

A NOTE ON ISAIAH 45: 9

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The first stich of this verse reads in the MT:

הַיְיָ רֵב אֶת-יָצְרוֹ חָרַשׁ אֶת-חֲרֻשׁוֹ אֶדְמָה

and is rendered in the KJV "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds of the earth." The two sentences (as rendered above) have required some interpolation in order to achieve some semblance of coherence of thought. Clearly the initial hemistich of the passage delineates a sharp contrast between man and his *yōšēr*, "Maker," "Shaper," "Fashioner" (or "Potter," if you please). In view of the use of this figure of speech, it is only normal juxtaposition for the next hemistich to begin with *herēš*, "potsherd." However, the force of the symbol is somewhat weakened, if man, as a "potsherd," is next represented as striving with his fellow men, the "potsherds" of earth.

Rather, it seems apparent that the "woe" applies to the whole stich. Although there is no repetition of *rāb*, it admittedly should be considered as occurring implicitly. Thus there is a high degree of probability that the two hemistichs are in apposition. If this is so, it would be expected that 'et in the second hemistich, would be followed by an active participle, as in the first, and that this participle would refer to the Creator of man, rather than to a man's fellow men.¹

This conjecture is strikingly supported by the DSS, in which IQIs^a reads חרש את חורשי האדמה, with the *waw* indicating a qal active participle. However, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to postulate a participle from חרש, so it must

¹ A natural reluctance on the part of some to apply a plural noun to the Creator is counterbalanced by the well nigh universal recognition by both Jewish and Christian scholars of the OT use of the plural of deity (cf. Gn 1: 26; etc.).

rather be from **חָרַשׁ**. The active participle from the latter occurs frequently, and means "artisan" or "workman," usually one working in wood or metal. The basic meaning of the verb is "to plow." With *h'dmh*, the most obvious translation would be "the plowers (plowmen) of the soil." However, in view of the close parallelism between the two hemistichs, the rendering "the artisans of the earth (soil)" must be given equal weight, if not considered superior.

At least of equal significance and interest is the IQIs^a reading in the first hemistich where the plural **יוצְרָיו** occurs for the MT singular *yōṣṣrō*. This clinches the parallelism, the designation "his shapers," being in perfect agreement with "artisans" or "plowers." However, a word of caution is in order lest undue emphasis be placed on the fact that "shapers" occurs in the plural, for in IQIs^a the plural is not differentiated from the singular, as shown in the next stich.²

The second stich of this verse reads in the MT:

הַיֹּאמֵר חֹמֶר לְיוֹצְרוֹ מִהַתְּעַשֶּׂה וּפְעֻלָּהּ אֵין-יָדַיִם לוֹ

and develops further the opening motif (as do indeed the following verses). The MT *h^ayō'mar* apparently represents a syncope of the IQIs^a **הוּא הַיֹּאמֵר** which is probably original. The MT *hōmer* meaning "clay," accords admirably with the general theme and the previous terms used, "shaper" or "potter" and "potsherd." Perhaps its absence could be easier explained as haplography (in oral dictation) in IQIs^a, than its presence as dittography in the MT. However, it would be difficult to determine incontestably which reading is original.

Finally, the usage here of the active participle in referring to man's Creator seems to be carried out fully in IQIs^a with the reading **וּפְעֻלָּהּ** (though admittedly this could possibly be *plene* for the MT **וּפְעֻלָּהּ**). The additional word **אָדָם**, occurring between *'én* and *yādayim* in IQIs^a changes the MT thought considerably. The phrase with *'dm* becomes a summary idea

² In the second stich, IQIs^a is partially illegible, but the **צָרָה** [—] shows no divergence from the MT *l'yōṣṣrō*.

emphasizing the contrast between man and his Maker.³

A suggested reconstruction of the entire verse is as follows (being basically the reading of IQIs^a, with only the doubtful addition of *hmr*):

הוי רב אח יוצריו חרש את חורשי האדמה
 חוי האומר חמר ליוצרו מה תעשה ופועלכה אין אדם ידיים לו

“Woe to him who contends with his Shaper(s), a potsherd, with the Artisan(s) of the earth (soil). Woe to him who [being] clay, says to his Shaper, What art thou doing? Thy Maker is not a man (human being) having hands.”

³ The final thought concerning man that “he (has) hands” (lit. “[there are] hands to him”) possibly focuses attention on the human potter as being dependent on his hands for shaping clay into usable utensils. In contrast, God as the Creator is not dependent on hands for his power, but commands, and the power of the spoken word accomplishes His purposes (Ps 33: 6, 9; cf. the divine *Logos* in the NT).