

Sp. 00 Eichler, Seite 7350

DREROS BILINGUAL AND THE TABERNACLE

already mentioned in the Epic of Kret (cf. C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*, Rome, 1949, pp. 5-6). Mr Dus attributes to me superfine distinctions in chronology that have no place in my thinking. In *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, IX, 1963 (written in mid-1962), I have stated my view thus: "Bezalel and the Tabernacle cannot be retrojections from later times: least of all from the period of the Second Temple. Bezalel and the Tabernacle are Mosaic in the same sense that Daedalus and his constructions are Minoan; they all belong in the second millennium" (p. 28).

When I say "The year 1200 B.C. is sometimes given as the end of the Mycenaean Age, and as the beginning of the period of the Judges" I mean exactly what I say; to wit, that the year 1200 has so been used by various scholars. I do not accept this as precise historic chronology. Ages do not begin and end with round B.C. numbers; quite often they do not have precise beginnings and endings. There is no agreement on when the Renaissance began or ended. How much less the Mycenaean Age or period of the Judges!

In breaking new ground for remote periods of history, hyperfinesse is out of place. Wherever Mr Dus has misunderstood me, it is because he has ascribed to me his commentary on what I wrote. Fortunately, in the things that really matter he and I are in agreement.

Journal of Semitic Studies / Vol. X / 1965

THE MEANING OF THE EXPRESSION
עַם הָאָרֶץ IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

By E. W. NICHOLSON

The expression עַם הָאָרֶץ occurs between sixty and seventy times in the Old Testament and very frequently in post-biblical writings. In rabbinic literature it is a term of contempt for the religiously illiterate. Its meaning in the Old Testament has been variously interpreted. It has been taken as designating the rural population of a country as against the urban population.¹ It has been suggested that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was nothing less than an ancient Hebrew parliament complete with both upper and lower houses.² The phrase has been interpreted as referring to the entire population of a country as opposed to the ruling classes.³ Some have taken the expression as designating the landed nobility⁴ whilst others, in contrast to such a view, interpret it as referring to the lowest and poorest layers in society.⁵

Currently favoured is the view advanced some years ago by E. Würthwein who sees in the עַם הָאָרֶץ the body of free, property-owning, full (male) citizens of a country who played a vital political, economic and military role in the affairs of that country.⁶ According to this view the word עַם הָאָרֶץ in the expression can be replaced by the actual name of the country to which it refers. Thus, for example, the term when applied to Judah is the same as the expression עַם-יְהוּדָה (II Kings xiv. 21). It is further argued

¹ Cf. R. Gordis, "Sectional Rivalry in the Kingdom of Judah", *J.Q.R.* xxv (1934-5), 237-59.

² So M. Sulzberger, *The Am Ha-arez: the Ancient Hebrew Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1909); idem, "The Polity of the Ancient Hebrews", *J.Q.R.* III (1912-13), 1-81; cf. N. Sloush, "Representative Government among the Hebrews and Phoenicians", *J.Q.R.* IV (1913), 303-10.

³ So E. Klamroth, "Die jüdischen Exulanten in Babylonien", *B.W.A.T.* x (1912), 95 f.

⁴ Cf. S. Daiches, "The meaning of am ha-arez in the Old Testament", *J.T.S.* xxx (1929), 245-9.

⁵ Cf. A. Menes, "Die vorexilischen Gesetze Israels im Zusammenhang seiner kulturgeschichtlichen Entwicklung", *B.Z.A.W.* L (1928), 70 f.

⁶ E. Würthwein, "Der 'amm ha'arez im Alten Testament", *B.W.A.N.T.* IV, 17 (1936); cf. E. Gillischewski, "Der Ausdruck עַם הָאָרֶץ im A.T.", *Z.A.W.* XL (1922), 137-42; M. H. Pope, "'Am Ha'arez", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (edit. G. A. Buttrick, New York, 1962), I, 106-7.

that since the word עַם in the expression designates the responsible male citizenry of a country it may be replaced by the word אָנָשִׁי so that the עַם הָאָרֶץ of Judah, the עַם יְהוּדָה, is parallel in meaning to אָנָשֵׁי-יְהוּדָה (II Sam. ii. 4, etc.).¹ On the basis of all this it is argued that every country had its עַם. Thus the עַם of Hebron is mentioned in Gen. xxiii. 7, 12-13, the Egyptian עַם in Gen. xlii. 6, that of the Canaanites in Num. xiv. 19, whilst the אָנָשֵׁי-יָבֵשׁ mentioned in II Sam. ii. 4 are believed to be the עַם of Jabesh.²

Würthwein's theory is based mainly on arguments adduced from a consideration of the occurrences of the expression עַם הָאָרֶץ as applied to Judah during the period of the monarchy. It is argued that the political role of the Judaeans עַם הָאָרֶץ is evidenced by their part in the overthrow of Athaliah and the enthronement of Joash (II Kings xi) and the enthronement of Josiah (II Kings xxi. 24; II Chron. xxxiii. 25) and his successor Jehoahaz (II Kings xxiii. 30; II Chron. xxxvi. 1),³ whilst their role in the country's economy is adduced from II Kings xxiii. 35 where they are said to have been taxed in order to raise the tribute imposed by Necho.⁴ The reference in II Kings xxv. 19 (cf. Jerem. lii. 25) to the official "who mustered the people of the land" is taken as evidence of their military role.⁵ Finally, the frequent mention of the עַם הָאָרֶץ alongside the king, the priesthood and the nobility (cf. Jer. i. 18; xxxiv. 19; xxxvii. 2; xlv. 21) is taken as further evidence of their high position in Judah.⁶

Common to the various interpretations which have been advanced is their insistence that the expression is a *terminus technicus* designating a fixed and specific social or political class or group within the population of a country. The contention of this short paper is that the expression is no such technical term but that it is used in a very general manner varying in meaning from context to context.

In Gen. xxiii. 7, 12-13 we are told that Abraham "bowed himself before the people of the land". Throughout the chapter (cf. especially v. 7) the term עַם הָאָרֶץ is parallel in meaning to בְּנֵי-הָאָרֶץ. Both expressions are used of the inhabitants of Hebron in contradistinction to the foreigner Abraham. No one would suggest of course that the entire population of Hebron turned out to witness the purchase of the cave by the Patriarch; obviously only the particular group of men involved in the business would have been

¹ E. Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 15.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 8-9, 22 f., 30 f., 33 f.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 10.

² *Ibid.* p. 14 n. 8, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 9 f., 41 f.

present. But to argue that the expression עַם הָאָרֶץ is a technical term for that group of men is to ignore the fact that they are also referred to as the בְּנֵי-הָאָרֶץ and it would be absurd to claim that the phrase בְּנֵי-הָאָרֶץ was limited in its application to a specific social or political group in Hebron. The group of men involved in the business with Abraham are referred to representatively as the עַם הָאָרֶץ or בְּנֵי-הָאָרֶץ.

In Gen. xlii. 6 we read that Joseph sold corn to "all the people of the land". The plain meaning of this text is surely that Joseph was responsible for supplying corn to *any Egyptian* who might wish to buy it. The expression cannot here be referring to a specific class, social or otherwise, within the population of Egypt.

The use of the phrase in Exod. v. 5 raises a problem. The M.T. reads: וַיֹּאמֶר פֶּרַע הֵן רַבִּים הֵם הָאָרֶץ. Taken as it stands this would mean that the Hebrews were the עַם הָאָרֶץ as distinct from the Egyptian population. Possibly however the Samaritan text has preserved the correct reading in מֵעַם הָאָרֶץ—"And Pharaoh said: they (the Hebrews) are more numerous than the people of the land" (cf. the parallel statement in i. 9). In this case the עַם הָאָרֶץ would obviously refer to the Egyptian population as a whole.

Leviticus iv sets out the sin offerings which have to be offered in the case of the high priest (v. 3), the religious community as a whole (v. 13), a civic ruler (v. 22) and finally for anyone of "the people of the land" (v. 27). Some would link the section dealing with the עַם הָאָרֶץ (vv. 27-35) with v. 7 and would interpret the expression as designating the poorest members of the community who could not afford an expensive offering.¹ But perhaps the simplest interpretation is to take the expression here as referring to the ordinary members of the community as distinct from the priesthood and the civic rulers who have already been catered for.²

Leviticus xx. 1-6 stipulates the punishment for anyone who participates in the Molech-cult. Offenders are to be stoned by the עַם הָאָרֶץ. Here again there is no need to take the expression as anything other than a purely general term. Naturally such executions would have been carried out by the men of the area involved (cf. Deut. xxi. 18-21; xxii. 21, etc.). As in the example quoted above from Gen. xxiii the group of men involved in the execution are referred to representatively as the עַם הָאָרֶץ.

¹ Cf. for example E. Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 48.

² Cf. N. Micklem, "Leviticus", in *The Interpreter's Bible*, II (1953), 24; N. H. Snaith, "Leviticus", in *Peake's Commentary* (ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley, London, 1962), *in loc.*

In Num. xiv. 9 Joshua and Caleb, having just returned with the other spies from the land of Canaan, exhort the Israelites not to fear the עַם הָאָרֶץ. Here the expression clearly means the indigenous population of the promised land and is parallel to the "people who dwell in the land" in xiii. 28 (cf. Neh. ix. 24). The expression is also parallel to the שְׁבִי-הָאָרֶץ in such texts as Josh. ii. 9, 24; vii. 9; viii. 24; ix. 24; etc. Once again the term עַם הָאָרֶץ or its parallel שְׁבִי-הָאָרֶץ is used in a purely general sense.

This brings us to a consideration of the expression as it is applied to Judah. The part played by the עַם הָאָרֶץ in the overthrow of Athaliah and the enthronement of the young Joash (II Kings xi) has been taken as evidence that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was a powerful political body within the population of Judah who played a vital role in the affairs of the State. It is argued that this view is supported by the part played by the עַם הָאָרֶץ in the enthronement of Josiah (II Kings xxi. 24) and of his successor Jehoahaz (II Kings xxiii. 30). The עַם יְהוּדָה who raised Azariah to the throne (II Kings xiv. 21) are identified with the Judaeans עַם הָאָרֶץ. But the use of the term עַם הָאָרֶץ in these instances can be interpreted along quite different lines. The overthrow of Athaliah and the enthronement of the legitimate Davidic king Joash must be seen as a national revolution. The *coup* was organized by the high priest Jehoiada, who evidently had the backing of the army, and was supported by the nation at large. To be sure *v.* 20 seems to contrast the עַם הָאָרֶץ with the עִיר but this, as De Vaux has suggested,¹ may be nothing more than a distinction between the city and the seat of the regime which had just been overthrown and the rest of the country which had remained loyal to the Davidic house. And in the case of Azariah, Josiah and Jehoahaz the expression is to be interpreted in a similar manner. That is to say, these kings were raised to power by popular acclamation.

In II Kings xv. 5 we read that Jotham "was over the house, judging the people of the land". This text has been interpreted as meaning that the עַם הָאָרֶץ were a privileged group who had direct access to the king in judicial matters and who were not subject to the royal officials who might otherwise deal with such matters.² But such an interpretation is surely too forced. The most natural interpretation of the text is that Jotham, in the absence of his leprosy-stricken father, was responsible, either personally or through the agency of his officials, for such legal matters as

¹ R. de VAUX, *Ancient Israel* (E.T. by John McHugh, London, 1961), p. 71.

² So Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 29.

any of his subjects, irrespective of class or rank, might bring before him.

II Kings xvi. 15 reads: "And king Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying: 'Upon the great altar burn the morning burnt offering and the evening cereal offering, and the king's burnt offering, and his cereal offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land. . .'" This text, like the previous one, has been interpreted as meaning that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was a special body of men in Judah who stood in a privileged relationship with the king since, it is argued, their offerings are classed with those of the king whilst the offerings of other groups, for example the Jerusalem people, are not mentioned.¹ But again such an interpretation is very strained. Here again the most natural interpretation of the text is that Ahaz demanded that all sacrifices, including his own and those of any of his subjects who might come up to the Temple to worship, were to be offered upon the newly erected altar.

Two texts which have been deemed particularly significant in the discussion of the meaning of the expression are II Kings xxiii. 35 and xxv. 79. In the former it is narrated that Jehoiakim in order to raise the tribute imposed upon Judah by Necho, the victor of Megiddo, "taxed the land" and "exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, each one according to his assessment". This has been taken as evidence of the economic role played by this alleged special group of Judaeans men.² But here again there is no need to take the expression as referring to anything other than the Judaeans population in general. In this verse the "land" in the first half is synonymous with "the people of the land" in the second half. In other words a universal taxation was imposed upon the country and each family was taxed according to its means. We may contrast this universal levy imposed by Jehoiakim with that imposed by Menahem (II Kings xv. 20) upon the wealthy גְּבוּרֵי-הַחַיִל only.³ The second text, II Kings xxv. 19 (cf. Jer. lii. 25) reads:⁴ "And he took from the city an officer who was in command of the men of war; and five men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city; and the secretary of the commander of the host, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 8, 30.

² *Ibid.* pp. 34 f.

³ For this class see W. McKane, "The Gibbor hayil in the Israelite Community", in *Glasgow University Oriental Transactions*, xvii (1959), 28-37.

⁴ For this verse see J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, *Kings (I.C.C., Edinburgh, 1951)*, *in loc.*

found in the city." Those who contend that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was a specific class of men within Judah take this text as evidence of the military role played by them in the country's affairs.¹ Now it is obvious that only the adult male population of the country would have been liable for military service but here again they are referred to loosely as the עַם הָאָרֶץ. We may compare the use of the term here with the analogous use of יהודה in such texts as Judg. i. 10; II Sam. xx. 5; II Kings xiv. 12 and of ישראל in such texts as II Sam. v. 2; x. 15, 17, etc. In these instances both "Judah" and "Israel" refer to the fighting men but it would be absurd to imagine that only the militia bore the name Judah or Israel.

II Kings xxiv. 14 reads:² "And he carried away all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the trained men of the army—a deportation—and all the artisans and smiths; there was none left except the poor of the people of the land." In the parallel text in Jer. lii. 16 the word עַם is omitted. It is also omitted in II Kings xxv. 12. The LXX reads: οἱ πτωχοὶ καὶ οἱ ἄσθενες. It has been argued on the basis of this that the word עַם in the M.T. is a gloss and that therefore this text is of no value in the discussion of the meaning of עַם הָאָרֶץ.³ But if the contention of this article is correct, namely, that the expression is purely general in meaning, then the text in II Kings xxiv. 14 with or without the word עַם means the same thing—only the poorest elements in the Judaeon population were left in the land.

It is difficult to see how II Kings xxv. 3 (cf. Jer. lii. 6) can be used in support of any theory which holds that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was a particular social or political group within Judah's population. The text contains a note which reads:⁴ ויחזק הרעב בעיר ולא היה להם ללחם. There are two possible interpretations of this verse. It is possible to take the note to mean that in both city (עיר) and countryside (הארץ) there was famine: "And the famine was sore in the city; neither was there any bread for the people of the land." Alternatively, it is possible that the second half of the verse stands in apposition to the first half so that both halves refer to the same location: "And the famine was sore in the city so that there was no bread for the people of the land." In view of the fact that the whole context of this note is dealing with events in Jerusalem

¹ Cf. Würthwein, *op. cit.* pp. 10, 44.

² Cf. Montgomery and Gehman, *op. cit. in loc.*

³ So Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 43.

⁴ Possibly an interpolation. Cf. Montgomery and Gehman, *op. cit. in loc.*

this second interpretation is to be preferred. But whether the first or second is preferred, can we seriously accept the view that the עַם הָאָרֶץ refers to only a particular class or group in the city or countryside? The most natural interpretation of the text is that because of the siege of Jerusalem the inhabitants of the city, both men, women and children, were threatened with starvation.

In four texts in Jeremiah (i. 18; xxxiv. 19; xxxvii. 2; xlv. 21) the עַם הָאָרֶץ are mentioned together with the king, nobility and the priesthood. Those who argue that the עַם הָאָרֶץ was a special political or social group within Judah's population take these texts as evidence of the high position of that group classed as it is with the highest officials and social classes of the country.¹ Here again, however, the expression can be interpreted in a purely general sense. For example, Jer. i. 18 reads: "For behold I have made you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land." Here the expression עַם הָאָרֶץ is most easily interpreted as referring to any of the Judaeon population who together with the ruling classes and the priesthood might attempt to persecute the prophet. Such an interpretation is much more in accordance with the first half of the verse with its promise of protection for the prophet "against the *whole land*". And the meaning of the expression in the other texts (xxxiv. 19; xxxvii. 2; xlv. 21) is best understood in the same general sense, namely, as a comprehensive term for the rest of the population apart from the royal house or the ruling classes and the priesthood. The use of the expression in Ezek. vii. 27; xxii. 29 and Dan. ix. 6 is to be understood in the same manner.

Apart from the two texts just cited, the expression עַם הָאָרֶץ occurs elsewhere in Ezek. in xii. 19; xxxiii. 2; xxxix. 13; xlv. 22;² xlv. 3, 9. In xii. 19 the עַם הָאָרֶץ is parallel to the "inhabitants of Jerusalem" and "the land of Israel". Similarly, in xxxix. 13 כל-עַם-הָאָרֶץ is clearly synonymous with the בְּיַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל in v. 12. In xxxiii. 2 the expression is again used in a purely general sense of the inhabitants of a country. In xlv. 22; xlv. 3, 9 the עַם הָאָרֶץ can only be taken as designating the Jewish community as distinct from the נְשִׂיא. This is evidenced by the fact that in xlv. 19 and xlv. 3 respectively the עַם and the עַם הָאָרֶץ are clearly used of one

¹ Cf. Würthwein, *op. cit.* pp. 9 f., 36 f.

² Ezek. xlv. 16 reads הָעַם הָאָרֶץ. Since the LXX omits הָעַם it is probable that it is a gloss in the M.T. Cf. Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 47.

and the same class, namely the ordinary worshippers who were to worship in the outer court.¹

In Haggai ii. 4 the prophet exhorts Zerubbabel, the high priest, and the people of the land to work for the rebuilding of the Temple. Here עַם הָאָרֶץ is obviously parallel in meaning to the עַם שְׂאֵרֵי-הָעַם of v. 2 and is just as general in meaning.² In Zech. vii. 5 once more the עַם הָאָרֶץ must be taken as nothing more than a general reference to the population as a whole.

In Ezra iv. 4 the עַם הָאָרֶץ is contrasted with the עַם הַיְהוּדָה and is clearly a general term designating those elements in the population of the country who attempted to frustrate the efforts of the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple. The עַמֵּי-הָאֲרָצוֹת of Ezra x. 2, 11 and Neh. x. 31, 32 are synonymous and both clearly designate the heathen population of Palestine amongst whom the Jews who had returned from exile had to live—"Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites; Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites" (cf. Ezra ix. 1). Is it possible that the later rabbinical use of the expression as a term of opprobrium for the illiterate and irreligious had its roots in the situation in Judah in the post-exilic period to which these texts refer? Finally the עַם הָאָרֶץ in Esther viii. 17 is most naturally interpreted as referring to the general population of the country amongst whom the heroine Esther lived. Again the view that the expression is here referring to a specific social or political class is unwarranted.

It may therefore be concluded from this brief examination of the occurrences of the expression עַם הָאָרֶץ in the Old Testament that the term has no fixed and rigid meaning but is used rather in a purely general and fluid manner and varies in meaning from context to context. To regard it as a technical term designating a specific class or group within the population of Judah is, in our opinion, to read far too much into its meaning.

¹ Cf. Würthwein, *op. cit.* pp. 47 f.

² Würthwein, *op. cit.* p. 53 (following Rothstein and Sellin) would change עַם הָאָרֶץ here to כָּל שְׂאֵרֵי הָעַם which is very frequent in Haggai. But such a change has no support in the versions and must be considered arbitrary. (Cf. G. A. Danell, *Studies in the Name Israel in the Old Testament*, Uppsala, 1946, p. 266, n. 81.)

MALTESE ETYMOLOGICAL NOTES

By P. P. SAYDON

The study of Maltese, which in the past has been so badly neglected by our people, is now gradually and honourably gaining its rightful position. Both the literary and linguistic aspects of the language are attracting a great deal of attention from local and foreign scholars. But as we are still taking the first steps in the vast field of linguistic research, no wonder that some scholars have unwarily been led into error by their insufficient experience or inadequate equipment. The purpose of this note is to correct some such inaccuracies and to supplement Maltese word-lists by discussing current etymologies and proposing new ones.

I

A short time ago Professor A. J. Arberry of Cambridge, with the assistance of Professor J. Aquilina and Fr P. Grech, published a small anthology of Maltese verse entitled *Dun Karm, Poet of Malta. Texts chosen and translated by A. J. Arberry. Introduction, notes and glossary by P. Grech* (Cambridge, 1961, viii + 216), reviewed in the *J.S.S.* VIII (1963), 126-9. This is an anthology of Dun Karm's (whose real name is Revd Mgr Carmel Psaila) poetic compositions, to which P. Grech added a long introduction and a glossary explaining the meaning and etymology of a few words. The following are some of the inaccuracies which I have noticed:

AWL, "beginning". The explanation given by Grech may be supplemented thus: The word *awl* or *ewl* is used in these expressions: *ewl il-lejl* "the beginning of the preceding night". The Catechism teaches us that Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist *ewl il-lejl qabel ma miet* "on the eve of his passion"; *minnewl id-dinja* "from the beginning of the world, from ever, always"; *ewl iemes*, pronounced *lewliemes*, "the day before yesterday". Obviously it is Arabic.

BISWIT, "opposite, in front of". Equated with Arab. بَسْوِي. Aquilina (in a Maltese periodical *Leben il-Malti*, "The Voice of Maltese", no. 94, Dec. 1938, p. 137), explains *fi + sawat* "in the direction of" and quotes Dozy. Dessoulavy (*B.S.O.A.S.* 1940, p. 546) inclines to a Latin origin *opposit*. In his *Maltese-Arabic Word-list* published in the same year, 1938, he omits the word altogether. Barbera (*Dizjonario Maltese-Arabo-Italiano*, Beyrouth, 1939) prefers a French origin *b + suite*.