

# THE SHAVING OF SAMSON : A NOTE ON JUDGES 16: 19

by F. C. FENSHAM

**T**HE question is simply: who shaved Samson? According to the A.V. (followed by the R.S.V.), Delilah "called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks" of Samson's head. According to the R.V. and A.S.V., it was Delilah herself who, having "called for a man", then "shaved off the seven locks". The verb used in the Massoretic text implies a feminine subject. Some have emended it to the form implying a masculine subject, but Dr. Fensham, an expert in Semitic philology, argues that the A.V. and R.S.V. are right in retaining the feminine subject and treating the verb as causative in force.

**T**HE problem of this verse is obviously *watëgallah*. Various explanations were proposed in the past. The traditional interpretation as is found with C. F. Keil<sup>1</sup> is that the man called to Delilah's side was present to protect her against the strong Samson. It was actually Delilah who shaved Samson's hair. Another standpoint is represented by a group of scholars who read with Kittel *wayëgallah* and take the man as subject of the sentence.<sup>2</sup> Scholars who follow this view, are compelled to accept a different reading from the Masoretic Text. A third possibility was originally proposed by Kimchi,<sup>3</sup> namely to take *watëgallah* as a causative. This view gives full weight to the summoning of the man and keeps to the Masoretic Text.

The only way to solve this problem is to weigh all the evidence in our possession. The root *glh* "to shave" is only to be encountered in the Arabic *galiha* with the meaning "become bald".<sup>4</sup> It is not attested in any other Semitic language, not even Ugaritic. This makes the position to get evidence from comparative Semitics precarious.

<sup>1</sup>C. F. Keil, *Josua, Richter und Ruth*, 1874, p. 343. <sup>2</sup>Cf. Kittel in *Biblia Kitteliana*, 4th edn., and the commentaries of Budde, Hertzberg (*A.T.D.*) and F. F. Bruce (*New Bible Commentary*). Hertzberg is however not sure and decides in favour of the traditional interpretation. <sup>3</sup>Cf. G. F. Moore, *Judges*, I.C.C., p. 356. <sup>4</sup>Cf. E. König, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum A.T.*, 1910, *ad loc.*, and L. Köhler—K. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 1953, *ad loc.*

If we take the Ancient Versions into consideration the position is as follows: The LXX has the aorist of ξυπόω in the sense of “shave”, but it is not possible to derive from the Greek that the subject is masculine or feminine. The Syriac gives the clearest picture of the problem. We have the feminine third person singular of the *Pe'al* of the verb *gr'* with a causative meaning.<sup>5</sup> We infer this from the fact that *'ish* (“man”) is translated by “barber” (*gārā'ā*) and would be meaningless if the following verb is not taken as a causative. This points clearly in favour of the proposal made by Kimchi. The Vulgate translates as follows: “*Vocavitque tonsorem, et rasi septem crines ejus*”. Very interesting in this translation is the fact that *'ish* is called *tonsor* “barber”, a clear parallel with the Syriac. This may point to *tonsor* as the subject of *rasi*, but the feminine may as well be the subject. Although an interpretation, I agree that *'ish* must be taken as “barber”. The evidence in favour of the feminine third person of the verb is too strong to be neglected. The only solution seems to be to take it as a causative, as is done by various modern translations.<sup>6</sup> The only objection against this solution may be the absence of the third person masculine suffix.

An investigation of the meaning of the root *glh* shows that it was predominantly used as causative. The verb occurs with the exception of one instance,<sup>7</sup> in the Pi'el third person. The third person as subject refers in many instances to the person who must be shaven and not to the person who shaves. The only examples of the verb with the person who shaves as subject, is to be found in the Hithpa'el.<sup>8</sup> There is not one example of this verb where the subject is to be taken as pure active. Taking this into consideration the meaning of *watēgallah* can only be: “and she caused him to shave off . . .” To shave hair must have been a specialized job and not to be undertaken by anyone. We can infer from Egyptian monuments that the guild of barbers existed very early. From the same monuments it is also to be deduced that the Sea Peoples (Philistines) were clean shaven<sup>9</sup> and a guild of barbers very likely. The *'ish* of Judges 16: 19 was probably one of this group.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. Jennings, *Syriac N.T. Lexicon*, 1926, *ad loc.*, and G. Dalman, *Aramäisch-neuhebräisches Wörterbuch*, *ad loc.* <sup>6</sup>Cf. Authorized and Revised Standard Versions, New Dutch Translations, etc. <sup>7</sup>Cf. 2 Sam. 14: 26 where in one instance the preposition *b* and the infinitive construct is used. <sup>8</sup>Lev. 13: 33 and Num. 6: 19. <sup>9</sup>Cf. K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexicon*, 1936, pp. 251 ff.