

What is going on in Psalm 22:16 with כְּאַרְיֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי “like a lion my hands and my feet?”

The KJV reads:

Psa. 22:16 For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

The MT text appears to read:

כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הִקְיִפוּנִי כְּאַרְיֵי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי

So what do we do with this “like a lion,” which makes no sense, and the KJV’s “pierced?”

The LXX reads:

ὅτι ἐκύκλωσάν με κύνες πολλοί συναγωγῇ πονηρευομένων περιέσχον με ὄρυξαν χεῖράς μου καὶ πόδας

Here ὄρυξαν is a 3rd pl aorist verb from:

19.55 ὀρύσσω; σκάπτω: to make a hole in the ground and to remove earth with some sharp-edged instrument (for example, a pick or spade) — ‘to dig, to excavate.’

ὀρύσσω: ἐφύτευσεν ἀμπελῶνα ... καὶ ὄρυξεν ἐν αὐτῷ ληνόν ‘he planted a vineyard ... and dug a wine press in it’ Mt 21:33.

σκάπτω: ἔσκαψεν καὶ ἐβάθυνεν καὶ ἔθηκεν θεμέλιον ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν ‘he dug and went down deep and laid the foundation on the rock’ Lk 6:48; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω ‘I am not strong enough to dig (ditches)’ Lk 16:3. For another interpretation of σκάπτω in Lk 16:3, see 43.3.

(This is from *Louw and Nida’s* Greek lexicon).

So the LXX supports the KJV. But do we have any Hebrew MSS support for the KJV reading, which prophecies strikingly of Christ? The MT reading is nonsensical. *BSac* 147:587 (Jul 90) p. 286ff., *An Exposition of Psalm 22* by Mark Heinemann, mentions:

Option C is that the Septuagint reading is the correct one: “they are piercing my hands and my feet.” This view holds that the Septuagint (using the verb ojru/ssw, “to dig, bore through”) represents a superior text that was corrupted to the Masoretic Text reading either by (a) a scribal error in which ... כְּאַרְיֵי (“they are piercing,” assuming the root כָּנָה “bore, dig, hew” [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “כָּנָה,” by R. Laird Harris, 1:435] or root כָּרָה “to dig” [mentioned as an option but not chosen by Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, p. 196]) was changed to כְּאַרְיֵי (“like a lion”); or (b) a scribal error in which the pointing was altered, changing a participle “piercing” (which would have been the only occurrence in the Old Testament) into a noun with a prefixed ;Vk “like a lion” (Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 246-47). The נ may be explained as an ancient *mater lectionis*.

From this we can see that the difference between the presumptive Hebrew text underlying the KJV and that in the MT is the change of a final chireq-yod (MT) to a shureq (KJV).

The *RibSac* article goes on to say (RTW position “A” and “B” where other options which would

In favor of Option A or B are the following arguments: (1) lions are mentioned elsewhere in the psalm; (2) the Gospels do not cite or apply this verse (which seems strange if it so strikingly prefigures the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet); (3) "piercing" in the Septuagint goes too far beyond David's experience and is too striking a "prophecy" (suspicion of later textual corruption by Christians); and (4) most Hebrew manuscripts have "like a lion." The following points argue for adopting the translation "they are piercing" (Option C): (1) the Masoretic Text reading is awkward, for unlike other verb ellipsis situations in Hebrew poetry, the relationship between the subject "lion" and the objects "my hands and my feet" is not easily explainable (Gunkel states bluntly, "the lion does not 'encircle' the 'hands and feet' of his victim" [*Die Psalmen*, p. 96]) and therefore can be suspected of being corrupted; (2) two Hebrew manuscripts do attest to the Septuagint reading (Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 246), (3) elsewhere the Messiah is pictured as pierced (Isa 53:5; Zech 12:10); (4) point number 2 above in favor of options A and B is an argument from silence, and (5) point number 3 above in favor of options A and B begs the question, does not acknowledge that intentional corruption could be argued from either side, and fails to take into account the pre-Christian origin of the Septuagint.

So we can see from this that there are two Hebrew MSS that support the LXX and the KJV reading. The above was from footnote #32 to the article. Footnote #33 reads:

Even if one holds to the reading, "like a lion my hands and my feet," the prefiguring is only weakened in its directness; it is not disposed of entirely. It is important to note that there would still be a strong correspondence between David's enemies doing something harmful to his hands and feet and the fact that Jesus' enemies did something harmful to His hands and feet when they crucified Him. The connection and thus the prefiguring remains intact because of the specific and unusual mention of David's hands and feet.

The KB Hebrew lexicon also has an entry which reads:

כָּאֲרִי Ps 22¹⁷: ?? MSS כָּאֲרִי, 1 MS כארו Versions ? = כרה א כרו; →

Commentaries. †

While *BibSac* quoted a guy who said there were two Hebrew MSS which supported the KJV reading, citing Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 246, (which one could acquire a copy of for further detail, which would be useful), KB says that "1 MS" has כארו, which would be the KJV reading, "they pierced."

John Gill mentions further evidence for the KJV reading not discussed above:

they pierced my hands and my feet; by nailing them to the cross, which, though not related by the evangelists, is plainly suggested in Joh 20:25,27; and is referred to in other passages of Scripture, Zec 12:10 Re 1:7; and clearly points at the kind of death Christ should die; the death, of the cross, a shameful and painful one. In this clause there is a various reading; in some copies in the margin it is, "as a lion my hands and my feet", but in the text, "they have dug" or "pierced my hands and my feet"; both are joined together in the Targum, "biting as a lion my hands and my feet"; as it is by other interpreters {c}; and Schultens {d} retains the latter, rendering the preceding clause in connection with it thus,

“the assembly of the wicked have broken me to pieces, as a

In the Targum, in the king of Spain's Bible, the phrase, "as a lion", is left out. The modern Jews are for retaining the marginal reading, though without any good sense, and are therefore sometimes charged with a wilful and malicious corruption of the text; but without sufficient proof, since the different reading in some copies might be originally occasioned by the similarity of the letters כ and ל; and therefore finding it in their copies, or margin, sometimes כִּאֲרָר, and sometimes כִּאֲרִי, have chose that which best suits their purpose, and is not to be wondered at; however, their "masoretic" notes, continued by them, sufficiently clear them from such an imputation, and direct to the true reading of the words; in the small Masorah on the text it is observed that the word is twice used as here pointed, but in two different senses; this is one of the places; the other is Isa 38:13; where the sense requires it should be read "as a lion": wherefore, according to the authors of that note, it must have a different sense here, and not to be understood of a lion; the larger Masorah, in Nu 24:9; observes the word is to be found in two places, in that place and in Ps 22:16; and adds to that, it is written כִּאֲרָר, "they pierced"; and Ben Chayim confirms {e} this reading, and says he found it so written it, some correct copies, and in the margin כִּאֲרִי; and so it is written in several manuscripts; and which is confirmed by the Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Greek, and Vulgate Latin versions; in which it is rendered, "they dug my hands and my feet"; and so took it to be a verb and not a noun: so Apollinarius in his metaphrase; and which is also confirmed by the points; though taking כִּאֲרִי for a participle, as the Targum, that reading may be admitted, as it is by some learned men {f}, who render it "digging" or "piercing", and so has the same sense, deriving the word either from כִּאֲר or כִּרַר, which signify to dig, pierce, or make hollow; and there are many instances of plural words which end in י, the ו omitted, being cut off by an apocope; see 2Sa 23:8 2Ki 11:4,19 La 3:14 Eze 32:30; and either way the words are expressive of the same thing, and manifestly point to the sufferings of Christ, and that kind of death he should die, the death of the cross, and the nailing of his hands and feet to it, whereby they were pierced. This passage is sometimes applied by the Jews {g} themselves to their Messiah.

{c} Amamae Antibar. Bibl. p. 743.

{d} Origin. Heb. l. 1. c. 12. s. 8. Vid. Jacob. Alting. Dissert. Philolog. 5. s. 27-34.

{e} In Maarcath א, fol. 10. 2. ad Calc. Buxtorf. Bibl.

{f} Pocock. Miscell. c. 4. p. 59, 60. Pfeiffer. Exercitat. 8. s. 37. Carpzov. Critic. Sacr. p. 838, 839. Alting. ut supra. (Dissert. Philolog. 5.) s. 48, 49.

{g} Pesikta in Yalkut, par. 2. fol. 56. 4.

Adam Clarke states, "The *Complutensian Polyglot* has כִּאֲרָר *caaru*, they digged or pierced, in the text; for which it gives כִּרַר *carah*, to cut, dig, or penetrate, in the margin, as the root whence כִּאֲרָר is derived."

On the same verse, William Whitaker on pg. 159-160 of his *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (trans. & ed. William Fitzgerald, first pub. London, 1588. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000) writes:

All Christians read, "They pierced my hands and my feet." But the Hebrew MSS. have not *Caru* [כָּרָר] "they pierced," but *Caari*, [כִּאֲרִי] "as a Lion." I answer, that this is the only specious indication of corruption in the Hebrew original; yet it is easy to protect this place from their [Catholics and others who are against the preservation of Scripture] reproaches. For, first, learned men testify that many Hebrew copies are found in which the reading is *Caru*; Andradius, Defens. Trid. Lib. IV., and Galatinus, Lib. VIII. C. 17. And John Isaac writes that he had himself seen such a copy, in his book against Lindanus, Lib. II.; and the Masorites themselves affirm that it was so written in some corrected copies.¹ Secondly, in those books which have this reading,

the Masorites² tell us that it is not to be taken in the common acceptance: whence it plainly appears that nothing was farther from their minds than a design to corrupt the passage. Thirdly, the place is no no otherwise read than it was formerly before Jerome's time. For the Chaldee Paraphrast has conjoined both readings,³ and the Masorites testify that there is a twofold reading of this place. Jerome, too, in his Psalter read in the Hebrew *Caari*, as our books have it, though he rendered it "fixerunt." So that it can never be proved, at least from this place, that the Hebrew originals were corrupted after the time of Jerome.

Thus, there is ample support for the KJV reading, "they pierced," in Hebrew sources; Whitaker affirms that "many copies" possess this reading.

CONCLUSION

The MT text, at least as available in the Ginsburg version of the Ben Chayyim MT and in the modern critical MT based on the Leningrad codex, reads "like a lion." However, Hebrew MSS support exists to support the KJV reading "they pierced." Therefore we can continue to hold to a verbal, plenary preservation view of the text, and continue to affirm that the Hebrew text beneath the KJV is a perfect replica of the *autographa*. However, this would be an evident error in the Ginsburg MT. Earlier printed editions of the MT also do not seem to contain the KJV reading, based on the footnote to כָּאֵרִי in Ps 22:17 in the Ginsburg MT edition, which mentions that other editions contain כָּאֵרִי but does not mention a previous edition of the MT that reads כָּאֵרִי with the KJV. Nonetheless, there is evidence, as indicated by John Gill and others, for the reading of the KJV in Hebrew MSS and witnesses. We can conclude that the true Hebrew textual reading is available and in use through the Hebrew MSS which contain it, through the KJV translation, and other textual witnesses such as the LXX). It is also referenced elsewhere in Scripture (Isaiah 49:16; Zechariah 12:10; Isaiah 53:5; John 20:25, 27; Revelation 1:7; etc.) We can still hold that the Hebrew text under the KJV is perfect. However, it may be impossible to hold that the Ginsburg edition is perfect, unless one wishes to say that כָּאֵרִי does not actually always mean "like a lion" but here means "pierced."

—TDR