Title: THE MEANING OF MAHÇOÇÌLÁH/MAHÇOÇL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Abstract:

The study is primarily interested with the words נדוהל, “double flutes” and נדוהל, “flute” as they appear in the phrases נדוהל ונדוהל, “with hand drums and with double flutes” and נדוהל ונדוהל, “with hand drum and flute.” Most of modern studies have concluded that these expressions refer to “dancing” and “dances” based on theoretical etymologizing. On the contrary, this study shows that these phrases have to say more about women’s musical performances than the mere bodily movement.

The method used in this work does not take into account the form of perceptible words, but its linguistic and functional orientation. The terms נדוהל and נדוהל were investigated on the basis of their function in relationship to other elements in the text.

The phrases identify 2 main musical instruments’ tradition first coined by Miriam and Israelite women at the Sea of Reeds (Exod 15). The morphosyntactical relationship considers the way words relate to each other and how certains sets of a pair of words influence the semantic fields of both terms in the pair. This helps to specify how the plural נדוהל is mostly in overlapping synonymy with percussion instruments (e.g., מְנַשְׁנֵים, “rattles” [2 Sam 6:5]; מְנַשְׁנֵים, “cymbals” [1 Chr 13:8]) and with the chordophone כְּרָכָה, “harps” (Isa 30:32).
Likewise, the singular יִנְחַל is ordinarily substituted within the pair by another instrument: the כֶּנֶר, “harp” (Gen 31:27; Job 21:12; Pss 81:3; 149:3) or with רַנְכֵל, “(family of) flute” (1 Sam 10:5; Isa 5:12).

As a paradigm, every word functions in a field or a group of words, that is its semantic field. All of this militates for the understanding of יִנְחַל as a syntagmatic relationship of instruments. In this sense, the relations of the slots occupied by the second term in the pair are always substituted with another instrument of music, but never with any body movements. This paradigm found in the pair used to translate the term under study sets rules on how to recognize when it means a body movement or the actual musical instrument.