

SIR GODFREY DRIVER

The difficulty of translating this verse is well known and is clearly brought out in the generally accepted translation, namely

'The LORD is God, and he hath given us light;

'bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar' (R.V.).

The perfect 'he hath given us light' is against the context, which seems to require a wish in accordance with the verbs in the surrounding verses, and the imperative 'bind' has no obvious subject.

Professor Yadin, however, in 1966 published¹ a fragment of a Scroll which goes far towards solving the problem. In place of אֲסוּרֵי חֶג 'bind ye a pilgrimage' (not 'sacrifice', as in the R.V.) this has אֲסוּרֵי חֶג 'bound ones of a pilgrimage', which refers not, as Professor Yadin suggests, to the sacrificial beasts but to the 'ordered band of pilgrims' standing beside the altar; for the analogy of Roman practice suggests that the festal crowd may have been kept in order by ropes. Some such practice can be illustrated by the poet's *tu inter eas restim ductans saltabis* 'thou wilt dance passing a rope from one to another' (literally 'through them', i.e. through the hands of the maidens dancing with her)² and by the historian's *in foro pompa constitit et, per manus reste data, virgines sonum vocis pulsus pedum modulantes incesserunt* 'in the Forum the procession halted and the maidens, passing a rope 'from hand to hand, advanced accompanying the sound of the 'voice by beating time with the feet.'³ The purpose of the rope in both cases will have been to keep the lines of dancers straight by passing it through their hands, so that they do not become entangled with one another in their excitement; and in the same way the Hebrew pilgrims may have been kept from crowding too close upon the altar by ropes tied round those at the head or on the outskirts of the procession.

Then וַיֵּאָר 'and he has given light' may read as יֵאָר 'may be given light' with two Hebrew MSS. (de Rossi) and the conjunction may be omitted with one MS. (de Rossi) and several ancient VSS. (Pesh., Targ. and Arab. Q,R,B,P),

1 In *Textus V* [1966] 6-7.

2 Terence *Adelphos* IV vii 37.

3 Livy *ab urbe condita* XXVII xxxvii 14.

while עַד 'till, up to' may be taken in the local sense of 'at, beside' as often elsewhere.⁴

The verse may now be translated:

'may the LORD God shine upon us'

'the ordered line of pilgrims⁵ by the horns of the altar'

'pilgrims lined up beside (or:at) the horns of the altar',

which yields a sense suitable to the context and agreeable to a known practice of the ancient world.⁶

4 Cp. Yellin in *Abrahams Festschr.* [1927] 448–52, Ginsberg in *B.A.S.O.R.* CXXII [1951] 12–14 and Speir *op. cit.* CXXVI [1952] 27, and Driver in *Annual of the Leeds University Oriental Society* IV [1964] 21.

5 Cp. 1 Ki. 14:6; Is. 33:1; Ps. 69:4 (where emendation is needless) for participles qualifying pron. suffixes.

6 Cp. 1 Ki. 20:14; 2 Chron, 13:3 and 1QM 5:3 for a somewhat similar use of the same verb (see Yadin in, *Scroll of the War* (tr. Rabin 165–8).