

# HAGAR'S WORDS IN GENESIS XVI 13B

by

TH. BOOIJ

Amstelveen

The words of Gen. xvi 13b in which Hagar tells the reason why she calls him that spoke to her El Roi, *hgm hlm r'yty 'hry r'y*, have long been a problem. We find them translated as: "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" <sup>1)</sup>, "Have I really seen here after him who sees me?" <sup>2)</sup>, „Ai-je encore vu ici après celui qui me voit?" <sup>3)</sup>, „Habe ich auch hier dem nachgeschaut, der mich geschaut hat!" <sup>4)</sup>, and the like; but sometimes it is added that the clause is „schwierig" or even "totally obscure" <sup>5)</sup>. The difficulty is even greater when we consider that the translation "here" for *hlm*, and such renderings as "see after" of "look after" for *r'h 'hry*, are questionable <sup>6)</sup>.

It is not surprising that some more or less radical emendations have been proposed. The most famous and most widely accepted conjecture is the one offered by Wellhausen (cf. *BHK*, *BHS*), who reads *'lhym* instead of *hlm* and who inserts *w'hy* (*wā'ēhī*) before *'hry*: „habe ich die Gottheit geschaut und bin am Leben erhalten nach meinem Schauen!" (cf. Gen. xxxii 31; Ex. xxxiii 20; Judg. vi 22 f., xiii 22) <sup>7)</sup>. The suggestion of Seebass may also be mentioned: he substitutes *lhym* for *hlm* and translates: „War es nicht zum Leben, dass ich hinter dem her schaute, der mich ausersehen hat?" <sup>8)</sup>

An essential part of both theories is the emendation of *hlm* (Seebass:

<sup>1)</sup> King James Version (Authorized Version).

<sup>2)</sup> C. J. Labuschagne in *Studia Biblica et Semitica Th. C. Vriezen dedicata* (Wageningen, 1966), p. 200.

<sup>3)</sup> R. de Vaux, *La Genèse* (Paris, 1962), p. 86.

<sup>4)</sup> G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose II* (Göttingen, 1964), p. 161.

<sup>5)</sup> See von Rad, p. 164, n. 1, Labuschagne, de Vaux.

<sup>6)</sup> "Look after" (*nachschauen*) has a plain Hebrew equivalent in *hibbi' 'āḥārē* (Ex. xxxiii 8). For *hlm* see below.

<sup>7)</sup> J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 323, 324, n. 1. Adopted in, for example, RSV and the Dutch "Willibrord Vertaling". Some take over only the main part of Wellhausen's emendation, deleting *'hry r'y*. A. Clamer, *La Genèse* (Paris, 1953), p. 273, merely substitutes *'lhym* for *hlm*: "Ai-je vraiment vu Élohim après qu'il m'a vue?"

<sup>8)</sup> H. Seebass, "Zum Text von Gen. xvi 13b", *VT* 21 (1971), pp. 254-6 (see p. 255).

here lies the „Hauptfehler“) <sup>9</sup>); and it is precisely this emendation that raises doubts in view of the context. In Hagar's speech—as is found in some other passages in Genesis—the story firmly attaches itself to a specific place (cf. *v.*14), and one may surmise, with Gunkel, that a reference to the place is essential in the speech <sup>10</sup>). It has been observed that elsewhere *hlm* means “hither” (allative), not “here” (locative) <sup>11</sup>). That would appear to be correct, but it does not in itself justify the emendation.

A second characteristic of both conjectures is that through them a connection is made between *v.*13b and the element *hy* in *v.*14a (related to *hyh*, “to live”) <sup>12</sup>). Now the punctuation in *v.*14a (*ro'i*, with the stress on the final syllable <sup>13</sup>); not *ro'i*, the usual pausal form of *ro'i* <sup>14</sup>); nor *ro'i*, as in *v.*13a) makes it most likely that the Massoretes wished to render the name *b'r lhy r'y* meaningful in relation to *v.*13b—probably as “Well of the Living One, who sees me” <sup>15</sup>). However, the tendency to attribute to the element *hy* a special function in the play of words offered by *vv.*13 f., finds no justification in the text. The explanation (*ky 'mrh*) in *v.*13b concerns Hagar's preceding utterance *'th 'l r'y*, and so it stands to reason that the author focuses attention here on the notion of “seeing”, which in the story as it has been trans-

<sup>9</sup>) p. 255. Cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, 1964), p. 119: the *hlm* is “unmanageable”.

<sup>10</sup>) See H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen, 1966, = 1910), p. 190, with reference to Gen. xxii 14, xxxii 31 etc. See also Gen. xxi 30 f., xxxi 47 ff.

<sup>11</sup>) In my opinion this is also true of Judg. xx 7, where *hlm* denotes the point to which “word and counsel” are brought together. The text of Ps. lxxiii 10 is obviously corrupt and ought to be left out of account here.

<sup>12</sup>) Cf. R. Kilian, *Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferungen* (Bonn, 1966), p. 81, in whose opinion a reconstruction of *v.* 13b as an etymology has to start, not only from *r'y*, but also from the element *hy* in the name of the well.

<sup>13</sup>) Likewise in Gen. xxiv 62, xxv 11; cf. Job vii 8.

<sup>14</sup>) See 1 Sam. xvi 12; Nah. iii 6; Job xxxiii 21. On *ro'i* in Gen. xvi 13a see below, n. 25.

<sup>15</sup>) J. Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh, 1912), p. 288, suggests as a possible rendering: “Well of ‘He that sees me lives’”. F. M. Th. Böhl, *Genesis I* (Den Haag etc., 1923), p. 42, has: “den levende van mijn zien” (“the living one of my seeing”). These renderings would require *l'hay* instead of *lahay*. Seebass's interpretation, “Brunnen dessen, der mich zum Leben ausersehen hat” (*VT* 21 [1971], p. 255), seems to require *lhyym*. It is often assumed that the original meaning was totally different from the one suggested by the MT. Wellhausen, pp. 323 f., reads *lhy* as “jaw” and supposes that *r'y* was an animal name (chamois?); the name of the well would have originated from the form of the rocks on the spot. W. F. Albright, *AfO* 3 (1926), p. 125, identifies *r'y* (for *\*rwiy*) with Arabic *urwiya* or *irwiya*, “ibex”. The same view was rejected by P. Haupt, *ZAW* 29 (1909), p. 283; in Haupt's opinion the original name of the well was *bi'ru lahyi-(l-)la'yi*, “Wildstierkinn-ladenbrunnen”.

mitted has a similar meaning to the "hearing" (*šm'*) of v.11. The word *hy* comes in as a secondary element, when there is further mention of the place where Hagar had her encounter.

It may also be noted that in Wellhausen's proposal the notion of "living" is hardly more than a formal link between v.13 and v.14a (cf. in v.14a the words *'l kn*).

Seebass has based his conjecture partly on the Greek version (καὶ γὰρ ἐνώπιον εἶδον ὀφθέντα μοι), which in his opinion goes back to a *Vorlage*: *wgm lpnym r'yty nr'h 'ly*.

The MT in v.13b is, at least substantially, supported not only by the Peshitta and the Vulgate but also by the Samaritan—which makes it doubtful whether the Greek indeed had a *Vorlage* that differed as much from the MT as Seebass assumes. Moreover, in judging Seebass's view that ἐνώπιον presupposes *lpnym* (proceeding from *lhyym*), it should be noted that the Greek has the same word ἐνώπιον in v.14. Can it be assumed that the *Vorlage* in v.14 also had *lpnym*? Or may the agreement be traced back to the Greek translator, who did what Wellhausen and others, as textual critics, do after their fashion, viz. bring about as close a connection as possible between v.13b and v.14a?

It is well known that the LXX rendering of the Hebrew text sometimes reminds us of traditions and principles of translation which are found in the Targums<sup>16</sup>). In this connection it is interesting to see how two Palestinian Targums "translate" *'th 'l r'y* in v.13a. Pseudo-Jonathan: "Thou art the Living and Lasting One, who seest but art not seen!"; the Fragment-Targum: "Blessed be thou, O God, lasting for all ages, who hast looked upon my affliction". Both Targums, each in its own way, apparently interpret *'l r'y* of v.13a in relation to *lhy r'y* in v.14a<sup>17</sup>). In the rest of their rendering of vv.13 f. too, these Tar-

<sup>16</sup>) e.g. Z. Frankel, *Ueber den Einfluss der palästinischen Exegese auf die alexandrini-sche Hermeneutik* (Leipzig, 1851), esp. pp. 3 f., 6 ff.; J. Fürst, "Spuren der palästinisch-jüdischen Schriftdeutung und Sagen in der Übersetzung der LXX", in *Semitic studies in memory of A. Kobut* (Berlin, 1897), pp. 152-66 (about the rendering of Gen. iii 15, vi 3, 6, etc.); P. Churgin, "The Targum and the Septuagint", *AJSL* 50 (1933/34), pp. 41-65 (see esp. pp. 60 ff. on Gen. xlix 25, iv 8, xxxviii 15, etc.); L. H. Brockington, "Septuagint and Targum", *ZAW* 66 (1954), pp. 80-6; M. Delcor, "Un cas de traduction 'Targoumique' de la LXX à propos de la statue en or de Dan. III", *Textus* 7 (1969), pp. 30-5 (on Dan. iii 12); S. Daniel in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* IV (Jerusalem, 1971), cols. 854 f.

<sup>17</sup>) Ps.-Jonathan has in v. 13a *hy wqyym*, in v. 14a *byr' d'ytgly 'lh hy wqym*; Fragm.-Targum in v. 13a *qyym l'lmv' (qyym kl 'lmv')*, and v. 14 is lacking. Cf. Neofiti I, v. 13a: *'t hw' 'lh' qyym kl 'lmyy'*, v. 14a: *b'r[b] d'tgly 'lh qyym kl 'lmyy'*. The last Targum represents a terminal point in that the notion "seeing" does not figure here anymore in the rendering of *'l r'y* (v. 13a).



gums, as well as Neofiti I and Targum Onkelos, display a great deal of liberty, in obvious efforts to give a meaningful equivalent of the difficult Hebrew text and to make clear the connection between its components.

The Greek translators would seem to have pursued the same object, although their procedure was more sober, and also different in its outcome. Essential to their views was the idea that the "seeing" in Gen. xvi 13 f. points to a manifest revelation. As Frankel—I think rightly—put it in the nineteenth century, Hagar's words in *v.* 13b were read as: "Did I see indeed (here) only the back of him that appeared to me?" (cf. Ex. xxxiii 23). As we sometimes find in the LXX, the question was turned into a categorical utterance: καὶ γὰρ ἐνώπιον εἶδον ὁφθέντα μοι, "indeed I saw face to face him that appeared to me!"<sup>18)</sup> Furthermore, *lhy* in *v.* 14a was understood in accordance with *v.* 13b: Hagar saw God *directly* as the "Living One"; and the rendering of *b'r lhy r'y* (or, perhaps, in the *Vorlage*: *r'yty*) was brought into line with this: "Well of him that I saw face to face (openly)"<sup>19)</sup>.

All in all, there is good reason to doubt whether the Greek presupposes a Hebrew text that differs widely from the MT. It seems justified to trust the Massoretic text and ask the question whether it has been read rightly in the past.

There are, I think, two difficulties that have obstructed a proper understanding: a syntactic one (the use of the perfect), and a lexical-semantic one (the meaning of *r'b 'hry*).

1) The Hebrew perfect does not always indicate a given or future fact, but sometimes expresses a fact (act) which, as the context may

<sup>18)</sup> Frankel, (p. 11. Cf. p. 8 (with reference to Gen. xviii 17, xxvii 36); also the same author's *Vorstudien zu der Septuaginta* (Leipzig, 1841), p. 171 (with reference to, for example, Gen. xxix 15). It may be noted that Ps.-Jonathan, Fragm.-Targum, and Neofiti I also read Gen. xvi 13b as a categorical clause. The Peshitta, in rendering *'l r'y* (*v.* 13a) as *'lb' bhzw'*, reminds us of the Greek version of *v.* 13b. The Syriac *hzw'* ("vision") in *v.* 13b might presuppose Hebrew *hlwm* ("dream") instead of *hl(w)m*.

<sup>19)</sup> The text of the LXX has its most simple explanation in Hebrew *r'yty* (see *BHS*), but could also be understood from the transmitted text *b'r lhy r'y*, read as "Well of the Living One of seeing" (or "of my seeing"; subst. *r'b*). In Gen. xxiv 62 and xxv 11 the name of the well is rendered as φρέαρ τῆς ὁράσεως. Was *lhy* lacking in the *Vorlage*? Or was the text in harmony with xvi 14a, and may the "neglect" of *lhy* be explained from a recognition of the interpretative element in the rendering of the last-named text? It is remarkable that in xvi 13b *blm* was not translated; moreover, this element is not found in either Targum Onkelos or Fragm.-Targum. The rendering of the key notion *r'b / r'y* has been adjusted to the context; for comparable instances see H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, 1914), pp. 325, 328 f.

show, *could* or *could not* have happened<sup>20</sup>). So in Ex. ix 15 the translation should be "By now I could have stretched out my hand"; in Gen. xxi 7, "Whoever would have told Abraham that Sarah would suckle children?" The latter text, with its wondering question, is especially interesting to us. As the question can be answered only with: "Nobody!", a rendering in *Irrealis* is required. The same, I believe, holds for Gen. xvi 13b, where the answer to *hgm hlm r'yty* ... should be: "No—who might have thought of a thing like that?" This was already seen by Rashi, who explains: *hgm hlm — lšwn tymb: wky sbwrh byty š'p hlwm bmdbrwt r'yty šlwħw šl mqwm* ("hāgam hālom—an expression of wonder: could I have thought that also here, in the desert, I should see God's messenger ...?")<sup>21</sup>). Rashi's explanation is the more remarkable, since it appears to miss the true meaning of *r'yty* (*'hry*).

2) Apart from Gen. xvi 13, the combination *r'h 'hry* does not occur in Biblical or extra-Biblical Hebrew. Its meaning can only be tentatively determined.

As to *'hry*: it is *a priori* not very likely that this word is used here as a substantive meaning "back" (cf. Ex. xxxiii 23)<sup>22</sup>). The only place where *'ahārē* occurs in that sense is 2 Sam. ii 23—unless we read *'āhorē* there. Moreover, it is not clear how, understanding *'ahārē* as "back", one might explain the word *hlm*, "hither". Of course the same problem arises if *'hry* in Gen. xvi 13 is vocalized as *'āhorē* (cf. Ex. xxvi 12, xxxiii 23). It seems advisable after all to retain the Massoretic vocalization, and to assume that *'ahārē* has its usual function of a preposition.

In order to explain our text, special attention should be given to those instances in which *'ahārē* as a preposition is connected with a verb and implies a purpose. For example *ns' 'hry* (Ex. xiv 10), *rdp 'hry*

<sup>20</sup>) Cf. F. E. König, *Historisch-comparative Syntax der hebräischen Sprache* (Leipzig, 1897), § 171b; W. Gesenius — E. Kautzsch, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1909), § 106p.

<sup>21</sup>) The text continues: *'hry rw'y 'wtm bbytw šl 'brhm* ("... after I had seen them [i.e. angels] in the house of Abraham"). This paraphrase takes up a tradition from Bereshit Rabba 45,10; cf. 45,7. See the edition by J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck (2nd printing, Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 458 and 455. A variant of it is found in the Fragment-Targum and Neofiti I.

<sup>22</sup>) Presumably this latter view was already assumed in the Greek (see above, n. 18). See further the Vulgate and, for example, C. F. Keil, *Genesis und Exodus* (Leipzig, 1878), pp. 187 f.; J. Lindblom, "Theophanies in holy places in Hebrew religion", *HUCA* 32 (1961), p. 102, n. 21; *KBL*<sup>3</sup> s.v.; also H. C. White, "The initiation legend of Ishmael", *ZAW* 87 (1975), pp. 285 f., n. 60.

(e.g. Gen. xxxv 5, xliv 4; Deut. xix 6), *rwš 'hry* (1 Kings xix 20; 2 Kings v 20, 21), *šlh 'hry* (2 Sam. iii 26; Jer. xlix 37).

With regard to *r'h*, "to see", it is to be noted that this verb can imply the idea of searching, inquiring (e.g. Gen. xviii 21; Ex. iv 18; Cant. vi 11).

When these data are combined, it can be maintained that *r'h 'hry* means "to look out inquiringly for", "to search for"—an interpretation that finds support in the context of Gen. xvi 13. The meaning of "to search" (viz. for God) is in itself certainly conceivable here; and the word *hlm*, "hither", suits it well. Just as one may pursue someone, or have someone pursued, "to somewhere" (*rdp 'hry*: Josh. ii 7; *šlh 'hry*: 2 Kings xiv 19), likewise he that searches for someone (*r'h 'hry*) may go and look inquiringly "hither" and "thither"—he may seek after him "here" and "there".

When *r'h 'hry* is used in Gen. xvi 13, instead of some more current word for "seeking", it can be explained from the narrator's wish to make the name *'l r'y* meaningful in more than one sense.

Elements in Hagar's utterance which have not yet been discussed need little further elucidation. Partly in view of the word-order, it may be maintained that *gm* has special reference to *hlm*, which is emphasized by it (cf. Gen. xx 4; Num. xxii 33; 1 Sam. xxii 7; Eccl. iv 14)<sup>23</sup>: "here (hither) indeed", "really here (hither)"—i.e., far into the desert. In the final element *r'y* the verb *r'h* appears in a shade of meaning which differs from that of *r'yty ('hry)*: it may be assumed to denote here the affectionate look of him who revealed himself in the angel to Hagar and took her distress to heart (see *r'h* in, for example, Ex. iv 31; Ps. ix 14, xxxi 8; Job viii 18); this emotional value seems to be corroborated by the verbal form, *ro'i, videns meus*<sup>24</sup>) (not *ro'enī* or *ro'ānī*, Is. xlvii 10; cf. a form as *ro'i*, "the one who tends me", "my shepherd", Ps. xxiii 1). In not identifying *r'y* at the end of v.13a with *r'y* at the end of v.13b, the Massoretic vocalization appears to have contributed to a pure transmission of the text. To the narrator the words *'l r'y* ("God of seeing", "God of sight") left room for both moments: man's searching for God, the Living One (cf. Ps. xlii 3, lxxxiv 3, 8), and God's looking after man. Yet it is not by chance that only at the end of both halves of v.13 one "seeing" "rhymes" with the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. C. J. Labuschagne (see n. 2), pp. 193-203, esp. p. 200.

<sup>24</sup> For this form cf. Job vii 8; F. E. König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache* II/1 (Leipzig, 1895), p. 110 (sub 2); also p. 536, n. 1: *videns me(us)*.



other. Only the divine "seeing" is an actual initiative, and that is what 'th 'l r'y is about <sup>25</sup>).

The meaning of Hagar's words in v.13b is: "Would I have gone here indeed searching for him that watches me?" If, in conformity with the Hebrew, we want to express the repeated "seeing" or "looking", we may render: "Would I have gone here indeed looking for him that looks after me?" <sup>26</sup>)

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<sup>25</sup>) When in v. 13a we find *rō'î* instead of the usual pausal form *rō'î* (cf. above, n. 14), this might be explained from a desire to transmit the name 'l r'y in a form that suits as well as possible the account given in v. 13b (*rō'î*).

<sup>26</sup>) R. Kilian (see n. 12), p. 80, rightly observes that vv. 7-12 nowhere tell explicitly that Hagar *saw* YHWH's messenger. In contrast to Kilian's view (pp. 81 f., 86 f.), I think that there is no explicit mention of an appearance in vv. 13 f. either.