

**THE PLURALIS
INTENSIVUS IN HEBREW,
A DISSERTATION**

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The pluralis intensivus in Hebrew, a dissertation by Aaron Ember

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AARON EMBER

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THE PLURALIS INTENSIVUS
IN HEBREW

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES
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BY

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PREFACE.

The following pages are an abstract of the Second Part of my thesis, submitted to the Board of University Studies of the Johns Hopkins University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The material of the First Part, in which I have discussed the 'pluralis intensivus' in Assyrian, Arabic, Ethiopic, as well as in the Classical Languages and in some of the Modern Languages, and which contains also a general introduction to the 'pluralis intensivus' in Hebrew, I hope to publish in the near future. I take here the opportunity to express my indebtedness to my esteemed teacher, Professor Paul Haupt, for the valuable suggestions which he has given me in the preparation of this work. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Johnston, Dr. Foote and Dr. Blake. To Dr. Johnston and Dr. Foote I am especially thankful for the reading of the proof during my absence in Europe.

THE PLURALIS INTENSIVUS IN HEBREW.

A. Plural Expressions for Natural Objects.

The 'pluralis intensivus' was in all probability employed at first to denote the wide phenomena of nature. Several phenomena in the universe were designated in Hebrew by plural expressions because they inspired the Hebrew mind with the idea of *greatness, majesty, grandeur, and holiness*. A correct understanding of the 'pluralis intensivus' becomes thus of great importance in reconstructing the cosmological ideas of the ancient Hebrews.

In several passages in the OT the plurals יָמִים 'seas' and נָהָרִים 'rivers' are employed to designate The Universal Sea (*'Okeanos*), which was believed by the ancients to flow around the whole earth.¹ Cf. the Babylonian map in Notes on Ezekiel (SBOT) p. 100. We read in the beginning of Ps. 24 (vv. 1 and 2):

לַיְהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבֵּל וְיֹשְׁבֵי בָהּ :
כִּי יָסְדָהּ עַל־יָמִים יְסָדָהּ וְעַל־נְהָרִים יְבָנְנָהּ :

The world is Javn's and the fulness thereof,
the world and they that dwell therein.

For He has founded it on The Great Sea (lit. *seas*)
and established it on The Great River (lit. *rivers*).

Duhm explains יָמִים as a poetical plural for the prosaic יָם. Baethgen understands both יָמִים and נְהָרִים as numerical plurals, referring the latter to the streams of the ocean (cf. Jon. 2, 4). These plurals must rather be explained as *intensive*, denoting *boundless extent*. See Notes on Ezekiel (Eng. transl.), p. 157, l. 22.

With regard to metre, the first section of the psalm (vv. 1-6) must be divided into three stanzas; each stanza comprises a couplet of two מְשָׁלִים, i. e., double-hemistichs; each hemistich contains three beats. The couplet of two double-hemistichs, with three beats in each hemistich, is, according to Professor Haupt, the most common form of Hebrew poetry. See *Johns Hopkins University Circulars*, No. 163 (June, 1903), p. 54, col. 2. Cf. his

¹ Cf. the Chaldaean paraphrase of Ec. 1, 7: כָּל נְהַלְמָא וּמְבוּרֵי מֵיָא אֹדֵרֶן וּנְהָרִין לַמֵּי אֹרְקֵינִים דְּמִסְחֵר לְעֻלְמָא כּוּנֶשְׁמַקָּא אֵל כּוּנֵשְׁמִקָּא וְנִהְיִי וְנִהְיִי וְנִהְיִי לְעֻלְמָא כּוּנֶשְׁמַקָּא וְנִהְיִי וְנִהְיִי וְנִהְיִי לְעֻלְמָא כּוּנֶשְׁמַקָּא. 'All the rivers and streams of water run and flow into the Oceanus, which encircles the earth like a ring.'

remarks in Crit. Notes on Proverbs (SBOT) p. 33, l. 3, and *Book of Canticles* (Chicago, 1902), p. 19, last paragraph. The plural יַמִּים denotes The Universal Sea also in Gen. 1,10; cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, ad locum.

In a number of passages the pl. יַמִּים = הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל The Great Sea, i. e., the Mediterranean; e. g., Gen. 49, 13, זְבֻלֹן לְחֹמֶת יַמִּים 'Zebulun will dwell on the shore of the great sea'; Judg. 5, 17, אֲשֶׁר יָשָׁב לְחֹמֶת יַמִּים 'Asher sat still on the shore of the great sea'; cf. also Deut. 33, 19; Ezek. 26, 17; 27, 4; Dan. 11, 45. The pl. יַמִּים is sometimes employed poetically for the sing. יָם, especially in the phrase הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל 'the sand of the sea'; cf. Jer. 15, 8; Job 6, 3, etc.

In Ps. 137, 1 and 89, 25 the pl. נְהַרֹת 'rivers' is equivalent to הַנְּהַר הַגָּדוֹל, i. e., the Euphrates. We read in the first stanza of Ps. 137 (vv. 1 and 2):

שָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ	עַל-נְהַרֹת בָּבֶל
בְּזִכְרֵנוּ אֶת-צִיּוֹן :	גַּם בְּקִרְנוּ
תְּלִינֵנוּ בְּנִוְרֹתֵינוּ :	עַל-עֵיבָהֶם בְּחֹקֶהָ
By Babel's River	there we sat
And tears were shedding	on Zion thinking,
On willows there	our harps we hung.

The psalm falls into triplets of double-hemistichs, each hemistich containing two beats (2+2).

Ps. 89, 26.

וְשִׁמְתֵי בְיָם יָדוֹ	וּבְנְהַרֹת יַמִּינֵי :
I will lay his hand on the sea,	on The Great River his right hand.

This verse pictures the ideal boundaries of the Davidic Kingdom. It is to extend from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates.¹

The plural נְהַרֹת in these two passages is explained by some modern scholars² to mean the Euphrates and its canals regarded as branches. Duhm reads the sing. נְהַר in the second passage. The most probable explanation of the plural form נְהַרֹת is, however, that it is *intensive* = The Great River, i. e., the Euphrates.³

¹ Cf. Josh. 1, 4.

² Baethgen and others.

³ See Haupt's note in Wallhausen's translation of the Psalms, p. 182, l. 30.

According to Haupt,¹ אֲשֶׁר מֵעֵבֶר לְנִדְרֵי כּוּשׁ Is. 18, 1 means *beyond the Great River Cush, i. e., the upper course of the Nile.*²

In the same way Haupt explains יַאֲרֵי מִצְרַיִם (or יַאֲרֵי מִצְרָיִם) Is. 7, 18; 19, 6; 37, 25 to mean *The Great River of Egypt, i. e., the Nile.*³ Compare also יַאֲרֵיהֶם Ps. 78, 44. According to Marti (*Buch Jesaja*, p. 153) and others⁴ the pl. יַאֲרִים is used of the branches of the Delta. It is better, however, to explain it as *pluralis intensivus*. In Ezek. 29, 3-5 both the singular and the plural are employed to designate the Nile. Toy (in SBOT) is inclined to change the plurals to singulars, but this is unnecessary, as they may be explained as *intensive.*⁵ Compare Ezek. 30, 12.

In a number of passages in the OT (Ex. 15, 5, 8; Is. 63, 13; 78, 15; 106, 9) תְּהוֹמוֹת (pl. of תְּהוֹם 'abyss,' 'deep')⁶ is *pluralis intensivus*, = The Great Deep. In nearly all these passages the plural refers to the Red Sea. In Ps. 78, 15 it is used of the subterranean waters.⁷

Ps. 106, 9.

וַיִּגְבֵּר בַּיַּם-סוּף וַיִּחְדָּב וַיְהוֹלֵכֶם בַּתְּהוֹמוֹת עַמְדָּבָר׃

He rebuked the Red Sea and it was dried up,

He led them through the Great Deep as through pasture land.

Ex. 15, 3-5.⁸

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם אֵל מַלְחָמָה 3
יְהוָה בָּיָם 4 פָּרַעַת וַחַיִּלּוֹ

וּמִבְּתַר שְׁלֵשִׁי וּמִבְּתַר שְׁלֵשִׁי
יָרְדוּ בַמִּצְוֹלֹת׃ 5 תְּהוֹמוֹת יַבַּיִם

2) 5 כּוּשׁ אֲב

4) מִרְכַּבָּת

3) יְהוָה

¹ See Crit. Notes on Isaiah (SBOT), p. 106, ll. 50 ff.

² Cf. the article on Cush in Cheyne-Black's EB and Cheyne's *Critica Biblica*.

³ Cf. Egyptian 'io(t)r'o' the great river, i. e., the Nile.

⁴ Cf. W. Max Müller's article on the Nile in Cheyne-Black's EB.

⁵ 'sea' is used of the Euphrates and the Nile. The Babylonians called the Persian Gulf *nāru marratu*.

⁶ Cf. Assy. *tām̄tu, tām̄tu, tām̄du*.

⁷ Cf. Gen. 49, 25 'the deep that coucheth beneath.'

⁸ I have followed the text and translation of this passage given by Professor Haupt in his article, "Moses' Song of Triumph," *AJSZ*, Vol. XX, No. 3, pp. 149-72.