

OF BRIDES AND BIRDS: A REPLY TO M. LICHTENSTEIN

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I wish to thank the editor of *JANES*, Dr. Marcus, for kindly placing at my disposal a copy of M. Lichtenstein's paper for purposes of reply and rebuttal. The remarks that follow are not intended to be exhaustive, and they deal less with Lichtenstein's own case than with his challenges to mine.

Let me begin by restating briefly those contentions in my paper with which Lichtenstein is in agreement either tacit or express.

1. The idea, and ritual reality, of the *šušbîn/susapīnu*—roughly 'best-man'—is demonstrable in the ancient Near East as early as Sumer and as late as Talmudic times.

2. The Ugaritic piece NK (=CTA 24) cites the *kīrt* by name. Two, possibly three, of the seven names are to be connected with terms denoting objects of value which accompany the bride and remain her property either as dowry or trousseau.

3. The *kīrt* are equated with the Akk. *šassurātu*—'birth goddesses'—of whom it is said, *inter alia*, that they "institute marriage."

4. The *susapīnū* of Dumuzi, consort of Inanna (Ištar), are seven; the *kīrt* of NK are seven; the bridal attendants of Esther are seven; and the *šassurātu* of *Ātraḫasīs* are "twice seven."

5. OT Heb. *yš* in the *hiphil* formation can mean 'to escort', especially when it takes a direct object as in Ps. 68:7; OT Heb. *yšb* in the *hiphil* formation can mean 'take a wife', especially when accompanied by a term like *bay/it* 'family, household' as in Ps. 68:7; and all these usages are elsewhere and independently attested in the OT.

We now proceed to consider the challenges.

I. Re **arûšim* 'betrothen ones'

A. Lichtenstein's authority for doubting that the Akk. *ērišu* means 'bridegroom' is M. Held's note in *JBL* 84 (1965), 278, n. 29, where it is concluded "the rendering of *ērišu* as 'bridegroom' is open to serious doubts." One may note however the following:

1. No assyriological lexicon from Muss-Arnoldt through Bezold, *AHw.*, and *CAD* has ever questioned the validity of this rendering. Nor is the *evidence* for this definition denied by Held himself: "There is no denial of the fact that the lexical equation of *ērišu*=*ḫā'iru* [= bridegroom—B.M.] is well attested However . . . *ērišu* is equated in the lexical texts not only with *ḫā'iru* but also, by implication, with *ḫa'āru* the meaning of *ḫa'āru* is still not established" (emphasis added —B.M.).

2. One suspects that the *real* source of Prof. Held's dilemma is the Etana passage which represents the sole literary attestation of *ērišu*: "Have mercy upon me and I will bestow upon thee a dowry (*nudunnâ*) like a bridegroom (*kīma ērišu*)." Since when do bridegrooms bestow dowries? it may be fairly asked. I herewith submit two tentative replies:

a) According to Finkelstein (RA 61 [1967], 130, 134) Akk. *nudunnûm* can also mean 'a gift of fiancé to bride'. See also *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vol. 5 (1957), 906, where OB *nudunnû* is described as "un cadeau de mariage . . . que le futur faisait à son épouse pour assurer sa subsistance au cas où il viendrait à mourir."

b) S.N. Kramer renders a passage in a Sumerian hymn thus: "The Tigris surrendered to him [=Enki —B.M.] as [to —S.N.K.] a rampant bull./He lifted [his —S.N.K.] penis, brought the bridal gift, . . ." (*The Sacred Marriage Rite* [Bloomington, Indiana, 1969], 53).

B. Lichtenstein states: "In the Mishnah . . . the passive participle *'arûsah*, as well as the *pu'al me'ôrāsāh*, designate the female betrothed, while the male is spoken of only as *me'arrēs*" (emphasis added —B.M.). It is regrettable that Lichtenstein confined his search to the Mishnah. Had he taken into consideration the entire Talmudic corpus, or even Ben Yehuda's *Thesaurus* (vol. 1, 383) he would have had no difficulty locating Middle Hebrew usages of *'arûs* in the sense of bridegroom. Thus we read in a pre-Herodian Baraita (Jer. Tal. *Hag.* 2:2):

והיו בני ירושלם כותבין מירושלם הגדולה לאלכסנדריא
הקטנה עד מתי ארוסי יושב אצלכם ואני יושבת
ענומה

(cf. also Bab. Tal. Ned. 67b, Keth. 13b).

One cannot accordingly fault Baumgartner et al., *Hebräisches-Aramäisches Lexikon*, 88b, for citing MHeb./JAram. *'arûs* 'Verlobter', the source of Arabic *'arûs* and, of course, cognate with Akk. *ērīšu*.

There is thus nothing intrinsically improbable about a MHeb. **'arûsîm* meaning either 'bridegrooms' or 'betrothen' (i.e., *'arûs* + *'arûsā[h]*).¹

C. In view of the meagerness of the data, not to mention the inherent ambiguity of a basically consonantal script, one can hardly be dogmatic about the possibilities of a *qal* formation of *'rś* in Biblical Hebrew. It needs hardly be emphasized that the *qal* and *pi'el* are not mutually exclusive formations or that the boundaries between Biblical Hebrew—especially late Biblical Hebrew—and Middle Hebrew, where both the *qal* and *pi'el* of *'rs* are attested, are not hard and fast.

But the probability of a late-Biblical Hebrew or Middle Hebrew "gloss" in Psalm 68 depends ultimately on one's views of Psalm 68 as a whole.² I should be one of the last to deny that Psalm 68 contains archaic materials;³ but to conclude from this that the psalm as a unit and in its present form is ancient is to fly in the face of some very considerable evidence. (Lichtenstein of course is not alone in this; indeed his company is most distinguished.) Some of this evidence I cited in my paper: the Second Commonwealth stylistic revision represented by the use of the divine onomasticon *ādōnāy* (and not merely *'elōhîm*) for *YHWH* (passim); the influence of late-Biblical Hebrew or Middle Hebrew orthography in the form *mitrappēs* (v. 31) for **mitrappēs*, significantly involving the identical shift alleged for **'arûsîm*. To this may be added an

¹The vocable **'arûsîm* is not expressly found in MHeb. sources, but *'arûsôt* 'fiancées' is; cf. Ben Yehuda.

²As well as on one's views of the origins of MHeb., on which see Ben-David, *Lešon miqrā ulešon hakāmim*, rev. ed. (1967), esp. 60-80.

³See my article in *Tarbiz* 30 (1969-70), 1-8.

indication of lateness on the literary level. Thus one notes how, in the quotation from Judg. 5:4-5 (cf. also Deut. 33:2) in verses 8 and 9 of the psalm, references to Edom and Seir have been neatly cut away. Can one really separate this development from the fierce anti-Edomite feelings of sixth century Israelite literature (Isa. 34 (!); 63:1-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 35; Obad.) which culminates in Edom becoming, by late Second Temple times, a euphemism for the hated Rome?

Finally, one should recall in this connection the well-known paradox, namely, that most of the archaic material in the OT, especially of a mythological nature, is to be found precisely in the late books: Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, and Job. Conversely, genuinely ancient pieces like the Song of Deborah, the Patriarchal Benedictions or Testimonies, the Song of the *Moslim*, and so forth, are almost entirely free of the type of overt mythology found in Psalms 68, 74, 82, and so forth.

II. Re the nuptial connotations of *môšîb* and *môšî*

I am sorry to say that much of what Lichtenstein has to say on the matter of nuptial connotations strikes me as hypercritical quibbling, at times even as special pleading.

A. Within the frame of reference set out in my paper, is it really relevant, much less decisive, that in Ps. 19:5-6 *yš* 'is in the *qal* rather than the *hiphil*, or that no *šušbîn* is mentioned? Is not the distinction which Lichtenstein draws between 'marriage' and 'fertility' apropos Ps. 113:9, and between 'family' and 'mate' apropos *yehîdîm* and *bayetâh* in Ps. 68:7, rather a case of splitting hairs, of distinctions which, given our terms of reference, are not real differences? Stated differently: I should have no objection to rendering verse 7a "The Lord founds a family for the solitary"; nor do I see that my case is any the weaker for this change.

B. Is not the explanation offered by Lichtenstein for *hôšîb* 'take a wife' in Ezra-Nehemiah—"employed, in place of what were considered more formal or legitimizing terms" (note 35)—the purest speculation? Is it not moreover suspect—along with the exegesis of *yehîdîm* as 'the militarily exempt *caelibis causa*' (contrast Deut. 20:5), and the quite innocent denial of reflexes of matrimonial ritual in Gen. 24:61ff.⁴—as *disputatio per se* and *explicatio ad hoc*?

III. Re the Ugaritic *ktrt*

A. Though presumably in agreement with my treatment of most of the critical issues connected with the interpretation of these personalities, Lichtenstein charges me with having isolated "one function performed by the *ktrt* . . . and then proceeding to assume that this one aspect is that which was transmitted to preserve in ancient Hebrew hymnic literature." Lichtenstein concludes this point with the statement that "clearly, 'bridesmaids' cannot be favored over 'midwives'."

I respectfully submit that this assertion is both factually wrong and misleading.

1. The Ugaritic texts do not explicitly attribute *any* function to the *ktrt*; the scholarly debate is a direct consequence of this unwelcome silence.

2. The new evidence equating the *ktrt* with the *šassurātu*, taken together with the Rephaim texts (CTA 20-22), makes *some function connected with birth* a probable *inference*. It does not follow, however, that the *ktrt* are to be considered specifically, much less exclusively, midwives.

⁴Cf. Gunkel's early commentary on *Genesis*, 3rd ed. (Gottingen, 1910), ad loc., and bibliography *ibid.*; *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, vol. 5; and most recently Greenfield, *EI* 9 (1969), 64.

3. The inference of bridesmaid functions was drawn from evidence no less substantial than what we presumed to be (and Lichtenstein did not challenge this point) the proper names of three of the damsels: 'Dowry' (*ṭlhh*); 'Trousseau' (or the like; *mlgh*); and 'Pulchra' (*dmqt*), perhaps also 'Jewel' (cf. OT PNs (fem.) *penina(h)*; *'adā(h)'*/*'adayā(h)*). Common to at least two, possibly all three, is a very intimate association with nuptials generally and the bride in particular; hence bridesmaids or bridal attendants. This of course has little or nothing to do with the ceremonial relic of the modern (western) church or synagogue wedding. What I intended—and what I believe I made clear—was a well-to-do bride who, in the manner of the foreign princess in Psalm 45 or the aristocratic matriarch in Genesis 24, comes to her prospective husband accompanied by 'girlfriends' (*rē'ôt*) or 'maidens' (*ne'ārôt*), whose life-long duty it shall henceforth be to tend to the Lady's needs, presumably not excluding those moments of direst need represented by childbirth (cf. Gen. 35:16-19). It is doubtless from the ranks of these 'ladies-in-waiting' (or their offspring), rather than from the menial servants, that the polygamous patriarch will take his concubines.

If, to this configuration, one adds the mythic element represented by the *ktrt*—the latter are not after all to be conceived as real flesh-and-blood bridal attendants any more than Yahweh is a real flesh-and-blood *šušbîn* (or judge, or warrior, etc.)—then one may, I believe, conclude that the *ktrt* are prototypal bridal attendants or ladies-in-waiting, or as such figures are designated in the Judaeo-Christian (mostly Christian) tradition, patron-saints, to whom the devotee will turn for both physical and spiritual succor.

B. I fully concur with Lichtenstein that *bnt hll snnt* is potentially a most important clue to the identity of the *ktrt*; would that we knew what it meant! Without committing myself to a definitive interpretation, I implied my preference for the view which would make the *ktrt* either 'daughters of Venus-Ištar' (cf. Isa. 14:12) designated in Akkadian literature 'goddess of women' (ANET³, 384b) and, apud Virolleaud, *sinuntu* 'swallow'; or 'daughters of the moon-crescent' (Arab. *hilāl*), corresponding to Ištar, daughter of the Sumero-Akkadian moon-god Sin, and no less rich in gynecic overtones.

C. As concerns *ktr-w-ḥss*:

1. The relation of the *ktrt* to this deity is anything but certain. Nowhere in Ugariitic literature are they ever connected.

2. *Ktr-w-ḥss*'s relation to music is known from much later sources (cf. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 4th ed. [Baltimore, 1956], 82). RS 24.252 (obv.) is no exception: it is far from clear—to my mind, most doubtful—that *ḥbr* in this context (occurring, incidentally, and pace Lichtenstein, as *bḥbr*) means 'friend', much less musician-friend.⁵ I remain staunchly persuaded that *ḥbr* bears here the same meaning as in SS (=CTA 23) 76 *whbrh mla yn* 'and his vat is filled with wine', as correctly rendered by Aistleitner (*Wörterbuch*, no. 896).

The question is then legitimately put: what precisely is the evidence for a musical affiliation of the *ktrt*? Is it conceivable that the entire theory rests ultimately

⁵ Parenthetically, I confess to being at a loss to explain Lichtenstein's objection (n. 56) to my rendering of *dšn* by 'pour' (=Heb. *dšn* 'to grease, make fatty'; nominal 'drink') on the grounds that we "expect" *yšq*. This same argument, it seems to me, can be used to reject the generally accepted rendering of Ps. 23:5, on the grounds that we "expect" *māšahū*!

(and exclusively) on Hebrew *hallel* 'to (sing?) praise', as suggested by Van Selms (*Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* [London, 1954], 88)? *Mirabile dictu*!⁶

IV. Summation

Considerations of time and space prevent me from offering a full critique of the solution(s) proposed by Lichtenstein himself. Suffice it to say that, in my estimation, Lichtenstein hardly takes us beyond the traditional, uniformly questionable interpretations, submitted almost invariably with the greatest reserve. Nor am I persuaded that Lichtenstein has laid the traditional ghosts to rest. *Kšr* in the significations alleged—'health, prosperity, deftness'—is well attested only in the Aramaic languages, whence its sporadic entry into late-Biblical Hebrew (Ecclesiastes and Esther); the precise meaning of Ugar. *ktr*—itself poorly attested—is moot in the extreme; and above all, the morphology of the alleged derivative in Ps. 68:7 continues to confound etymological exegesis.⁷ It may be further observed that while *some* of Lichtenstein's comparative material is illuminating, most of the alleged "parallels" serve in lieu of, rather than in addition to, real evidence. After all, one hardly needs to be persuaded that Hebrew and Akkadian are cognate languages, or that Hebrews and Babylonians had some similar ideas (and idioms) regarding prisoners.

In sum: even after Lichtenstein's painstaking critique it still seems to me—

1. that a passage which speaks of the deity as "founding a family (or "finding a mate") for the solitary" and who "escorts with (or "by-means-of") *kôšārôt*" has matrimony (in the widest sense) as its theme;

2. that the occurrence of a Hebrew term *kôšārôt*—a linguistically faultless equivalent of Ugar. *ktr*⁸ and for which no etymological explanation has ever exceeded the barely plausible—considered against the evidential backdrop of the *ktr*-*šassurātu* equation and *ktr* nomenclature, cannot but strengthen our conviction in a matrimonial theme;

3. that while *ššrîm* 'prisoners' is all but impossible in such a context,⁹ **šrîšîm* 'betrothen', effected by a mere metathesizing of the medial consonants (discounting the insignificant vowel-letter alteration), is at once linguistically valid and, most importantly, contextually apt.

⁶In view of the fact that Lichtenstein himself is unpersuaded by the case for the *ktr* as 'artistes' (p. 105), is not the argument on p. 104 still another case of special pleading?

⁷Lichtenstein has however overlooked the potential plum offered him by Dietrich and Loretz (*OLZ* 62 [1967], 542), who, citing Akkadian *kušru* 'ingot' (*CAD*, K, 600) render 'Fesseln'. But the linguistic footing here is equally treacherous, considering that the Akkadian is attested only in NB (so *CAD*), or that 'ingot' is still not 'Fesseln'.

⁸It is curious to note that while he takes considerable pains to sever the Ugar. *ktr* from the OT *kôšārôt*, Lichtenstein does not hesitate to invoke the *ktr*-*šassurātu* equation, or the OT "wise woman" to make *his* case (e.g., notes 91, 97). Furthermore, if the *ktr*-*šassurātu* can also be considered 'skilled ones' (fem.), and the latter is a plausible rendering of *kôšārôt*, is this not an additional argument for *my* case? Lichtenstein apparently failed to sense that my interpretation does not *preclude* most of the etymological options, but only reduces them to secondary importance.

⁹Lichtenstein seems to imply that my rejection of the motif of "divine liberator" in Ps. 68:7 is necessarily a denial of the motif as such within hymnic literature. Furthermore, one of the conclusions that may be drawn from Ps. 146:7 is that when a biblical author wants to express this idea he has no difficulty making himself perfectly clear.