

XIV

“ADORE WITHOUT RESTRAINT, WORSHIP WITH FIDELITY”

PSALM 2:11–12a

INTRODUCTION

The MT נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר “kiss a son” has yet to receive a contextually satisfying explanation. Uncertainties about the phrase—which contains the Aramaic בֵר “son” rather than the Hebrew בֵן—are apparent in the early translations.¹ Although Aquila translated נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר as καταφιλήσατε ἐκλεκτῶς “kiss the chosen,”² the Septuagint rendered it as δράχασθε παιδείας³ “grasp instruction,” which is reflected in the Vulgate’s *apprehendite disciplinam* and in the Targum’s קבילו אולפנא “receive instruction.”⁴ But Jerome translated it *adorate pure* “worship in purity,” which may correspond to Symmachus’ προσκυνήσατε καθαρῶς.⁵ The Syriac נַצַּמָּה בֵר (našqû bēra) “kiss the son” matches the MT, but makes בֵר definite.

When it comes to the English translations, KJV, NKJ, NIV and NIB (“kiss the Son”) followed the MT and Syriac—but with a Christological twist having “the Son” for “a son.” The NAS (“do homage to the Son”) followed Symmachus and Jerome, as did the NLT paraphrase (“submit to God’s royal son”). But the YLT followed Aquila (“kiss the Chosen One”). The RSV, NRSV, and NJB have “kiss his feet,” adopting the emendation of Bertholet (1908: 59) who combined בֵר “son” and וְגִילוּ “and rejoice” to create בֵרְגִלְיוֹ “on his feet” in order to create a motif of homage: “kiss on his [God’s] feet.”⁶

More recent scholars have suggested other changes. Dahood (1966: 13), revocalized the MT to נִשְׂי קֶבֶר “men of the

grave” and translated “O mortal men!” Mackintosh (1976: 14) proposed deleting בַּר and translated נִשְׁקִי as “order yourselves (properly)/be (properly) governed.” Oloffson (1995: 199) opted for בַּר “field” instead of בֵּן “son,” since “kissing a field” was yet another way to pay homage.

ASSISTANCE FROM ARABIC

Oloffson (1976: 5) summarized the theories how Arabic جُول (*jûl*) “to circulate, to roam” and وَجَل (*wajila*) “to fear” were related to גִּיל “to rejoice.” He argued unconvincingly that following the *Addā*d phenomena in Arabic, where a word may have opposite meanings, גִּיל “to rejoice” could also mean “to fear,” thus harmonizing the verb and adverb in order to translate the בְּרַעְרָהּ of 2:11 as “and shew fear with trembling.” But missing from his discussion was any reference to the Arabic جَل (*jalla*) “to honor, to dignify, and to exalt the majesty of God,” with جَلَال (*jalâl*) “extreme greatness” being an attribute of God (Lane 1865: 436; Wehr 1979: 152). By simply removing the vowel letter, MT וְגִילָהּ can be read as the imperative וְגַלְהּ “and magnify [Him],” which logically follows the עֲבַדוּ אֱתֵיְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה “serve/worship Yahweh with reverence” in 2:11a (BDB 432, *sub voce* 3).

The MT בְּרַעְרָהּ has usually been translated as “trembling” (= τρόμος in the Septuagint and *tremore* in the Vulgate), with רַעַד being the cognate of Arabic رَعَد (*ra’ada*) “to thunder, to terrify” (BDB 944). But in this context رَعَد is probably the cognate of رَغَد (*ragada*) “it became ample and unrestrained” and رَغْد (*ragd*) “plentiful, pleasant, easy” (Lane 1867: 1105; 1112). With these cognates in focus, 2:11a can be translated “worship Yahweh in reverence, adore with unrestraint!”

The Septuagint’s δρᾶχασθε “seize” comes from a *Vorlage* having נכשו or נקשו “seize!” for the Masoretic נִשְׁקוּ “kiss!” (Jastrow 1903: 912, 935). The interchange of ק and כ is attested not only with נכש and נקש, but in a number of other words like כִּשְׁבַשׁ and קִשְׁקֵשׁ “to knock, to shake” and דִּבְדַּב and דִּבְדַּב “to crush.” In light of this well attested interchange, it is reasonable to assume that נִשְׁקוּ could be a variant for נִשְׁכוּ; and if so, נשק / נשך would be the cognate of نساك (*nasa-ka*) “he worshiped” (Lane 1893: 3032; Wehr 1979: 1129).⁷

Were בר the direct object of נשך / נשק, one would expect it to have the שׁת particle, as in the preceding שׁת־יְהוָה “worship Yahweh.”⁸ Without the שׁת, the בר can function as an adverbial accusative, which precludes reading it as “son” or “field.” But other possibilities for בר include “pure, pious, honest” which is a cognate of (1) بر (*birr/barr*) “fidelity, piety towards God or parents, obedience” or (2) برى (*bariy*) “free, clear, . . . pure in heart from associating any [other] with God” (Lane 1863: 179). Were برى the cognate, however, בר should be בר־, which suggests that the ך deleted from וְגִלּוֹ (> וְגִלּוֹ) could be added to בר to restore an original בר־.

CONCLUSION

Simply by reading וְגִלּוֹ as וְגִלּוֹ, the MT of Psa 2:10–12a can be translated

Now therefore, O kings, be wise,
be warned, O rulers of the earth;
worship Yahweh in awe,
and *adore without restraint*,
worship with fidelity.

This understanding of the Hebrew supports Jerome's *adore pure* and Symmachus' προσκυνήσατε καθαρῶς "worship in purity."

Cloaked in a psalm speaking of Israel's imperial aspirations is an invitation to the earthly kings to share in Israel's faith—though not necessarily in Israel's religion and cultus. Even though the invitation was extended in the shadow of derision and threats, it was an invitation, nonetheless, for all kings (and presumably their kingdoms) to find refuge in Yahweh. As much as there are hints of "forced conversions," like "lest they perish" (in 2:11b), there is a vision of earthly peace made possible by having a shared faith. Unfortunately, the invitation to share a faith was commingled with an ultimatum to submit to Israelite hegemony.

NOTES

1. In 2:7b בן, not בר, was used: בְּנִי אֵתָהּ אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדְּתִיךָ "you are my son, this day I have begotten you."
2. Note Ezek 21:19 (MT 21:24) where ברא "choose" appears twice in the KJV and I Sam 17:8 where בְּרוּ לָכֶם אִישׁ was rendered ἐκλέξασθε ἑαυτοῖς ἄνδρα "choose for yourselves a man" in the Septuagint.
3. The Septuagint παιδείας "instruction" may reflect an internal Greek corruption of παιδίον, which ordinarily translated בן or ילד or בן, all words for young children, and it would be the most likely word to translate בר "son." If not an internal corruption, παιδείας may be the fruit of a syllogism: בר = בן and בן = בֵּין, therefore בר = בֵּין "instruction." It is, therefore, unnecessary to posit a different *Vorlage* for the Septuagint.

4. The Vulgate, following the Septuagint, did not give בר any Christological significance. The Targumist may have associated the בר with the בְּרִיָּהּ, the term for those traditions and opinions not embodied in the Mishnah. (See Jastrow 189.)

5. Although προσκυνέω means “to make obeisance to the gods or their images” or “prostrating oneself before kings and superiors” κυνέω means “to kiss,” leading Liddell and Scott (1966: 1518) to comment that perhaps originally προσκυνέω meant “*throw a kiss to the god . . .* (and) the gesture is probably represented in Sumerian and Babylonian art monuments.”

6. Mackintosh (1976: 13) convincingly noted

. . . considerable difficulty attaches to the view that the dissident rulers are exhorted to kiss the feet of Yahweh; to introduce so gross an anthropomorphism is implausible and the attempt to interpret the words metaphorically is unlikely.

7. Mackintosh (1976: 11, 14) interpreted נשק in light of Arabic نسق (*nasaqa*) “to arrange, to set (pearls) in order” (Wehr 1979: 1129).

8. The absence of the emphatic ס suffix (= ברס) on this Aramaic loanword or the Hebrew definite article (= הבר), like the הַיּוֹם in 2:7b, as well as the absence of the סה prefixed to a definite noun, indicate that the translation of בר as the definite “the Son” is a purely subjective rendering.