attested in the Hebrew
Bible (see Delitzsch 1920: 109, §106[a-b]) that a closer look at
words composed of חר is warranted. Such words include

<div align="center">

חרא   "dung"
חור   "white/white stuff"
חור   "hollow"
חרר   "hole"

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חרה   "to burn"

חרר   "to burn

חר   "noble, freeman" (stem חרר)

חרא   "freedman" (Aramaic)

Five of these words are of no help in the context of Ps Sol 2:26. Given these definitions, Ward's opting for חר "noble, freeman" was reasonable, especially if there is some sarcasm in PsSol 2:26, which is suggested by Plutarch's description of Ptolemy XIII's council as being somewhat less than aristocratic. Plutarch stated

> Now, Ptolemy was quite young; but Potheinus, who managed all his affairs, assembled a council of the most influential men (and those were most influential whom he wished to be so), and bade each give his opinion. It was certainly a dreadful thing that the fate of Pompey the Great was to be decided by Potheinus the eunuch, and Theodotus of Chios, who was a hired teacher of rhetoric, and Achillas the Egyptian; for these were the chief counselors of the king among the chamberlains and tutors also gathered there . . . .[10]

At first glance, the third word in the above list, חור "hollow," does not fit the context of PsSol 2:26. It is the cognate of Arabic خور (ḥawr) "the depressed ground between hills" (BDB, 301). But Pompey was not assassinated in "the hollows of Egypt" or "the valleys of Egypt." However, when the Arabic cognate خور (ḥawr) is examined more carefully a contextually perfect option becomes transparent. Castell's (1669: 1175) citation for Hebrew חור referenced the Arabic cognate خار (ḥâra) which he defined not only as (1) "depressa, planior *que* terra inter duos montes," (as noted later in BDB),

but also (2) "Ostium fluminis" [entrance to a river] and "Sinus maris" [the land around a gulf, shore of a bay]. About two hundred years later, Lane (1865: 821a; 1877: 2308) defined خور (ḥawr) as (1) "low, or depressed, ground or land between two elevated parts; like غور (ġawr) low, or depressed, land, country, or ground," and (2) "an inlet (lit. a neck) from a sea or a large river, entering into the land, a place, or channel, where water pours into a sea or large river, or a wide place or channel, where waters pour, running into a sea or large river; a canal, or cut, from a sea or large river." Hava (1915: 188) defined خور (ḥawr) as the "gulf, mouth of a river" and, similarly, Wehr (1979: 306) translated it as "inlet" and "bay."[11]

Because the Hebrew ה and ח would appear in Greek transliterations of Hebrew words simply as a smooth or rough breathing mark (see Hatch and Redpath, 1954: *Supplement*, *passim*) the Greek ὀρέων—minus the genitive plural suffix ων—may actually be the *transliteration* of חֹרֵי "inlets" in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of PsSol 2:26—rather than the *translation* of הָרֵי "mountains." Even the ὄρει of Dio Cassius' Κασσίῳ ὄρει could be a *transliteration* of a Semitic place name composed of the קַשִׁׁי [12] and חֹרֵי.[13]

A similar *transliteration* of חֹר occurs in Num 33:32–33 which lists the names of the Israelite encampments. The MT and Septuagint text read in part

וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּחֹר הַגִּדְגָּד ... וַיִּסְעוּ מֵחֹר הַגִּדְגָּד [14]

and they encamped at Horhaggidgad
. . . and they set out from Horhaggidgad (RSV)
and they encamped at the *inlet* of the (Wadi) Gidgad
. . . and they set out from the *inlet* of the (Wadi) Gidgad

καὶ παρενέβαλον εἰς τὸ ὄρος Γαδγαδ
. . . καὶ ἀπῆραν ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους Γαδγαδ

and they encamped in the mountain Gadgad
. . . and they departed from the mountain Gadgad.[15]

The repeated הֹר was *transliterated* as "ὄρ . . . ὄρ" which, when given case endings became the "ὄρος . . . ὄρους of Gadgad." The addition of case endings on the Greek transliterations was sufficient here to make a mountain—not out of the proverbial molehill—but out of a waterway.

There is one other significant difference between the Roman recollections about Pompey's burial (cited above) and the PsSol 2: 27b, which simply states "and there was no one to bury him." On the other hand, the recollection of Dio Cassius and PsSol 2: 27a are in remarkable agreement. The Jewish psalmist recalled that "his body was violently carried over the waves," and the Roman poet, in more detail, penned the following:

Now beaten by the sands,
Torn upon rocks, the sport of ocean's waves
Poured through its wounds, his headless carcase lies,
. . . Now half consumed, and sinews; and the wave
Pours in upon them, and in shallow trench
Commits them to the earth. . . .
(in lines 825–829 and 917–919)

The Jewish poet was probably unaware of Caesar's command that Pompey's "head should be adorned, properly prepared, and buried." and he was also unaware that Cordus (according to Dio Cassius) or Philip (according to Plutarch) affectionately cremated and buried Pompey's ashes. Similarly, the tradition that Pompey was later interred at Alba was unknown or ignored. The Jewish poet resonated with what

was Ptolemy's assessment of Pompey—he was as dispensable as trash thrown overboard.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Whereas Wright (1998: 97) translated the Greek PsSol 2: 27c, "because God contemptuously despised him" (adding "God"), and Trafton (1985:30) translated the Syriac (2:32a), "because they despised {him} in disgrace" (adding "him" and opting for "they" as the subject, contra the Greek singular verb), the Hebrew *Vorlage* probably had a singular passive verb. It was misread as an active, requiring a new subject ("God" or "they") and an object for the Syriac ("him"). The poetic lines can be translated, "and no one buried him because he was despised and treated-with-contempt" by his Egyptian assassins. For the Jewish poet, the ignominious death and disposal of Pompey was all he needed to prove his point that Pompey received from God what he well deserved.

The Greek ἐκκεκεντημένον ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέων Αἰγύπτου, in PsSol 2:26 translated a *Vorlage* having just נחר על חרי מצרים "he [Pompey] was stabbed along the inlets of Egypt." The Greek ὀρέων could reflect (1) either a *transliteration* of the חרי in the Hebrew *Vorlage*, resulting in a homograph of the Greek word for "mountain," or (2) the חרי "inlets" in the Hebrew *Vorlage* was misread as הרי "mountains." The Syriac כד מטחסר על לגזא דמצרין "when he [Pompey] was slain upon the mountains in Egypt," simply misread the original חרי in its *Vorlage* as הרי, as well as having misread נכה "slain" instead of the original נחר "stabbed."[16]

NOTES

1. Wright, 1998: 95. Compare Ward's proposal (1996: 23) that the Hebrew *Vorlage* for "the sinner" was העול "the attacker" or

הטחא "the General," homographs of עול and חטא, with both meaning "sinner." The poet's calling Pompey the "General" would parallel Septimius' salutation of Pompey as "Imperator" just prior to his assassination (see the quotation from Plutarch, below).

2. *Wars of the Jews*, I: 7. 5 (Naber, V: 30–31; Whiston, I: 30) and *Antiquities of the Jews* XIV: 4. 4 (Naber, III: 235; Whiston, III: 286).

3. See Cary, 1917, section 42: 3–5.

4. See Perrin, 1917: 316–317. Ironically, Ptolemy XIII was himself soon to die in the Nile waters in the Alexandrian War. Achillas marched from Pelusium and surrounded Caesar's 3,200 legionnaires and 800 cavalry with 20,000 troops. Eventually and with difficulty Caesar prevailed and Ptolemy drowned in the Nile while trying to escape. (Dio Cassius' *Roman History*, sections 34–43.)

5. See Ridley, 1896. Pompey's ashes were later collected and sent to his wife, Cornelia, who buried them at Pompey's villa at Alba. According to Dio Cassius, Caesar "commanded that the head [of Pompey] should be adorned, properly prepared, and buried."

6. Pelusium (derived from πηλός "mud, mire") was known in Hebrew as סִין "clay" (BDB 695).

7. The "Mount" of "Mount Cassius" is much like the "Mount" of "Mount Vernon." It could qualify for being a גבעה "hill" or a "rise" but hardly a הר "mountain" and definitely not the plural הרי, i.e., a plural of intensity which would suggest a large mountain. The Egyptian Cassiotis—which Ptolemy situated at 63°30′ and 31°10′ with Pelusium some distance to its west at 63°15′ and 31°10′—was unrelated the Mount Cassius (Arabic *Jebel ´el-Aqra`*) which rises 5,660 feet at the mouth of the Orontes River, about twenty-five miles north of Ugarit. Goetze (1940: 32–33), on the basis of place names which appear in Akkadian and Ugaritic, made the following equation and comments with reference to this northern Mons Cassius:

āl Ḫal-bi ḪUR.SAG Ḫa-zi = ḫlb ṣpn
Mount Ḫassi = Mount Cassius = Mount Ṣapanu.

. . . the name *Casius* derives from our *Ḫa(-az)zí* which, of course, can be transliterated *Ḫa(-as)sí*. The question as to the meaning of the Hurrian *ḫazzi/ḫassi* cannot be answered as yet, but the equation under discussion seems to indicate that it should be connected in one way or another with the notion expressed by Semitic *ṣapānu.*

The desiderated Semitic meaning of *Ṣapanu* is not צָפַן "to hide" or צָפוֹן "north" but the Arabic cognate صفو /صفوان (*ṣafwun/ ṣafwân*) "clear, pure, choice, select" (Lane 1872: 1704; Wehr 1979: 606), used with reference to Adam and Mohammed, as God's elect ones, or anything purely or exclusively belonging to God. This word may occurs in Psa 48:3, with the יַרְכְּתֵי being a plural of intensity: הַר־צִיּוֹן יַרְכְּתֵי צָפוֹן, meaning "Mount Zion, the quintessence of purity" or "Mount Zion, (God's) exquisite choice. "

8. Sirbonis is now called *Sabkhet el Bardowil.* Herodotus III: 5 (Godly 1957: II: 8–9) noted that

. . . [the seaports] are Syrian again from Ienysus as far as the Serbonis marsh, beside which the Casian promontory stretches seaward; from this Serbonian marsh, where Typho, it is said, was hidden, the country is Egypt. Now between Ienysus and the Casian mountain and the Serbonian marsh there lies a wide territory for as much as three days journey, wondrous waterless.

9. See note 7, above.

10. Perrin 1917: 316–319 [47: 2–3]. In this context it should be noted that Philip, who made a funeral pyre for Pompey of scrap wood, identified himself as a "freedman" (ἀπελεύθερος), which in Hebrew would be a חָפְשִׁי or a חֹר.

11. The *aw* diphthong in the Arabic خور (*ḥawr*) would have contracted in Hebrew to *ô*, resulting in the spelling חוֹרֵי or חֹרֵי (*scriptio defectiva*) which could easily have been misread as הֹרֵי. This cognate is not cited in KBS (299).

12. It is of interest to note that القس (*al-qassu*) and قس (*qassu*) are not linked in Arabic with جبل (*jabal*) "mountain" (= הַר), but with خور (*ḥawr*) "gulf, inlet, bay, shore" (= חֹר) (see next note). In the Targum the Κασίωτις or Κάσιος was simply transliterated as גסיוטאי.

13. The חֹרֵי is the "gulf, bay, inlets," discussed above, and the קְשִׁי (=Κασσίῳ) would be the Hebrew equivalent of قسي (*qassiy*), which, according to Lane (1885: 2521), was "a kind of cloth or garment brought from Egypt" which was "so called from a district, or place, or town or village, upon the shore of the sea called القس (*al-qassu*) or قس (*qassu*), between El-'Areesh and El-Faramà in Egypt." The *translation* of a *transliteration* is well attested, as in Judges 5:21, where the MT הֲלְמוֹ was transliterated as ομαλιει in MSS Mnamyb₂σ' and the Lucianic MSS dgknptvw —with an inversion of the הלמו to המלו in the *Vorlage* of these manuscripts—and as αμα λαω in MSS k and k*. The Armenian text (= Latin *planabunt* "they will level") has a *translation* of the *transliteration*, as though ομαλιει were from ὁμαλίζω "to make level."

14. This word is the cognate of Arabic جدجد (*jadjad*) "hard level ground" and جدد (*jadd*) "hard level ground . . . containing no soft place in which the feet sink, nor any mountain nor any [hill such as is called صحرآء (*ṣaḥrâʾ*) (= "Sahara")], as well as جد (*judd*) "water little in quantity : water at the extremity of a desert" and جدة (*juddat*) "a bank or side of a river/wadi" (Lane 1865: 385– 387). These cognates, coupled with a reference to אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מָיִם in

the parallel passage in Deu 10:7, mitigate against emending חֹר to הֹר to accommodate the ὄρος . . . ὄρους in the Septuagint.

15. The Wadi Giddade, near the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Wadi Ghadhaghedh have been identified with this site, but Binns (1927: 211, note 32) correctly concluded that Ghadhaghedh is improbable on etymological grounds.

16. See Lane, 1893: 2774 and BDB, 637–638, noting carefully the Arabic cognates نخر (*naḥara*) "to snort" and نحر (*naḥara*) "to stab." Ward concluded that "it is more likely that נכרה was original and that the ר was missed by the Syriac rather than assuming that the Greek added it." But נחר "to stab" is much more widely attest than is כרה "to pierce," which generally means "to bore, to dig." Jastrow (1903: 666, 896) included "pierced" in his notes on כרה, but it was a reference to the stem ברא "perforate" in Ezek 23:47, וּבָרֵא אוֹתְהֶן בְּחַרְבוֹתָם, which appears in the Septuagint as καὶ κατακέντει αὐτὰς ἐν τοῖς ξίφεσιν αὐτῶν, "and he stabbed them with their swords." Jastrow defined נחר as "to perforate, especially to kill by stabbing" and suggested that this verb is a secondary root of חור and חרר.

MAP OF THE EGYPTIAN DELTA