

# A MULTIVALENT TEXT: PSALM 151:3-4 REVISITED

by

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It is now twenty-three years since I unrolled 11QPs<sup>a</sup> and saw in its last written column the Hebrew psalm(s) lying back of LXX-Syriac Psalm 151. I recognized it immediately, thanks to my teachers, especially Sheldon Blank, who instilled in me a deep respect for the biblical text and its early versions. It is a pleasure to be able to thank Prof. Blank, in this manner, for all that he gave me during my three years at the Hebrew Union College and since then in his writings.

It was clear on first perusal that the Qumran Hebrew and the LXX-Syriac Psalm 151 differed considerably. The most obvious difference lay in the lacunae in the LXX-Syriac, and especially in the total lack of anything corresponding to 11Q vv. 3 and 4. I fixed my attention immediately on these, and though it was apparent that one could read it in different ways (see, e.g., the circelli I affixed above each *waw/yod* in the Clarendon [1965b] publication), it seemed only logical that one should prefer the plainest, simplest reading which would explain the glaring omissions in the LXX and Syriac versions—the heterodox idea that mountains and hills did not witness to God's works. This was so clearly non-biblical (and against everything I had been taught) that it commended itself as the explanation for the salient and lengthy lacuna in the clearly orthodox LXX Psalm 151 and, of course, the Syriac 151, its faithful daughter.

Once thinking along this track I wondered just how heterodox the 'original' psalm was. I was asked by Paul Lapp, director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, and by Roland de Vaux, director of the Ecole Biblique there, to share my findings in the scroll with the scholarly community of (then) Jordanian Jerusalem. At a meeting in the library of the ASOR (now the Albright Institute) in the late winter of 1962 I presented what appeared soon thereafter as Sanders (1962) and then (1963). The reaction was positive. Fr. Jean-Paul Audet was among those present, and it was he who suggested the figure of

Orpheus as the explanation for the 11Q verses lacking correspondence in the versions (see Sanders, 1967, p. 99). I delved straightaway into the question of whether 11QPs 151 did not perhaps provide the missing literary link to the frequent artistic presentations of an Orphic understanding or 'resignification' of David. I published Psalm 151 making that suggestion (1963, 1965b, 1967). Jean Magne has since then provided a sane, clear statement of why one would logically expect such a literary link to appear sometime (1975b, pp. 533ff.).

The first reactions to the suggestion were mixed. The first to come to my attention was that of Isaac Rabinowitz (1964). Upon reading his rebuttal in manuscript form, I decided to let the debate take its course, for in the meantime other responses were quite favorable (see Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963; Dupont-Sommer, 1964a). Since then more scholars have tried their hand at reading the text in what each has been confident was the author's intention. Most of them tried to deal with the question of whether there had been a Hebrew recension *Vorlage* to the present LXX and Syriac version. But only two, to my knowledge, have suggested that the 11Q text is corrupt and offered reconstructions of the original (see Magne, 1975b; Smith, 1981). Magne thinks that the negative particles in 151:3 are later insertions, while Smith thinks all of 151:4 is a later insertion; the latter thinks a full line dropped out of 151:3. Neither of these had appeared when I did a first review of the situation in Sanders 1974. The two scholars who have studied the script of 11QPs<sup>a</sup> the closest in attempting to determine readings in these two verses of Psalm 151 (see Magne, 1975b and Cross, 1978) disagree at every crucial point (see the synopsis below), so that it would appear that paleography provides no obviously clear answers.

No one who has written on Psalm 151 since the *Nida Festschrift* (Sanders, 1974) appeared had apparently read it, for no one has referred to it. Nor have I seen any clear references to the fresh observations I made in 1967, over 1963 and 1965, especially those in the extensive footnotes in 1967, pp. 96–97. But then it is very interesting to note that none of those who prefer to read *haqqol* as a genitive has offered a satisfactory explanation of the accusative translations of it in LXX<sup>S</sup>, OL, *et al.* If Sinaiticus can be ignored . . . ! John Strugnell, noting and respecting Sinaiticus, reads *haqqol*, with me, as accusative (1966).

Yigael Yadin understood that like the Temple Scroll (1977, Vol. 1, pp. 298–300) the Psalms Scroll was functionally canonical for the Essenes at Qumran (see Sanders, 1967 and 1969). D. Barthélemy (1978, pp. 347–351), E. Puesch (1978, p. 547, n. 2) and G. Wilson (1981) among others also agree (*pace* P. Skehan, 1973 and 1975; and M. Homan, 1978).

I will here simply reaffirm my assessment of Psalm 151 as stated in 1967 and 1974, and offer in the manner of 1967, a synopsis of the sixteen scholarly attempts at reading Ps 151:3-4 since the *editio princeps*. A translation of the full psalm is offered for the convenience of the reader, followed by the translations that others have made of the two verses (where full translations of them have been provided); and thereafter the specific readings by each scholar of the crucial multivalent words in the two verses. An updated bibliography of work on 11QPs<sup>a</sup> since its recovery is appended. I wish to express gratitude to three graduate students: Mr. William Yarchin for helping to update the bibliography, Mr. Peter Pettit for collaboration in composing the following, and Mr. Stephen Delamarter for typing the final draft.

#### Translation of 11QPs 151

**Sanders** (1963, pp. 75-76):

#### A Hallelujah of David the Son of Jesse

1. Smaller was I than my brothers  
and the youngest of the sons of my father,  
So he made me shepherd of his flock  
and ruler over his kids.
2. My hands have made an instrument  
and my fingers a lyre;  
And (so) have I rendered glory to the Lord,  
thought I, within my soul.
3. The mountains do not witness to him,  
nor do the hills proclaim;  
The trees have cherished my words  
and the flock my works.
4. For who can proclaim and who can bespeak  
and who can recount the deeds of the Lord?  
Everything has God seen,  
everything has he heard and he has heeded.
5. He sent his prophet to anoint me,  
Samuel to make me great;  
My brothers went out to meet him,  
handsome of figure and appearance.
6. Though they were tall of stature  
and handsome by their hair,  
The Lord God chose  
them not.

7. But he sent and took me from behind the flock  
and anointed me with holy oil,  
And he made me leader to his people  
and ruler over the sons of his covenant.

Other Translations of 11QPs 151:3–4

**Skehan** (1963, p. 409):

the mountains cannot witness to Him  
nor the hills relate:  
Neither the boughs of trees, my words,  
nor the flock, my compositions;  
Who indeed can relate, and who can tell,  
and who can recount the works of the Lord?  
Everything, God saw,  
everything He heard—and He gave heed.

**Brownlee** (1963, pp. 380–381):

“Mountains do not witness to Him,  
nor do hills proclaim (Him).  
The trees have extolled my words,  
and the flocks my deeds.  
Yet who can proclaim?  
and who can tell?  
And who can recount  
the deeds of the Lord?”  
All this did God observe;  
all this did He hear;  
and He gave ear.

**Carmignac** (1963, p. 375):

Les montagnes ne sont pas un témoignage pour lui  
et les collines ne sont pas une annonce.  
Les intruments (de musique) ont mis en valeur mes paroles  
et le troupeau mon activité.  
Mais qui annoncera? qui exprimera?  
qui racontera les oeuvres du Maître?

Second Strophe

Elôah a vu le tout,  
Lui, Il a entendu le tout,  
et, Lui, Il a écouté.

**Dupont-Sommer** (1964a, p. 32):

“Les montagnes ne lui rendent-elles pas témoignage?  
 Et les collines ne [Le] proclament-elles pas?”  
 Les arbres prisèrent mes paroles  
 et le troupeau, mes poèmes.  
 Car qui proclamera et qui célébrera  
 et qui racontera les oeuvres du Seigneur?  
 L’univers, Eloah le voit:  
 l’univers, Lui l’entend, et Lui prêté l’oreille.

**Rabinowitz** (1964, p. 196):

“The mountains will not bear witness for me,  
 nor the hills;  
 the trees will not report my words on my behalf,  
 nor the flocks my deeds;  
 but O that someone would report,  
 O that someone would speak about,  
 O that someone would recount my deeds!”  
 The Master of the universe saw;  
 The God of the universe—  
 He himself heard,  
 and He himself gave ear.

**Weiss** (1964, v. 3 with Sanders, 1963):

But who can proclaim and who can tell,  
 and who can recount the works of the Lord of the Universe?  
 The God of the Universe has seen—  
 He has heard and he has heeded.

**Carmignac** (1965, pp. 250–251 (see Carmignac, 1975 for “nouvelles précisions”]):

“Les montagnes ne témoigneront pas pour moi  
 et les collines ne proclameront pas en faveur de moi,  
 les arbres (ne proclameront pas) mes paroles  
 et le troupeau mes oeuvres.  
 Qui est-ce donc qui proclamera,  
 qui est-ce qui exprimera,  
 qui est-ce qui racontera mes oeuvres?”

#### Second Strophe

Le maître de l’univers a vu,  
 le dieu de l’univers, lui, il a entendu  
 et, lui, il a prêté l’oreille.

**Delcor** (1966, pp. 18 and 20):

Nicht können die Berge für mich Zeugnis ablegen noch die Hügel,  
 noch die Blätter der Bäume meine Worte verkünden,  
 noch die Herde meine Werke.  
 Denn wer kann ankündigen,  
 wer kann sagen,  
 wer kann meine Werke erzählen.  
 Der Herr des Universums hat gesehen,  
 der Gott des Universums;  
 er selbst hat aufgehört,  
 er selbst hat hingehört.

**Strugnell** (1966, p. 280):

The mountains cannot witness to Him,  
 nor the hills proclaim about Him;  
 (Nor) the trees (proclaim) His words,  
 nor the flocks his deeds.  
 For who can relate, who can tell  
 and who can recount the works of the Lord?  
 But God saw all, all He heard,  
 and He gave ear.

**Meyer** (1967, p. 165):

Die Berge zeugen für ihn nicht,  
 und die Hügel verkündigen [ihn] nicht;  
 [Aber] die Bäume preisen meine Worte  
 und das Kleinvieh meine Werke.  
 Fürwahr, wer verkündet und wer bespricht  
 und wer erzählt die Taten des Herrn?  
 Alles sieht Gott,  
 alles hört er und nimmt er wahr.

**Magne** (1975b, p. 544):

“Les montagnes [ne] témoignent [pas] sur moi,  
 et les collines [ne] rapportent [pas] à mon sujet;  
 les arbres <racontent> mes chants,  
 et les brebis, mes oeuvres;  
 mais qui rapporte,  
 et qui chante,  
 et qui raconte les oeuvres du Seigneur?”  
 Dieu voit tout,

il entend tout:  
il écouta.

**van der Woude** (1977, pp. 39–40):

“Die Berge legen für mich kein Zeugnis ab,  
und die Hügel verkünden mir zugunsten nicht,  
(weder) die Bäume meine Worte  
noch die Schafe meine Taten.  
Wahrlich, wer wird verkünden  
und wer wird erwähnen  
und wer wird erzählen meine Taten?”  
Der Herr des all sah (es),  
Der Gott des All,—  
Er selbst hörte hin  
und Er selbst horchte auf.

**Auffret** (1977, pp. 164–165):

“Les montagnes n’iront pas témoigner à mon sujet,  
et les collines n’iront pas rapporter sur mon compte,  
<ni> les arbres mes dits  
ou les brebis mes oeuvres.  
Qui irait rapporter,  
et qui irait dire,  
et qui irait raconter mes oeuvres?”  
Le Seigneur de l’univers a vu,  
le Dieu de l’univers, lui a entendu  
lui a prêté l’oreille.

**Cross** (1978, p. 69):

O that the mountains would bear Him witness,  
O that the hills would tell of him,  
The trees (recount) his deeds,  
And the flocks, His works!  
Would that someone tell and speak,  
And would that someone recite His works!  
The Lord of all saw;  
The God of all heard,  
And He gave heed.

**Baumgarten** (1978, pp. 575–576):

The mountains cannot witness to Him  
neither the hills tell about Him

(nor) the trees His words  
 nor the sheep His deeds.  
 For who can tell, and who can bespeak,  
 and who can relate the deeds of the Lord of All Things?  
 God has seen everything, He has heard and He has heeded.

**Starcky** (1979, p. 9):

les montagnes ne lui portent pas témoignage,  
 les collines n'annoncent rien de lui,  
 (ni) les arbres ses faits et gestes,  
 (ni) les troupeaux ses oeuvres!  
 Qui donc annoncera ses oeuvres,  
 qui en parlera, qui les racontera?  
 Le Seigneur de l'univers a vu,  
 le Dieu de l'univers, lui, a écouté,  
 et lui, il a prêté l'oreille.

**Smith** (1981):

The mountains do not witness to him,  
 Nor do the hills proclaim about him.  
 <But I will tell of his deeds;  
 (As) my burnt offerings I shall offer thanksgiving:>  
 (for) the logs, my words,  
 and (for) the sheep, my deeds.

[                    ]  
 God saw everything;  
 He heard and He heeded.

#### Synopsis of Crucial Readings

Ps 151:3a (stich 9):

*lō*: Sanders, 1963; Skehan, 1963; Brownlee, 1963;  
 Carmignac, 1963; Dupont-Sommer, 1964a; Weiss,  
 1964; Strugnell, 1966; Meyer, 1967; Cross, 1978;  
 Baumgarten, 1978; Starcky, 1979; Smith, 1981.

*lī*: Rabinowitz, 1964; Carmignac, 1965; Delcor, 1966;  
 Magne, 1975b; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret,  
 1977.

Ps 151:3c (stich 11):

*illū*: Sanders, 1963; Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963;  
 Dupont-Sommer, 1964a; Weiss, 1964; Meyer,  
 1967.



<sup>ḥ</sup>*ālê*: Skehan, 1963; Delcor, 1966.

<sup>ḥ</sup>*alay*: Rabinowitz, 1964; Carmignac, 1965; Magne, 1975a; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret, 1977.

<sup>ḥ</sup>*ālāw*: Strugnell, 1966; Cross, 1978; Baumgarten, 1978; Starcky, 1979; Smith, 1981.

Ps 151:3c-d (stichs 11-12):

*debāray/ma<sup>ḥ</sup>āsay*: Sanders, 1963; Skehan, 1963; Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963 and 1965; Dupont-Sommer, 1964a; Rabinowitz, 64; Weiss, 1964; Delcor, 1966; Meyer, 1967; Magne, 1975b; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret, 1977; Smith, 1981.

*debārāw/ma<sup>ḥ</sup>asāw*: Strugnell, 1966; Cross, 1978; Baumgarten, 1978; Starcky, 1979.

Ps 151:4b (stich 15):

*ma<sup>ḥ</sup>āsê*: Sanders, 1963; Skehan, 1963; Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963; Dupont-Sommer, 1964a; Weiss, 1964; Strugnell, 1966; Meyer, 1967; Magne, 1975b; Baumgarten, 1978; Smith, 1981 (but, as intrusion).

*ma<sup>ḥ</sup>āsay*: Rabinowitz, 1964; Carmignac, 1965; Delcor, 1966; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret, 1977.

*ma<sup>ḥ</sup>asāw*: Cross, 1978; Starcky, 1979.

Ps 151:4b-c (stichs 15-16):

<sup>ḥ</sup>*ādôn*: Sanders, 1963; Skehan, 1963; Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963; Dupont-Sommer, 1964b; Strugnell, 1966; Meyer, 1967; Magne, 1975b.

<sup>ḥ</sup>*ādôn haqqôl*: Rabinowitz, 1964; Weiss, 1964; Carmignac, 1965; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret, 1977; Cross, 1978; Baumgarten, 1978; Starcky, 1979; Smith, 1981.

Ps 151:4c-d (stichs 16-17):

<sup>ḥ</sup>*êlô<sup>ḥ</sup>ah*: Sanders, 1963; Skehan, 1963; Brownlee, 1963; Carmignac, 1963; Dupont-Sommer, 1964a; Strugnell, 1966; Meyer, 1967; Magne, 1975b; Baumgarten, 1978.

<sup>ḥ</sup>*êlô<sup>ḥ</sup>ah haqqôl*: Rabinowitz, 1964; Weiss, 1964; Carmignac, 1965; van der Woude, 1977; Auffret, 1977; Cross, 1978; Starcky, 1979; Smith, 1981.

## CONCLUSION

The text has been available to the full scholarly world for over twenty years, and yet there is still no consensus on how to read 11QPs 151:3–4. Some of the world's most respected scholars have worked on the text, and still there is no compelling argument for a single grouping of readings of the above six crux words or phrases. While I do not want to appear dogmatic about my own readings, I at the same time have seen no compelling reasons to abandon them. And I can readily imagine my colleagues all making the same point.

In other words, we have a treasure in 11QPs 151 to use as a model for illustrating the literary phenomenon of multivalency at its most basic level. While there is multivalency in good literature beyond the basic textual level with many examples to illustrate it, rarely have we been given, in less than four lines from a scribe's hand, six ambiguous readings on which seventeen world-class scholars have worked with no consensus emerging twenty full years after publication. Indeed the latest efforts have been among the most divergent!

While multivalency of texts is a universal literary phenomenon, the hermeneutics by which texts are read determines how the reader chooses readings. This is no less the case when the multivalency is a basically textual one than when it is of a supposedly higher literary sort. In the case of 11QPs 151, I must admit that I have at times sensed a hermeneutic of avoidance as much at play in the work of some of my colleagues as I discerned twenty-three years ago in the work of the early translators, or perhaps in the revised *Vorlage* they worked with.

Be that as it may, we can all at least celebrate the fact of a richly multivalent text to illustrate the point that really good texts are to some extent beyond the manipulation even of first-rate scholarship. It might even be seen as a further contribution to the recent efforts of scholarship to be a bit less singularist and a bit more humble about recovering "authorial intentionality" of these texts we all love so much. This alone should make a true scholar like Sheldon Blank happy indeed.

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