

words “sevenfold” and “seventy-sevenfold” in Genesis 4.24, and it would not be acceptable English to delete the final suffix “-fold” in this case.

It has been suggested that Greek text of Matthew 18.22 has an ellipsis like in English, so that the expression “seventyfold seven” which occurs in the text is a shortened form for “seventyfold sevenfold” which means “seventy times seven times”. However, because the Greek *-kis* is a suffix rather than a separate word, this seems an unlikely possibility, and therefore the translation “seventy times seven (times)” is probably not correct.

According to the Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich Greek dictionary, the Greek expression *hebdomekontakis hepta* might possibly be a shortened form of *hebdomekontakis heptakis* “seventy times seven times”, but most likely it means “seventy-seven times”. The Blass, Debrunner Grammar of the Greek NT states in section 248 that *hebdomekontakis hepta* means “seventy-seven times” (not “seventy times seven”) as in the Septuagint of Genesis 4.24. A.T. Robertson says in his Grammar of the Greek New Testament (page 674) that “Moulton considers rightly that the passage in Genesis settles the usage in Matthew to which an allusion may be made.” (This reference is to Moulton’s *Greek Grammar: Prolegomena*, page 98.) It seems, then, that the weight of scholarly opinion is on “seventy-seven times” rather than “seventy times seven times”.

Since there is such strong linguistic and contextual evidence for choosing “77 times” rather than “70 times 7 times”, my recommendation is that translators should put this translation in the text, but include the other option in a footnote, since many earlier translations have chosen that interpretation. This is actually the opposite of what both RSV and GNB have done, which both put the traditional interpretation in the text, and the other one in a footnote.

IVER LARSEN

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### **Where does a soldier get cold beer on a hot day? (1 Kings 20)**

When King Benhadad (the Second) of Aram (Syria) laid siege to Samaria (1 Kings 20.1), King Ahab of Israel at first agreed to pay tribute; but then he got annoyed when the arrogant King of Syria said his men were coming to collect “everything they consider valuable” (GNB, based on ancient translations) or “everything else that you own” (CEV, based on the Hebrew).

Encouraged by a nameless prophet, Ahab called Benhadad’s bluff. In RSV (verse 12) we are told that his messengers went and found the Syrian king with his fellow “kings” in the “booths”. Later on, Ahab and his men attacked at noon, “when Benhadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths” (verse 16).

In place of “in the booths” (Hebrew *succhoth*) several modern English versions have “in their tents”. NJB “under the awnings” is rather strange, as is “in the pavilions” (NAB), since “pavilion” is an unusual word these days, most often associated with parks or sporting grounds. NJV (supported by Grey) takes the term *succhoth* as referring to the town of Succoth; but as this town is some 50 kilometers to the east across the mountains and on the other side of the Jordan, this seems highly unlikely. The most likely interpretation of the Hebrew term is surely some kind of booth, so I want to go on and consider this and some related issues.

Just where were King Benhadad and his soldiers drinking? And what were they drinking? Did they bring their supply of booze from Damascus? Or did they plunder local stores of wine? Some other questions can be raised also: Who were the inhabitants of the nearby towns, Geba, Azzah, and Kozoh? Were they Jews or gentiles? Did they flee inside Samaria for protection, abandoning their stores of food and drink? Or did Benhadad’s soldiers occupy these towns and force their inhabitants to provide food and drinks for them? And if so, did the local people produce any beverages apart from wine?

Even in the absence of firm answers to these questions from archeology, we are not without some clues regarding alcohol consumption and patterns of public drinking. Observing the production and use of wine and other alcoholic drinks in rural societies today can give us some ideas about the corresponding situation in Israel during the period covered by 1 Kings. So let us look again at three of these questions.

1. First of all, **What were Benhadad and his men drinking?** Opinions differ on how common the consumption of beer and wine was. According to B.L. Bandstra (ISBE [4], page 1070), wine was not the normal table drink in Old Testament times. It was rather for special occasions such as banquets and coronations. TWTOT, on the other hand, suggests that both beer and wine were everyday drinks. We might argue, in any case, that Benhadad, being a king, had unlimited access to alcohol. But, of course, they were away from home at this time, on the battle front. As there was no way of keeping alcoholic drinks from going sour in those days, we may conclude that the Syrians did not carry their own supply from home in hip flasks or other containers; they were probably limited to what they could get locally.

*Shekar* was originally a general Hebrew word covering all intoxicating drinks – it is related to *shakar* “to be drunk”. But after the Jews settled in Canaan and began cultivating grapes, *shekar* came to refer to intoxicating drinks other than wine. Such drinks could have been produced from pomegranates, dates, honey, raisins, barley, or apples. Date liquor seems to have been a favorite, judging from Assyrian and Babylonian Contract tablets (Edwards “Strong Drink” in ISBE [1], 1979). Snaith states that Near Eastern kings typically went to war just after the harvest was in (see, for instance, Judges 6.4, 11; 2 Sam 17.19; 1 Sam 23.1). If this is so, the siege may have taken place in December or January, when quite a number of the fruits mentioned above, and grapes as well, would have

been available. In the absence of further information, we can only guess whether Benhadad was drinking "wine" or some kind of *shekar*.

2. **Were Benhadad and his friends drinking in their tents?** If alcohol production and consumption followed the patterns familiar in rural societies today, it would have been brewed over a period of 4 or 5 days. It is not practical to brew a small amount of an alcoholic drink for personal consumption. But if a person makes a lot, it is an economic loss if it is not sold when it is "ripe". So in the early stages of business activity in the beer industry a person is typically serving beer out of her (or his) house. A booth is made on the edge of the compound where passers-by can stop for refreshment. Eventually, when roads are developed, a booth may be constructed at the roadside, and advertising quickly develops to make travellers aware that refreshment is available.

Now the military situation may have been quite different from the typical village scene. Still, it is likely that Benhadad and the other kings were not sitting alone in their tents drinking. Except for Noah's unfortunate experiment in Genesis 9, beer drinking has almost always been a social thing, if for no other reason than that it is usually made and sold by one person who serves it at a central location. In a small village, since beer takes at least 5 days to "ripen" to a pleasing condition, beer makers plan quite carefully so that their beer matures when their neighbours' supply runs out.

As Israel had well-developed towns and villages by this time, I propose taking one of two lines of thought in translating *succhoth*:

(a) they are beer booths, which might be either for the whole army or perhaps for the officers alone; or

(b) they are a group of booths representing some kind of headquarters for the officers; the New King James Version takes this line, referring to a "command post".

3. **Who were the brewers?** The fact that King Ahab was able to muster commandos from the governors of the districts (verses 14-15) and 7000 soldiers "from all Israel" suggests that the siege was not very severe. Given the up-and-down relations between Syria, Israel, and Judah, we can imagine a cold or luke-warm war atmosphere in which the poorest of the people simply shifted sides when Benhadad and his troops came marching in. These would have been the people (probably women) who would have been forced to brew liquor for Benhadad and his friends.

Finally, a linguistic question: If Benhadad and his royal comrades were drinking in their tents, why did the writer of Kings not use the word *'ohel* which is the normal word for "tent"? Instead he used the word *succhoth*, which, as is well known, is the same thing that the Israelites made during their "Festival of Booths" (*Succhoth*), and the same as what Jonah made for himself as he sat outside of Nineveh.

Perhaps the whole issue depends on the social "distance" between the kings and their troops. According to Keil (commentary on *Kings*, page 263) ordinary soldiers slept in tents while the officers used "booths" made

of branches. If there was a lot of interaction, the commanders (“kings”) may have been drinking with the soldiers in common beer-booths. If, on the other hand, the officers kept their distance from the common troops when not on duty, they might have had drinks brought to them in the booths which the soldiers had constructed as a kind of headquarters. In neither case would it have been “in their tents”.

So, in conclusion, it seems highly unlikely that the infamous kings of 1 Kings 20 would have been drinking “in their tents”. While 1 Kings 20.12 & 16 may not contain burning theological issues, they do contain interesting cultural details. And it is important for us as translators to get and give to our readers an accurate picture of the situation.

Any corrections, or additional information, or suggestions on the above are very welcome.

ROB KOOPS

## HOW WAS THAT?

From military officer assessment reports:

This officer is not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won't-be.

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Memo from Executive Officer to Personnel Manager:

Staff matters: It is important that you implement the long service award for legible staff.

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Wisdom from Africa about working in a committee:

“The donkey does the work; the zebra gets the stripes.”

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Transcript from dictation taken at a meeting by a temporary staff person:

From that moment, James realised that God was calling him to be a Minister of the Methodist Church. In 1948, at the end of his High School, he applied to go to the Illogical Ceremony.

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Those small typos:

He was instrumental in ruining the entire operation for a Midwest chain operation.