

HANNI KUHN

## WHY ARE JOB'S OPPONENTS STILL MADE TO EAT BROOM-ROOT?

The author is a Wycliffe Bible translator based in Togo.

Bible translators live under all sorts of pressure. There is the pressure of the market: people will only buy what they like, as is well known. Then there is the translator's own conscience which makes him want to rebel against the people's power. And finally, there is the pressure of the "big translations", against which the translator who works in a minority language feels helpless. Who is he compared to the impressive array of scholars that make up the big translation committees? What should he do if he is convinced that "the big ones" are wrong? That, precisely, is my question when I look at Job 30.4.

*Haqo tṗîm mallûaḥ 'ale šîaḥ wešoreš reṭamîm laḥmām*

their food' 'they pluck salt plant leaves, root of *roṭem* to warm themselves'.

Whether the first colon talks about one or two plants is disputed, as can readily be seen by comparing different translations. The fact that I write only one is merely for the sake of convenience. It is the second colon that I would like to draw attention to. The BHS apparatus indicates that there is a textual problem here: *laḥmām* "their bread/food" could also be read with different vocalization as *leḥummām* "to warm themselves".

Amos Hakham in his commentary on Job<sup>1</sup> gives the following four interpretations for *lḥmm*:

1. "their bread", meaning: the root of the *roṭem* is food for them like bread. He adds the note: its wood and its roots are used for heating (Ps. 120.4 "coals from broom wood"), but in times of need its roots after roasting them on the fire-are also used as food.
2. The infinitive from the root *ḥmm* "to warm, heat", with reference to Isa. 47.14 "no coal for warming", where "warming" is pointed like the *laḥmām* of our passage here.
3. On roots of *roṭem* they bake their bread.

They collect the root of the *roṭem*, sell it and receive in return their bread (real bread).

Now let us see how the most well-known and the most recent translations in English, French and German render this second colon of verse 4:

<sup>1</sup> Hakham, Amos, *The Book of Job*, (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1984) 226, (Hebr.)

*English*

KJV and juniper roots for their meat

Moffatt (1935) Using broom-roots for their fuel

RSV (1952) to warm themselves the roots of the broom

JB (1968) making their meals off root of broom

NEB (1971) and root of broom<sup>n</sup> for their food

*n*probably fungus on broom root

NAB (1971) the roots of the broom plant were their food

NASB (1973) whose food is the root of the broom shrub

GNB (1976) even the tasteless roots of the broom-tree

NIV (1978) their food<sup>n</sup> was the root of the broom-tree

*nor fuel*

NJPS (1985) The roots of broom are their food

*French*

Darby (1966) et pour leur pain, la racine des genêts

BdIP (1973) et la racine des genêts était leur pain

Col (1978) Et n'ont pour pain que la racine des genêts

BJ (1975) (ils) faisaient leur pain des racines de genêt

FC (1982) ils se nourrissaient des racines du genêt

TOB (1988) ils ont pour pain la racine des genêts

*German*

Zürich (1931) und ihre Speise ist die Ginsterwurzel

Bruns (1962) und ihre Speise war die Ginsterwurzel

Buber (1962) Ginsterwurzel war ihnen das Brot

Hamp (1962) zu ihrer Nahrung Ginsterwurzel

Einh (1980) und Ginsterwurzeln sind ihr Brot

GN (1982) und essen Wurzeln von den Ginstersträuchern

Luther (1984) und Ginsterwurzel ist ihre Speise

REIB (1985) und deren Brot die Ginsterwurzel ist

Looking over these different translations the following points can be noted:

- a) The plant name *roṭem*, which is the singular form of the plural *reṭāmīm* of our text, has consistently been translated "broom" (except for KJV which reads "juniper") and its equivalents "genêt" and "Ginster" in French and German respectively.
- b) *ḥmm* was understood as meaning "their bread/food" by all the above translations except RSV, JB and Moffatt which took the emended vocalization *ḥhummām* "to warm themselves" as the base of their rendering.

This second meaning, "to warm themselves", is, by the way, not a modern invention; it had already been suggested as a possibility by the Jewish commentator Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, 1288-1344)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See *Miqra'ot Gedoloth* (Hebr.)

But the problem with translating *reṭamîm/roṭem* as broom is that the roots of the broom are inedible, being nauseous, even poisonous. Bible dictionaries and commentaries agree on this point.<sup>3</sup> In the face of this evidence, the GNB translation "tasteless roots of the broom-tree" seems untenable. On the assumption that a correct exegesis must make good sense in the context, this leads to the conclusion that either (a) *lahmām* does not mean "food" or that (b) the plant referred to is not "broom" but some other botanical species.

Looking again at the four meanings of *lhmm* quoted by Hakham we can eliminate interpretation 1 ('their bread/food') as contrary to fact, based on the evidence of such botanists of repute as Löw, Moldenke and Hareuveni.<sup>4</sup>

Interpretation 2 ("to warm themselves"), which has been followed by RSV, and interpretation 3 (fuel for cooking) taken by JB-(Moffatt's "fuel", followed by NIV footnote, is ambiguous, referring to 2 or 3, or both)- both have their basis in the emended form *leḥummām*. This emendation only concerns the vocalization and not the consonantal text; in addition, it causes neither grammatical nor syntactical problems, and the meaning thus achieved fits both the immediate context of the verse as well as the wider context of the whole passage.

It is true that the NEB footnote at least tries to remedy the wrong statement of the text by modifying it in the footnote. The NIV footnote, on the other hand, does no such thing. Rather it suggests to the reader that a textual problem allows for two alternatives which are equally possible, the one in the text being the one preferred by the translators. That, however, is only true for the word *lhmm*, but not for the word "broom", which is wrong if used in the context of food.

For those who do not accept emendation even of vowels there exist two additional ways to translate this colon. The first goes in the direction of . Hakham's 4th possibility, and has been suggested by the Israeli botanist Nogah Hareuveni.<sup>5</sup> Quoting from Midrash and Talmud he shows that broom-embers have been known for centuries for their ability to retain heat much longer than other embers.<sup>6</sup> Also, the common use of *roṭem* as kindling in cooking stoves led to the making of coals from the roots, trunk and branches of the white broom, *Retama raetam*. This trade was common among the Negev Bedouin until very recent times. Concerning the verse under discussion, he says, "it is obvious that Job is speaking of white broom roots made into something that can be sold to earn one's bread."

<sup>3</sup> *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol.1, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 478-69. Pope, Marvin, *Job*, The Anchor Bible, vol.15, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965) 217, 220. Gordis, Robert, *The Book of Job*, (New York City: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978) 331.

<sup>4</sup> Löw, I., *Die Flora der Juden II*, (1924) 469-73. Moldenke, H.M. & Moldenke, A.L., *Plants of the Bible*, (New York: Ronald Press, 1952) 202. Hareuveni, Nogah, *Tree and Shrub in Our Biblical Heritage*, (Kiryat Ono: Neot Kedumim, 1984) 31.

<sup>5</sup> See Hareuveni, 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. Talmud: Pe'ah 1,1; Baba Batra 74b; Breshit Raba 95,19.

The second possibility of translating this colon meaningfully, again without emending the vocalization, also comes from botanists, this time from H.N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke.<sup>7</sup> Their suggestion has, so far, only found entry into commentaries and encyclopedias; it has not yet been followed by any translation. Their argument, in summary form, is as follows. The roots of *Retama raetam* are extremely nauseous, even somewhat poisonous. There is, however, a parasitic plant known as the scarlet cynomorium, *Cynomorium coccineum*, ("Dog's club" in English<sup>8</sup>) which grows in salt marshes and maritime sands, the favourite habitat of saltwort. Broom has often been observed with great masses of the parasitic cynomorium attached to its roots, especially in the region about the Dead Sea. The parasite is cylindrical and fleshy, and about a foot tall. The plant was originally called "*Fungus melitensis*" because of its fungus-like growth.<sup>9</sup> It is native to the whole of the Levant, southern Europe, and northern Africa, and it is frequently eaten in times of food scarcity. Now Moldenke and Moldenke think that this is actually the plant referred to by Job, but that the people who collected it for food thought it was broom root.

Moldenke and Moldenke were not the first to suggest that a different plant may be meant by *rotem*. Delitzsch in his commentary on Job stated that the Arabs call two different plants by the same name, *retem*, and that one of these is a kind of arrowroot which is edible. This, however, did not prevent him from translating this colon as "and the root of the broom is their bread".<sup>10</sup>

If we take the consonantal text, grammar, context, botany and general customs into consideration I would see the following three interpretations as equally legitimate and meaningful ways of translating this colon:

1. *lhmm* as pointed *lehummām* "to warm themselves". The meaning of this couplet could then be expressed as follows:

They pluck saltplant leaves for food,  
the roots of broom they burn for warmth.

or as RSV has it: to warm themselves the roots of the broom.

This translation accepts a change of vocalization, and in this way it can both keep the word "broom" and make sense in the context, and this without making a contrary-to-fact statement.

2. *lahmām* with the implied meaning "(to earn) their bread (by selling broom-embers)"; the translation could be something like:

They pluck saltplant leaves to eat,

and { sell  
          { make } embers/coals of broom to earn their bread

<sup>7</sup> See Moldenke, 91-92.

<sup>8</sup> "Dog's club" is a translation suggested by Prof. C.H. Gimingham (University of Aberdeen) of the German name "Hundskolben" which was given to me by Dr. R. Rutishauser (Institut für systematische Botanik of the University of Zürich).

<sup>9</sup> This, presumably, is the basis for the NEB footnote.

<sup>10</sup> Delitzsch, F., *The Book of Job*, transl. from German, 142-43.

This translation reflects the suggestion made by Hareuveni. The change involved is the idea of selling charcoal for a living.

3. *šoreš reṭamîm* standing—like a synecdoche (*totum pro parte*)—for another plant which grows from its roots. Translating the couplet we could say:

They pluck saltplant leaves to eat,  
even dog's club is their food.

This translation follows Moldenke's suggestion that it is not broom which is meant here but a parasitic plant; the change, then, would concern the names of the plants.

### Abbreviations

BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia	FC	Francais Courant
NJPS	New Translation of the Jewish Publication Society	TOB	Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible
BdLP	Bible de la Pléiade	Einh	Einheitsübersetzung
Col	Bible à la Colombe (Segond révisée)	GN	Gute Nachricht
BJ	Bible de Jérusalem	REIB	Revidierte Elberfelder Bibel

EDWIN K. BROADHEAD

## AN EXAMPLE OF GENDER BIAS IN UBS<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Broadbent teaches in the Religion Department at Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina.

The third edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament designates Matthew 21.28-32 as "The Parable of the Two Sons". Surprisingly, *huios* never appears in the story. The opening line reads *ti de humin dokei; anthrōpos eichen tekna duo*. The initial designation for the two siblings is the neuter *tekna*. The numeral *duo* is indeclinable and has no reference to gender. No manuscript from the textual tradition replaces *teknon* with *huios* in Matthew 21.28. Thus, the story is a parable of two children; it should be read as a generic account which applies equally to male and female.

The neuter designation of the siblings is unusually consistent through the remainder of the parable. The two children are treated separately as *tō prōtō* and as *tō heterō*; both terms refer back to *tekna* and may be read as neuters in the dative case. The story tells first of *tō prōtō*. The elder sibling is addressed in the neuter vocative as *teknon* (21.28). The parent repeats the command to the younger child (21.30). Only the two participles (*apokritheis, metamelētheis*) employ masculine gender for the children in the body of the parable. This use of the masculine is normative in koine Greek and should be read generically.