

What are the *m^eḥabb^erôt* in 1 Chron. 22:3?

Piet Dirksen - Leiden

In 1 Chron. 22:3-4 David lays up supplies of building materials in preparation for the building of the temple by Solomon. The Hebrew text of vs. 3 runs as follows: *û-barzel la-rôb lam-mism^erim l^e-daltôt has-s^e'arim w^e-lamḥabb^erôt hekîn Dawid...* "(David laid up) a big quantity of iron for the nails for the doors of the gateways and for the *m^eḥabb^erôt*..."

The problem for translators lies in the word left untranslated: *m^eḥabb^erôt*, which is a feminine participle of the piel of *ḥbr*, "to connect". In Exod. 26:6, 9, 11 and 36:10, 13, 16, 18 the verb is used for joining together hangings of the tabernacle. The word, therefore, must indicate some building device which serves to connect various parts of a structure. In the only other occurrence, 2 Chron. 34:11, it refers to (wooden) beams. In the verse under discussion this element of "connecting" leads commentators to think of (iron) clamps in parallelism to the nails. To mention the latest three commentaries: H.G.M. Williamson¹ thinks of "clamps", adding "it may be conjectured that these were horizontal 'bands'..." R. Braun² also translates with "clamps", without further commenting on it. S. Japhet³, finally, takes over the same translation from the RSV, without comment.

The dictionary of Gesenius-Buhl⁴ gives "Bindebalken (v. Holz)" for II 34:11 and "eiserne Klammern" for I 22:3; the dictionary

1. H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, NCBC, Grand Rapids, Mi., London 1982

2. R. Braun, *1 Chronicles*, WBC, Waco, Texas, 1986

3. S. Japhet, *1 and II Chronicles*, OTL, London 1993

4. W. Gesenius-F. Buhl, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, Leipzig 1921¹⁾

of Koehler-Baumgartner⁵ gives "Binder, Klammern", architectonic terminus technicus, made of iron (I 22:3) or of wood (II 34:11).

In accepting this translation we have to assume that one and the same word, $m^e \text{ḥabb}^e rā$ can refer to rather voluminous wooden beams as well as to small iron clamps just because of their common function of "connecting". I have no expertise whatsoever in carpentry but wonder whether this is realistic. One would *a priori* expect that these two completely different things would each have their own designation. In 2 Chron. 34:11 $m^e \text{ḥabb}^e rā$ refers to wooden beams. A reasonable assumption is that the same meaning applies here. That exegetes nevertheless assume that here the word means "clamps" must have been caused by the confusing use of the preposition l^e . The translation "clamps" presupposes that l^e in $w^e\text{-}lam\text{ḥabb}^e rōt$ is parallel to that in $lam\text{-}mism^e rim$: "(iron) for nails and clamps". This, however, is not the only possibility. It may as well be parallel to l^e in $l^e\text{-}daltōt$, in which case the translation "(wooden) beams" causes no problem whatsoever: David lays up iron for the nails (to be used) for the doors and the beams. Thus in both its occurrences $m^e \text{ḥabb}^e rōt$ refers to one and the same building device: (wooden) beams.

5. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, Leiden 1974^j