The purpose of this article is to present an additional instance where the ancient versions furnish semantic clues for better understanding of the Hebrew text.

Verse 55 forms part of a strophe (vv. 54–56) describing the attack on Babylon by the despoilers on the day of Yhwh’s judgment. The three vv. indeed form one integral unit. V. 54 begins this unit with a description of the wailing voice coming out of Babylon, v. 55 provides the reasons for this terrible voice, and the next verse further explains the reasons for the prophetic proclamations in the two preceding verses.

Despite its fluency, the strophe is not free from exegetical difficulties. V. 55 in particular poses several problems.

MT reads:

The first half of the verse consists of two complementary clauses, depicting the future action of God. In the first, the participle שָׂרַד is employed and Babylon is the object; in the second, the perfect consecutive רָאָב appears and the object is קֶלֶל. By pointing the verb רָאָב in the pi‘el rather than in the qal, the MT clearly understands קֶלֶל as the object. Yet, it is unusual for קֶלֶל to be the object of the verb רָאָב in such a context. רָאָב may occur as a transitive verb when conjugated in the pi‘el or hiph‘il. In either of the two conjugations, it means ‘to destroy, to exterminate’, and may take both

I wish to express my thanks to my friend, Dr. Emanuel Tov, for his most helpful and valuable suggestions.


רָאָב in the pi‘el: 2 Ki. 13:7; 21:3; Jer. 12:17; 15:7; Ez. 6:3; Lam. 2:9.
רָאָב in the Hiph‘il: Num. 24:19; Deut. 7:24; 9:3; Jer. 1:10; 25:10; 31:28; 46:8; Ez. 25:7; 30:13; 32:13; Ob. 8; Mich. 5:9; Zeph. 2:5.
the animate and the inanimate as objects. But with הבש as an object, הבש occurs only once, in Jer. 25:10, not in the pi’el but in the hiph’il, expressing the idea of God causing the voices to cease. A similar interpretation was offered also for v. 55, but it does not agree with the second part of the verse.

This second half beginning with הרומח, may be described as a syntactic circumstantial clause. It contains two shorter clauses connected asyndetically. Both clauses apparently should describe the same thing, namely the source of terrible noise. Otherwise the unity to the entire description would be broken. The main difficulty is caused by the 3.m. plr. possessive pronoun of ולנה, for it cannot be applied to the ‘mighty voice’, nor is it suitable for Babylon, although grammatically possible, for this would not be in line with the rest of the description, where Babylon is systematically referred to in the 3.f.sgl.

Both medieval and modern exegetes tried to tackle this problem without convincing results. The main effort was directed towards finding a suitable reference for the pronoun mentioned, since such a solution would pave the way towards understanding the entire verse. Some scholars suggested that ‘their waves’ refer to the despoilers. But Rudolph has pointed out that such a suggestion presupposes either an antecedent (in v. 53) or a subsequent noun (in v. 56) too far removed from the noun. One might add that having ‘the waves’ refer to ‘the despoilers’ would not only break the flow of the description, but would be out of context.

Some moderns\(^8\) emend יםו לנה to יםו לנה on the basis of Aquila (A), Symmachus (Sym) and the Hexapla reading רון קרמה אוסה. The antecedent of יםו לנה would, then, be Babylon. While such an emendation would solve the gramman-
tical problems, it would still not diminish the semantic difficulties. Others have suggested more elaborate emendations which seem unnecessary and arbitrary.

Our analysis to the second half of the verse holds good as long as we read with the MT נָגַנְתָּ in the passive (niph’al) and נָהֳשׁ in the construct. דִּבְרֵי נָהֳשׁ is, then, one unit, nomen regens and nomen rectum, viewed as the subject of the passive verb. ‘Their voice’ remain ambiguous because of the suffix. It could apply to the spoilers, to the inhabitants of Babylon, or to the waves. Volz emends to רָפָא after the LXX, referring the term to the city, but he admits that the MT reading is also possible and thus makes his own emendation doubtful.

To sum up, the verse under review cannot be naturally and easily interpreted, mainly because of the difficulty in understanding the ‘mighty voice’. A closer examination of the ancient versions may help in suggesting a solution for the above difficulties.

The Septuagint (Jer 28:55) reads thus:

ὅτι ἐξειλαθεῖσα κύριος τὴν Βαβυλώνια καὶ ἀπώλεσεν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς φωνήν μεγάλην ἡχοῦσαν ὡς ὁδότοι πολλά, ἔδωκεν εἰς ὀλέθρον φωνήν αὐτῆς.

The first part of the verse is rendered faithfully, but the second one went through some changes: the noun διειλαθεῖσα is omitted and the verb ἔδωκεν is turned into a fem. participle describing the ‘mighty voice’. Thus the grammatical difficulties disappear, but not the semantic ones.

The three, Aquila (A), Symmachus (Sym) and Theodotion (Th), preserve the syntax of the LXX with only slight modifications. A and Sym add the missing ‘waves’ but with the 3.fem.sgl. suffix τὰ κύματα αὐτῆς (sub tfoot). Volz maintains that the scribe of the MT understood the original הלי as an abbreviation of ליהו, but this is rather doubtful for it is difficult to presume that

9 B. Duhm, Das Buch Jeremia (Kurzer Handkommentar zum A.T.), (Tübingen & Leipzig 1901); Cornill, Die metrischen Stücke des Buches Jeremia, (Leipzig 1901); F. Giesebrecht, Jeremia, (Handkommentar zum A.T.), (Göttingen 1907); D. Arvid Bruno, Jeremia — Eine rhythmische Untersuchung, (Stockholm 1954).

10 The discussion has generally been restricted to examples from the Latter Prophets in order to avoid problems regarding translations of different parts of the Bible. The Vulgate is here omitted as it reflects the MT.

11 For quotations and references, volumes of the series “Septuaginta — Vetus Testamentum Graecum”, Göttingen, were used: Is. (XIV, 1939), Jer. (XV, 1957), Ez. (XVI, 1952), and XII Prophets (XIII, 1943) were all edited by J. Ziegler. For Psalms the edition of A. Rahlfss in the same series (X, 1931) was used.
a Hebrew scribe would have chosen the perplexing reading שְׁלִירֵי נַחֲלָה instead of the more natural one, שְׁלֶשֶׁה.

Surprising is the rendering offered by Sym to the ‘mighty voice’: παλαισμὸς μέγας. This points to a different direction altogether, as will be shown later.

The Syriac translation renders our verse thus:

Here the division of the verse is completely different. The ‘mighty voice’ is transferred into the second part of the verse and a new object is introduced into 55a: שְׁלִירֵי נַחֲלָה. This addition constitutes an entirely new element, not to be found elsewhere. This phrase usually renders the recurring expression רִבְרוּ מָיֵם in descriptions of desolation and destruction, particularly in oracles against both Israel and the nations (cp. Ez. 14:17, 19 and especially Ez. 14:21; 29:8. Cp. also Jer. 33:10, 12; 50:3). This addition might, then, have resulted from an inner-Syriac phenomenon.

And the Targum Jonathan:

The Targum supplies us with yet another division of the verse. It is composed of three clauses, all starting with the consecutive perfect, and thus depicting a continuing action. But the most striking feature is the rendering of ‘the mighty voice’ by מַשְׂרֵי נַחֲלָה, thus coinciding with Sym. In the vast majority


13 Biblia Sacra iuxta versionem simplicem quae dicitur Peschitta, (Mosul 1887–1891), newly published 1951. Longer citations were compared with Codex Ambrosianus in A.M. Ceriani, Translatio Syra Peschitto Veteris Testamenti ex Codice Ambrosiano, 1876.

13a The expression שׁלירֵי נַחֲלָה probably reflects the MT קֹלֵי נַחֲלָה. (Cp. Is 17:12 for a similar translation to a different expression). However, it should be noted that also קֹלֵי is omitted here, though the Syriac idiom tolerates a translation including both קֹלֵי and קֹלֵי (Cp. Is 13:4; 66:6).

14 A. Sperber, The Bible in Aramaic, III, The Latter Prophets — Targum Jonathan, (Leiden 1962). The only variant which has bearing to our discussion is the one offered by the Rabbinic Bibles and Cod. Reuchlinianus מַשְׂרֵי נַחֲלָה in the plural, but I think the singular of Sperber’s text is preferable.
of cases, מָשָׂר translates לְעַלְעַל, especially in military context. (Cp. Jer. 31:8; 50:9; Ez. 16:40; 23:24; 26:7; 27:27, 34; 32:22, 23; 38:4, 7, 13, 15).

To sum up: it is obvious that the ancient versions found v. 55 quite difficult and perhaps even confusing. Yet an analysis of those translations together with some lexicographical considerations may lead to a proper understanding of our verse.

If we examine more closely the uses of לְעַלְעַל in oracles of destruction, we find that it is frequently associated with the same metaphors. On the one hand, it is connected with the picture of enemies storming a city or a country (cf. Is. 13:4; 29:5–7; Jer. 47:3; Ez. 26:10), and is usually associated with שָׂרָה, sometimes with שָׂרָה. On the other hand, in such depictions the metaphor of roaring waves, waters, or the sea is often repeated (cp. Is. 17:12–13; 60:5; Jer. 6:23; 47:2–3; 50:42; 51:42; Ez. 26:3, 19; Ps. 65:8; Dan. 11:10).

Yet another vital part of the description is the situation of the attacked inhabitants. Here also the ‘voice’ plays an important role (cp. Jer. 47:2; 48:3–4; 49:21; 50:22, 46). Thus לְעַלְעַל has a double significance: the shouts uttered by the enemies and those uttered by the attacked. It is not surprising, then, that in such a context we often find combinations like לְעַלְעַל and שָׂרָה.

A more careful examination might point not only to a literary association, but to semantic affinities which might have served as a basis for the metaphors.

In Is. 31:4 and Ps. 42:5 שָׂרָה stands in parallelism to לְעַלְעַל. In such cases it has been generally assumed that לְעַלְעַל and שָׂרָה mean ‘noise’ or ‘voice’. Yet it may very well be that the other sense of שָׂרָה is intended, namely ‘multitude’, meaning that לְעַלְעַל also carries the additional meaning of ‘a multitude, from which an uproar emanates’.

It is worthwhile noting that in several instances, לְעַלְעַל appears in connection with crying aloud or praising in a loud voice (cp. Ps. 22:23, 26; 35:18; 40:10; 107:32; 149:1; Job 30:28 and perhaps Is. 52:8). Such usage might suggest that לְעַלְעַל is somehow associated with calling out in a loud voice. The semantic

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16 The same verb serves for translating other similar words as עָיִם, מָשָׂר and 38:15 where the TJ is forced into paraphrasing because of restricted vocabulary. Note also the change from עָיִם רָבָּה to כָּלִים רָבָּה. In a similar case (Jer. 47:2) מָשָׂר is read in the TJ and מָשָׂר in LXX. Cp. also LXX to Is. 13:4 where לְעַלְעַל is translated עָיִם רָבָּה. Such renderings might be based on biblical phraseology (cp. Jer. 6:22–23; 50:41–42; Ez. 26:3). Cp. further LXX to Is. 17:13.
17 In the Qumran Scrolls לְעַלְעַל has become an idiomatic expression independent of the biblical metaphorical context although reminiscent of it (cp. 1 QM 1:11; 1 QH 2:16, 27; 3:13, 16).
approximation between מלא and כל seems to come from both directions. Some scholars assert that the two words are cognate\textsuperscript{18}, but few attempts were made to substantiate this opinion by a closer examination of the actual employment of those two words in various contexts.

The assumption that אלה has an additional connotation, would not only cast new light on metaphorical combinations such as כל השמש, מלא השמש, but also may offer better understanding of our verse.

It was already pointed out that TJ and Sym translate כל or כל הים as כל הים ומלך or מלא המים. A similar situation is found in Jer. 11:16, where where some MSS read by TJemployer_semifinal, but others render by TJemployer_semifinal. Both verses might serve to show that TJ preserves the original sense of אלה in this context. Sym to the a.m. verse reads πρός φονή πλήθους τοῦ μεγάλου and thus may furnish another example for the connection between אלה and כל\textsuperscript{20}.

The Syriac translations offer two further such instances. MT Neh 5:7 is rendered by the Peshi\textsuperscript{t}a (5:8): "*מלך תים חסנין*"

The Syriac version of the second Apocryphal Psalm, lines 22–23, runs thus\textsuperscript{21}:

\[\text{מלך תים חסנין} \rightarrow \text{מלך דוד חסנין}\]

whereas the recently rediscovered Hebrew text of the psalm reads\textsuperscript{22}:

\[\text{מלך דוד חסנין} \rightarrow \text{מלך דוד תים חסנין}\]

The change from the Hebrew כל into מלח in the Syriac\textsuperscript{23} might be due to


\textsuperscript{19} Cp. the midrash in Babi Menahoth 53b.


\textsuperscript{21} The best text and commentary were published by M. Noth, “Die fünf Syrisch-überlieferten apokryphen Psalmen”, \textit{ZAW} 48, 1930, 1–23. For those lines the same text is followed by W. Baars in \textit{The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshi\textsuperscript{t}a Version, pt. IV, facs. 6}, Leiden 1972.

\textsuperscript{22} J. A. Sanders, \textit{The Psalms Scroll of Qumrán Cave 11, Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan}, IV (Oxford 1965), 39, 64–65.

a scribal error²⁴, but in light of the accumulating evidence, it may have resulted from a more intricate process, also involving semantical affinity.

The same Syriac text offers elsewhere another interesting example of a parallelism between יֶּהָד and קֶהֶל²⁵. Moreover, the position of those two nouns suggests there a deliberate play on words.

Now, assuming that יֶּהָד actually has the additional meaning of ‘crowd’, it could be understood as a collective noun which would ideally fit our verse. Neither הרום הנ״ה nor יהוה would any longer present a grammatical crux. The clause יְהֹוָה יִמְנֹה קֶּהֶל עַדּוֹ would also be meaningful and relevant to the context in the proposed translation: “For the Lord spoileth Babylon, and destroyeth of her a great multitude, and their waves roar like many waters, the noise of their voice is uttered”.

²⁴ Strugnell suggested an error deriving from a Hebrew phonetic writing, art. cit., 275.
²⁵ The first two lines of the same psalm read:

בָּכֹל נַעֲלָי הָלָלוֹתוּ בַּכֹּהֶל הָרֶבֶּנֶים והשַׁמָּעָנָיו מְחָזִיָהוּ.

Noth's retroversion: בָּכֹל נַעֲלָי הָלָלוֹתוּ בַּכֹּהֶל הָרֶבֶּנֶים והשַׁמָּעָנָיו מְחָזִיָהוּ.

Those two lines were not preserved in the scroll. Following the semantic analysis proposed above, it is preferable, in my opinion, to adopt Noth's reconstruction (also mainly adopted by Sanders) and to reject the reading יְהֹוָה יִמְנֹה קֶּהֶל עַדּוֹ as a rendering of יְהֹוָה יִמְנֹה קֶּהֶל עַדּוֹ as was proposed by two scholars on exegetical grounds; cp. M. Delcor, “Cinq nouveaux psaumes Esséniens”? RQ I, 1958, 89; M. Philonenko, “L’origine Esséniennne des cinq psaumes syraiques de David”, Semitica IX, 1959, 38–39. Although both renderings exist in the Peshitta’s Psalter, there is a marked preference to translate יְהֹוָה with יְהֵמוּּ (cp. Ps 22:25 (26); 35:18; 40:9, 11; 149:1) and קֶהֶל with יְהֹוָה (cp. Ps 1:5; 22:17; 68:30 (31); 82:1; 106:17).