

JEWELRY OF BIBLE TIMES
AND THE CATALOG OF ISA 3:18-23
PART II*

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In Part I of this series, I discussed sixteen of the twenty-one terms in the catalog of jewelry in Isa 3 and noted the evidence that the catalog represents both men's and women's jewelry. The point at issue in Isa 3 is not a criticism of the so-called fickleness of women's fashions but a denouncement of persons in high office for their social injustice. Before we proceed to an analysis of the final five more obscure terms in the list, it will be well to review some of the reasons for, and history of, the general misconception that Isa 3 represents an attack on women's "fickle fashions."

4. *Translation Difficulties and Culturally Oriented Interpretation*

A major difficulty which modern readers have with Isa 3 is that translators have not used consistently in various parts of the Bible the same English word for the original Hebrew term. Even more confusion arises, however, when a rare ancient word is given meaning by the fashions of the translator's own milieu. The latter is perhaps the major translation difficulty responsible for bringing confusion to the reader of English translations of Isa 3.

* Part I was published in *AUSS* 17 (1979): 71-84. The following abbreviated forms are used herein for works already cited in Part I:

BDB = Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1952).

Guy and Engberg = P. L. O. Guy and Robert M. Engberg, *Megiddo Tombs*, OIP, vol. 32 (Chicago, 1938).

Hayes = William C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

Indeed, the lists used in translations of Isa 3:18-23 are known to mirror the dress styles of the major eras of Bible translations. E.g., *The Holy Scriptures* of Miles Coverdale, 1535,¹³ speaks of *spanges, cheynes, partlettes, hooves, "ye goodly floured, wyde and brodered raymet," brusshes, glasses, smocks, bonettes, and taches*; and the Geneva Bible, 1560,¹⁴ refers to *slippers, sweet balls, sloppes, tablets, flaunes, and stomachers*. A number of the same designations are also used by the KJV, 1611, with the memorable *cauls, "round tires like the moon," mufflers, wimples and crissing pinnes*. The ASV, 1901, mentions *headtires, ankle chains, sashes, nose jewels, mantles, and satchels*; the Moffatt Bible, 1922, modernizes with *tiaras, necklaces, scent-bottles, purses, gauze, and wrappers*; and J. B. Phillips, 1963,¹⁵ has *party dresses, stoles, and handbags*. The JB, 1966, has identified *mantillas* in the list. The NEB OT, 1970, has *coronets, lockets and flounced skirts*, while the Jewish Publication Society of America's Isaiah, 1973,¹⁶ includes *lace gowns, linen vests, and an apron*. Reading translations like these with the aid of a contemporary dictionary (and especially for the older versions, the Oxford English Dictionary) yields intriguing information for the history of costume and reveals the translator as a zealous prophet who persevered with the task of trying to make God's Holy Word understandable to his generation.

But there are problems, too, with this approach to difficult Hebrew words. In some societies jewelry and apparel do not particularly carry associations of leadership and special office, but rather have become the property of one group or even one sex. One example is the limited definition that Americans may think of for "mantilla"—the lace headscarf worn by Latin-American/Spanish women immigrants to conservative Catholic

¹³ *The Holy Scriptures*, trans. Miles Coverdale (1535; 2d modern ed., London, 1847).

¹⁴ *The Geneva Bible* (1560; reprint ed., London, 1599).

¹⁵ J. B. Phillips, *Four Prophets* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

¹⁶ H. L. Ginsberg, *The Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973).

churches as required head covering at Sunday mass. The danger with overly contemporizing translations of Isa 3 is that they tend to define this particular catalog in terms relating to fairly ordinary women's dress, irrespective of the fact that such rendition goes contrary to the meaning and intent of the original.

Indeed, this passage has tended to become the *locus classicus* for the religious denunciation of feminine accouterment and the accompanying deprecation of feminine personality and womanhood itself as characteristically consumed with the superficiality of dress and jewelry. To cite one prominent example, R. B. Y. Scott in his exegetical treatment in the prestigious *IB*, used so often by Protestant clergy, assumes that the catalog in Isa 3 refers to belongings peculiar to women. Even though he does hint at the larger context including the denunciation of the men of the society in the early chapters of the book, he equates jewelry and ostentatious dress as the domain of women alone:

The pride of men showed itself in the building of great towers and tall ships, in the arrogance which sought to master the world in forgetfulness of God (cf. 2:15-17). The same pride showed itself in the luxury and ostentation which had become the sole objective and standard of fashionable women, contemptuous of others and indifferent to the human cost of the privileges they enjoyed.¹⁷

In the *IB* homiletical section on the same chapter, G. C. D. Kilpatrick goes even further by making application to the sinfulness peculiarly characteristic of womanhood and to its far-reaching devastating consequences:

- . . . degenerate womanhood can corrupt a nation.
- . . . the moral quality of womanhood determines the character of society. These are the mothers of men, they set the ideals of men, and by what they are, either inspire or corrupt their sons.
- . . . the womanhood of a nation, more than any other single agency, determines the character and destiny of men.
- . . . the hand that rocks the cradle . . . rules the world.¹⁸

¹⁷ *IB* 5: 191.

¹⁸ *IB* 5: 191-193.

It seems obvious that the interpretation which Kilpatrick felt was the most relevant for contemporary preaching was to keep women from being morally degenerate by their use of jewelry and ostentatious apparel lest they corrupt the *true* people of the society, the men, bearers of high ideals and prime movers in the tide of empires! We can easily envision the sermon that has chosen for its text the excerpted section of Isa 3:16-24 and whose aim would be to draw out in vivid castigation—by means of a contemporary catalog of women's dress—the sinfulness characteristic of womanhood consistent in its propensity for moral degeneracy from Isaiah's day till now!

Another example of the seriousness with which this passage has been read as a denunciation of women is reflected in *The Woman's Bible*, 1898.¹⁹ Of all the passages of magnificent literature in the sixty-six chapters of the book of Isaiah, feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton has chosen only Isa 3:16-23 for comment. This choice in itself says something regarding the catalog's importance in the culture of her time. But even more interesting is the fact that this great women's-rights leader has accepted fully the interpretation of her contemporary church (though no doubt her witness to it is from a different stance):

The Prophet in the above texts reproves and warns the daughters of Zion and tells them of their faults. He does not like their style of walking, which from the description must have been much like the mincing gait of some women today.

The prophet expressly vouches God's authority for what he said concerning their manners and elaborate ornamentation, lest they should be offended with his criticisms. If the Prophets could visit our stores and see all the fashions there are to tempt the daughters of today, they would declaim against our frivolities on the very doorsteps, and in view of the Easter bonnets, at the entrance to our churches. The badges which our young women wear as members of societies, pinned in rows on broad ribbons, the earrings, the bangles, the big sleeves, the bonnets trimmed

¹⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, Part II (New York: European Publishing Co., 1898; reprint ed., Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974).

with osprey feathers, answer to the cringing pins, the wimples, the nose jewels, the tablets, the chains, the bracelets, the mufflers, the veils, the glasses and the girdles of the daughters of Zion. If the Prophets, instead of the French milliners and dressmakers, could supervise the toilets of our women they would dress in far better taste.²⁰

Evidently, in order for Stanton's voice to be heard, in order for her to gain attention long enough to be able to make any contribution, she must affirm that for which the rest of her society had some kind of affinity. Curiously, nevertheless, in her quotation of Isa 3:16-23, she omitted vs. 17 which includes "the Lord will lay bare their secret parts." Apparently Stanton could not preach a gospel in which God told male prophets that the humiliating punishment of women would result in such a dehumanizing action as "laying bare their secret parts." But she could affirm the denunciation of the superficiality of dress which was ultimately based on pleasing men because it gave women at least one entry into that society. She could affirm this because she was presenting an understanding of the free woman who could vote and make substantial contributions to the body politic on many more levels.

The translations noted above and the comments of Scott, Kilpatrick, and Stanton to which attention has been called are but samples of a very common misconception of the intent of the catalog in Isa 3.

A remedy for the situation would, of course, be to have a more accurate translation of the catalog in the light of usages in other parts of the biblical literature and on the basis of a review of the general context of Isa 3 itself. The central point of the passage is not the condemnation of women for superficiality in their preference for jewelry and ostentatious apparel. On the contrary, the point is that the *leaders* of the society, *both men and women* who wear the symbols of their offices, have corrupted that society by misuse of leadership at the expense of the poor.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

5. *New Suggestions Regarding the Isa 3 Catalog*

Finally, with regard to jewelry study and our task of discerning the specific ancient pieces to illustrate biblical passages, there are a few new suggestions for the Isa 3 catalog. These will deal primarily with the five obscure items that have not already been elucidated in Part I of this series.

The second item in the Isa 3 catalog is *hašš^ehîšîm*, and this instance is the only time in the Hebrew Bible that the word (and root) occurs. The RSV has translated "headbands"; the KJV and other early English Bibles prefer "cauls," which the Oxford English Dictionary describes as the networks (often richly ornamented) at the back of a kind of close-fitting woman's cap. The Moffatt translation has "tiaras," one of the *IB* suggestions is "buckles," and the Jewish Publication Society has "fillets."

A number of basic scholarly publications make the most interesting suggestion from the standpoint of Semitic linguistics, and this fits well with archaeological jewelry evidence. The revered Hebrew grammar reference text, Gesenius-Kautzsch, comments when discussing diminutives formed by inserting a "y" after the second radical that in this case it is "as though [we have] a foreign dialectical form for *šumais*, *little sun*."²¹ The BDB Hebrew *Lexicon* notes the suggestion of a sun and adds "small glass neck ornament."²² Scott in *IB* suggests objects "with circular faces of bright metal, 'little suns'" and mentions Shapash, the female sun divinity of the Ugaritic texts, as having some relationship.²³ George Buchanan Gray, in *ICC*, prefers "net bands," no doubt following the reasoning of the English translators who used "caul."²⁴ Gray claims that in the Hebrew of the Mishnah *šbys* "was the ornamental band that passed from ear to ear over the *sbkh*, a net covering and enclos-

²¹ *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch; 2d Eng. ed., edited by A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1910), p. 240, §86g, n. 1.

²² BDB, p. 987.

²³ *IB*, 5: 192.

²⁴ *ICC, The Book of Isaiah 1-39*, 1: 72.

ing the hair."²⁵ He also allows for the possibility of "a little sun" due to the interchanging of *b* and *m*, and hence Isaiah could have meant a pendant worn around the neck together with the following item in the catalog, the crescents.

Table 2. Partial List of the Jewelry Catalog of Isa 3:18-23*

RSV	Hebrew	Suggestions
Isa 3:		
vs. 18 In that day the Lord will take away		
(2) the headbands	<i>wēhaššēḥiśim</i>	and the sun- or star-disks,
(3) and the crescents;	<i>wēhaššaharōnim</i>	and the crescents,
vs. 19 (4) the pendants	<i>hannēṭipōt</i>	the drop pendants,
(5) the bracelets,	<i>wēhaššērōt</i>	and the necklace cords,
- (6) and the scarfs;	<i>wēhārē'ālōt</i>	and the beads,
vs. 20		
(10) the perfume boxes,	<i>ūḥātē hannepeš</i>	and the tubular "soul" cases,
vs. 22		
(15) the mantles,	<i>wēhamma'atāpōt</i>	and the enveloping capes,
vs. 23 (18) the garments of gauze	<i>wēhagilyōnim</i>	and the thin garments,

* The complete list of twenty-one items is given in Part I, Table 1, *AUSS* 17 (1979): 72.

In the preceding part of this article, I have reviewed the evidence for translating item (3) as "crescents," meaning moon-like pendants which can be suspended from a cord with droplet beads of various shapes, item (4).²⁶ One remarkable piece of jewelry that illustrates brilliantly this kind of neckwear is the fabulous Dilbat Necklace, dated to the first half of the second millennium and now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.²⁷ It has two strands of beads in front with six pendants

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See Part I, pp. 73-74.

²⁷ K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop, *Western Asiatic Jewellery* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 88-90. Hereinafter cited as *WAJ*.

suspended at intervals from the lower strand. Among the pendants is a truly exquisite crescent moon, two "rosettes," and a central "star disk." Comparable neck jewelry is depicted in Assyrian stone reliefs of a thousand years later, so surely this kind of necklace arrangement was not forgotten. A relief of Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 B.C.) shows his head and beard turned sideways to his right revealing a cord necklace with four pendants including an obvious crescent and a star disk.²⁸ Rosettes were found in gold, bronze, and bone in Palestinian Iron Age excavations at Bethshan, Gezer, Bethshemesh, and Megiddo; and star disks occurred in silver, gold, ivory, and bone at Megiddo, Gezer, Bethshan, and Hazor. Although the number of individual specimens is very limited, it is important to know that star disks, crescents, and rosettes were used in the time of Isaiah, who as a highly skilled political officer of the Kingdom of Judah prophesied during the second half of the eighth century concerning the Assyrian menace. Obviously, from the Mesopotamian evidence and the assemblages of valuable jewelry in which the objects were found at Israelite sites, these pendants could be significant symbols of high office.

The usual way that rosettes are distinguished from the star disks is by the rounded petals of the former. Western Asiatic jewelry authority K. R. Maxwell-Hyslop believes that the rosette, which occurs ubiquitously in the art of this part of the world, is essentially an emblem of the goddess Inanna-Ishtar and that the pointed-ray star is representative of a sun divinity.²⁹ But it is true that the two types appear to merge under the various craftsmen so that it can be difficult to perceive the difference between rosettes and star disks. Maxwell-Hyslop formally discusses the star pendants in her treatment of the jewelry of Syria-Palestine ca. 1550-1300 B.C.³⁰ She discerns two basic types: first, the circle with the star in repoussé plus a central boss and, customarily,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Pl. 220.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-151.

smaller bosses between each ray near the outside edge; and the second, the type with the cut-out rays extending from the central boss. These stars occur with four, six, or eight points. She refers to Claude F. A. Schaeffer's work at Ugarit and says that "either the six- or the four-pointed star pendants (or probably both) should be regarded as sun-pendants and symbols of the Ugaritic sun goddess, Shapash."³¹ The eight-pointed star, however, is a symbol of Ishtar:

In Babylonia, Ishtar as goddess of love and war was manifested in the form of the morning and evening star and her dual aspect had an astral character linked to the planet Venus. Often the eight-pointed star was inscribed on a disc and there was very little difference between conventionalized rendering of the star and the rosette, which was also used from the earliest times as a symbol of the goddess Inanna-Ishtar.³²

A third type of disk is the pointed star with wavy lines or curved rays between each point. Both Maxwell-Hyslop and H. Frankfort, a renowned authority in Mesopotamian art,³³ agree that this is a symbol of the sun god—Babylonian Shamash and Sumerian Utu. However, Maxwell-Hyslop does mention that an argument can be made for the curved rays with the four-pointed star representing the thunderbolts of Adad or another storm divinity.³⁴ The motif is clearly seen on a gold medallion found from the Early Iron Age in the Megiddo Tombs with a four-pointed star and the addition of two pairs of wavy lines set between the points.³⁵ The medallion design compares favorably with gold circular star pendants having rolled-over suspension loops, known from Late-Bronze Shechem and shown by Maxwell-Hyslop with crescent pendants.³⁶

My suggestion is that *hašš^ṣē^ḥbīšīm* (2) of the Isaiah catalog

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³³ H. Frankfort, *Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), pp. 106-107.

³⁴ *WAJ*, p. 157.

³⁵ Guy and Engberg, p. 162, Fig. 169.

³⁶ *WAJ*, Pl. 115.

are the sun-disk pendants worn on necklaces somewhat like the Mesopotamian Dilbat example and the relief of Ashurnasirpal II. The words grouped at this point in the catalog suggest other familiar necklace elements such as crescents (3), drop pendants or beads (4), suspension cords (5), and finally, yet another kind of bead or suspended ornament, *hār^oālôt* (6), is taken to be from a root *r'l* meaning "to quiver, shake, reel" and even the highly suitable "dangle." The attractive droplet beads in shapes of seeds, blossoms, flower parts, etc., would be fine candidates as they occur with crescents and star disks/rosettes on jewelry molds.

The most intriguing possibility for an obscure item in the Isaiah catalog was suggested in personal communication with Prof. Alix Wilkinson, regarding item (10).³⁷ For this enigmatic item, *bātê hannepēš*, usually translated in modern versions as "perfume boxes" or sometimes more literally "soul houses," she calls attention to the tubular cases of Egyptian jewelry. These are amulets which look like slim cylinders and came into fashion during the Middle Kingdom.³⁸ With their caps and rings for suspension they ranged in size from 3.3 cm. long to 6.8 cm., were made of metal (most frequently gold and silver) and were decorated with semi-precious stones. She notes that although one of the pendants found is usually attributed to a man's grave, several others are from women's burials. She refers to Petrie's designation of them as "charm-cases" and cites bronze specimens that contained papyrus rolls with spells written on them.

William C. Hayes discusses four examples in gold and silver from the treasures of the three wives of Thutmose III and two in the "Murch collection," all acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁹ For the latter he comments that they "were evidently intended to hold charms written on small rolls of

³⁷ A. Wilkinson, personal communication from St. George's College, Jerusalem, July, 1974.

³⁸ The following information is from A. Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 55.

³⁹ Hayes, 2: 133, 180.

papyrus.”⁴⁰ The aspect of written messages has called forth Wilkinson’s exciting suggestion of amulets related to *tephillin*, phylacteries worn in modern custom at the weekday morning service by Jewish males of thirteen years and over.⁴¹ The observance is based particularly on Deut 6:4-9, where reference is made to binding “these words” as “a sign upon your hands” and as “frontlets between your eyes.”

The English word “frontlets” reminds us of the headbands worn low on the forehead and tied at the back of the head which occur in Iron-Age excavations in gold foil and are a kind of crown. The Hebrew word *tōtāpōt* occurs here and in Exod 13:16 and Deut 11:18, but the verbal root is not used in the Bible and its meaning is dubious. In the Deut 11:18 passage, the same word for “soul” (*nepes*) is found that occurs also in our Isa 3 catalog, as literally “houses of the soul.”

Modern *tephillin* are leather cases with a strap that encircles the head so that “the front edge of the case lies just above the spot where the hair begins to grow and directly above the space between the eyes,” with the fastening knot positioned at the nape of the neck.⁴² A second case is worn on the muscle of the inner side of the left forearm with the strap going around the arm seven times and three times around the middle finger. The link between these and the Egyptian tubular amulets, which must have been worn as a necklace pendant, is that inside is placed a written message. Four paragraphs (Deut 6:4-9, 11:13-21, Exod 13:1, and 13:11-16) written on parchment go into the cases, and the purpose is, of course, to direct the wearer’s thoughts to God as a result of knowing these key passages of the law. The Reform Movement in Judaism dropped the tradition of wearing *tephillin* because Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), the spiritual leader of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2: 180.

⁴¹ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and G. Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 380.

⁴² Ibid.

Reform Judaism in Germany, "maintained that they were originally pagan amulets."⁴³

Two other items in the catalog remain difficult to determine. Article (15) in the list, *hamma*^{ʿatāpōt}, usually translated "mantles," may be related to the verb meaning "envelop"—with the idea of an enveloping cape. Article (18), *hagilyōnīm*, could be related to the verb "reveal," hence the preferred translation "garments of gauze," which suggests some form of the delicate textiles worn by New Kingdom royalty in Egypt. Alternatively, polished metal mirrors have been proposed, of the kind known in the shaving sets from the New Kingdom,⁴⁴ although in our Isaiah passage the surrounding items would favor garments or apparel.

6. Conclusion

With new linguistic and archaeological information for identifying the terms in the Isa 3 catalog, we can continue the study of the enigmatic items. We are now free to work with the possibility that the articles were those worn by both men and women as signs of high office. The passage context would affirm that the wearing of beautiful apparel such as jewelry is not in itself what is being condemned, but that the lesson is on the misuse of the authority of office for which that apparel stands.

This theme fits well with the function of jewelry in other parts of the Bible. Genesis patriarch Joseph is praised as Prime Minister, and one sign of his authority is the seal ring; Haman in the Esther saga misuses that office and his wearing of the ring is to be condemned. The queen and bride in Song of Songs is praised for her jewelry and fine raiment, but the harlot in Ezekiel has misused her finery. Rebecca, as the chosen bride of Isaac and generous leader of her people, is heralded by her gold ornaments, but the aristocratic women of Samaria in Amos' time have become indolent "cows." The High Priest of the Exodus tabernacle and Solomonic temple was honored by his

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hayes, 2: 64.

turban and breastpiece, yet the prophet Hosea says that because of extravagant sin “the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim” (Hos 3:4). Isaiah’s noble daughters of Jerusalem have characteristically jangled their anklets and stepped on the poor, but in prophetic proclamations of the future, envisioning the new day, Israel will be a bride again: “In that day . . . I will betroth you to me forever . . . in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy” (Hos 2:16, 19). The NT book of Revelation depicts this new queen as “the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” wearing a crown of gold with jasper, agate, emerald, chrysolite, amethyst, topaz—“having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel” (Rev 21:2, 12-21).