

On the Interpretation of Proverbs 12:27

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Abstract: This article suggests that the difficulties in Prov 12:27 stem from a confusion of the gutturals ק and ע, and interpretation of יקר as an adjective rather than a verbal form of the root קרה. Making these minimal emendations produces a balanced and coherent text: לֹא־יֵעָרֵךְ רְמִיָה צִידוֹ וְהוֹן־אָדָם יִקְרֶה/יִקְרֶה חָרוּץ (The slacker will not set up his food, All a person has befalls the diligent).

Keywords: Prov 12:27, ק/ע confusion, gutturals

Introduction

Proverbs 12:27, which reads

<i>A negligent man never has game to roast;</i>	לֹא־יֵעָרֵךְ רְמִיָה צִידוֹ
<i>A diligent man has precious weight.</i>	וְהוֹן־אָדָם יִקְרֶה חָרוּץ

poses considerable difficulties to commentators. The preceding NJPS translation reflects Toy's opinion that:

The two clauses are unrelated to each other; there appears to be a displacement—each clause has lost its parallel. The first may read: *the slothful man* (lit. *slothfulness*, = *the man of slothfulness*) *does not hunt* (or, *rouse*, or, *roast*) his game—metaphor taken from hunting-life; the meaning of the verb is doubtful, but the general sense appears to be that the slothful man is too lazy to provide food for himself, and must consequently suffer.¹

Many commentators note that the first line of 12:27 is obscure, and the second line seems to be garbled.² Some commentators feel that the verse is too corrupt for translation (Kamphausen). Others come up with strange renditions of the verse. For instance, Noyes translates: *The slothful man takes not that which he hunts; but a diligent man has precious substance.*³ Recently Longman observed that “This verse is widely recognized as enigmatic. We find it hard to place the second colon in smooth grammatical form, so we keep it abrupt.” He renders 12:27 *Slack people do not roast their prey; determined people, precious riches.*⁴ This meaningless text amply illustrates the frustration with the MT of 12:27.

¹ Crawford H. Toy, *The Book of Proverbs* (5th ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1959), 258.

² William McKane, *Proverbs, A New Approach* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970), 444.

³ George R. Noyes, *A New Translation of the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles* (Boston: Monro, 1846), 27.

⁴ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 269.

The major difficulties in 12:27a are the *hapax legomenon* יַחַרְךָ, the confusing order of words in the parallel colon, and the absence of thematic connectivity between the cola. For instance, Toy observes that: “The second clause should express the idea that the diligent man does make provision for himself, but this meaning cannot be got from the present text.”⁵ Obviously, a solution is required that assigns to the *hapax legomenon* יַחַרְךָ a reasonable meaning and establishes a sound meaning for 12:27b which clearly conveys the thematic coherence of the verse.

Analysis

The versions in general support the MT, though some change the order of the words. For instance, the Septuagint renders: *A deceitful man shall catch no game; but a pure man is a precious possession* (Οὐκ ἐπιτεύξεται δόλιος θήρας, κτήμα δὲ τίμιον ἀνὴρ καθαρός). It assumes that 12:27a is a metaphor derived from hunting-life, takes יַחַרְךָ = *he shall catch* (ἐπιτεύξεται), צִידָה = *game* (θήρας), seems to be reading הוֹן יָקָר (κτῆμα δὲ τίμιον), and takes חַרְיִן = *pure* (καθαρός). The Septuagint’s rendition results in two cola that are completely unrelated. It leaves us wondering why *a deceitful man shall catch no game* when so much of hunting relies on deceit.

It seems that *Targum Ketubim* understands 12:27 as a comparison between the fortunes of the deceitful and honest man, translating: *A deceitful man does not chance upon game, and the fortune (wealth) of [an honest] man is precious gold* (לְנִבְרָא נְכִילָא וּמְזִילִיה דְּבַר אַנְשׁ דְּהַבָּא יְקִירָא) (לא נסתקבל צידא). *Tg. Ket.* takes יַחַרְךָ = *he chances upon* (לְנִבְרָא נְכִילָא see Jastrow 1019a), seems to be reading חַרְיִן יָקָר (דְּהַבָּא יְקִירָא), and takes חַרְיִן = *gold* (דְּהַבָּא). The coherence of *Tg. Ket.* translation is better than that of the Septuagint. However, it does not have a clear counterpart to נְכִילָא in the second colon. How can the Targum assert that *a deceitful man does not chance upon game* when any reader knows it to be unrealistic?

The Septuagint and Peshitta translations result in two colons that are thematically unconnected. The Peshitta has for 12:27: *The deceitful man shall not find his prey: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.* It takes יַחַרְךָ = *he will find*, and reads אַדָּם חַרְיִן יָקָר (*a diligent man is precious*). The Vulgate has the best harmonized two cola, though their correspondence to the MT is not satisfactory. It paraphrases 12:27: *The deceitful man shall not find gain: but the substance of a just man shall be precious gold* (Douay-Rheims) (*non inveniet fraudulentus lucrum et substantia hominis erit auri pretium*). The Vulgate takes יַחַרְךָ = *he will find*, צִידָה = *gain (lucrum)*, adds shall be (*erit*), and reads חַרְיִן יָקָר (*auri pretium*). The critical word *just* in the Douay-Rheims translation is missing in the Latin text, and צִידָה never means *gain*.⁶

All the versions render יַחַרְךָ = *he will find*, or *catch*. However, it is not clear whether there was a tradition for this meaning of the word, or the Septuagint guessed a meaning that in its view fit the text and the other versions adopted it. However, the only two words in the Tanach that could have the verbal stem יַחַרְךָ in them are הִתְחַרְךָ (“was singed”) in Dan 3:27 and the noun חַרְכִּים in Song 2:9 (“window”). Neither of these cases even remotely suggests the sense of catching or obtaining.⁷ This is also the case whether the word is similar to the Arabic حرق

⁵ Longman, *Proverbs*, 269.

⁶ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (6th printing; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 845a.

⁷ H.W.F. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 305a. Regarding the translation of Prov 12:27 by the versions, Gesenius observes that “all these translations appear only to have given the sense freely. The signification of taking is indeed *doubtful*, unless the idea be connected with חַרְכִּים. C.B. Michaelis interprets, *will catch in a net*, making it thus, denom. from חַרְכִּים, net-work, lattice.”

(“singe, burn”) or حرك (“move, be agitated”). Apparently, the versions struggled with the order of words in 12:27b. Their rearrangements of the text do not result in better inner-verse coherence. As will be seen from the following overview, the difficulties faced by the versions presage the exegetical challenges of Prov 12:27 to this day.

Rashi (1040-1105) connects 12:27a to 12:26b, paraphrasing the two colons “the behavior of the wicked will make him err, and he will not succeed in his fraudulent hunt.” Rashi notes that the underlying hunting metaphor led to the MT use of חרך, since successful trapping of a bird implies singeing of its feathers. He rearranges 12:27b, reading והיו אדם חרוץ יקר “and the possession of the honest man is precious,” apparently taking אדם חרוץ = “honest man.” Attachment of 12:27a to 12:26b removes the need for harmonization of the MT cola in 12:26. However, this attachment destroys the meter of both vv. 12:26 and 27. Moreover, the stand-alone 12:27a is hanging.

Ibn Ezra (1089-c.1164) explains that the deceitful should not roast or cook his game since he would be robbed of it, but the possessions of a precious person, diligent and honest, would not be robbed. Ibn Ezra reads an entirely unrealistic scenario into the verse. Ralbag begins in a similar vein, saying that “the deceitful should not eat his hunt or trade it, because someone will take it from him.” He explains the following colon: “A man’s most precious possession is being an honest person (חרוץ).”

Most Jewish classical exegetes (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Qimhi, Ralbag *et al.*) take חרך to mean *roast*, or *singe*, as in Aramaic (Dan 3:27), and so do the early Jewish lexicographers (Menahem, Abulwalid, Parchon, and Juda ben Kureish).⁸ The exegetes seem to be compelled to expand and complete 12:27a with a statement about the deceitful not being able to enjoy his game and the reason for it. This expansion is not in the MT, nor is it realistically credible.

While early exegesis saw the contrast in 12:27 anchored on deceit and honesty, modern exegesis sees it resting on laziness and diligence. For instance, Stuart says: “The most probable meaning seems to be, indolence will prevent the slothful from catching the game, and so he will have none to roast. But perhaps, the sentiment is still more pointed, viz.; he is too lazy to cook his game when caught. The text will bear either explanation.”⁹ It seems strange to suggest that someone is not too lazy to hunt but is too lazy to cook his catch.

Stuart translates 12:27: *The indolent man shall not roast his game; but a precious treasure of any man is a diligent person.* He perceives 12:27b as referring a diligent laborer who hunts for his employer, and so is a treasure to him. Why isn’t 12:27b self centered? Toy rightly says that such a notion is “an allowable rendering of the Hebrew, but an inappropriate idea; the intention of the clause is to praise the diligent man for his value not to others but to himself.”¹⁰ Perowne repeats Stuart’s translation of 12:27a and corrects 12:27b rendering: *The slothful man roasts not that which he took in hunting; but the substance of a diligent man is precious.*¹¹ The two cola, however, remain disconnected.

Delitzsch thinks that Shultens is right in associating חרך with the Arabic حرك (“move, be agitated, set in motion”). In his view “The Latin *agitare*, used of the frightening up and driving forth of wild beasts, corresponds with the idea here. Thus יחרך together with צידו gains the meaning of hunting, and generally of catching the prey.”¹² Delitzsch adopts Qimchi’s interpretation of 12:27b. He says that Qimchi’s explanation “‘a valuable possession to man is industry,’ has

⁸ Qimchi understands צידו as referring to wild fowls, and explains that יחרך refers to the singeing of the tips of the wings of the fowl, so that they could not fly away.

⁹ Moses Stuart, *Commentary of the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Dodd, 1852), 262.

¹⁰ Toy, *Proverbs*, 259.

¹¹ Thomas Th. Perowne *The Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1916), 100.

¹² Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), 267.

the twofold advantage that it is according to the existing sequence of the words and presents a more intelligible thought.”¹³ Delitzsch renders: *The slothful pursues not his prey; but a precious possession of a man is diligence.* The meaning “pursue” for חרך has support of the versions. However, as was shown above, the versions guessed the meaning of חרך from the context.

Bertheau and Nowack essentially accept Delitzsch’s position. They say:

Man wird daher richtiger mit arab. حرك zusammenstellen *quod est movere, ciere, excitare* κινεῖν generatim; ... In ^b haben Umbreit u. A. auf Grund der LXX die Umstellung versucht: והון יקר אדם וחרוך kostbarer Reichtum ist beim Fleissigen aber die Wortfolge des M. T. giebt einen guten Sinn. ... vielmehr ist wohl mit Delitzsch zu übers.: *aber ein kostbar Gut des Menschen ist Fleissigsein.*”¹⁴

Gesenius uses the more remote حرق “to burn, to singe,” for deriving the meaning of חרך.¹⁵

Toy does not present a likely translation of 12:27, but says that it may be read: *The slothful man does not hunt his game, the diligent man possesses wealth.*¹⁶ Such reading would assign to יחרך the sense “will not hunt,” which is unlikely when יציד could have been used and צידה is used in the verse. It also transposes several words. The two cola appear to Toy to be unrelated, each losing its parallel.

More recently, exegetes have continued to struggle with the interpretation of 12:27. For instance, Cohen translates: *The slothful man shall not hunt his prey; but the precious substance of men is to be diligent.*¹⁷ Cohen comments that the first part of the verse spoke of “a man catching an animal in the hunt but [being] too indolent to roast it as food; consequently what he owns has no value for him at all.” Unfortunately, his translation of 12:27a does not reflect this information. In fact, the statement “man shall not hunt his prey” is contradictory. If a person does not hunt, whatever prey he would have would not be *his* prey. Moreover, if Cohen takes יחרך = “shall hunt” why does he take it in the comment to mean “roast?” Is roasting the only way to make use of game?

Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) uses intertextuality to suggest that 12:27 is an abbreviated version of 5:26-31. He finds the following similarities: יחרך → תשרפנה, תכוונה; רמיה → אשה זונה; צידו → נפש צידו; and, הון ביתו → הון. This suggests to him that 12:27 also deals with a person who loses his wife to someone else. Torczyner reads 12:27 as two rhetorical questions: “Wouldn’t he be singed one whose ‘food’ (wife) is a deceitful woman? Isn’t the fortune of this honorable man lost?”¹⁸ However, section 6:26-31 is difficult and the intertextuality questionable. In particular, the referents of “singeing” and הון seem to be different in the two passages. Consequently, it is difficult to see how 12:27 is a shorter version of 6:26-31.

Dahood argues that the appearance of the verb חרך in a 14th BCE tablet in Ras Ibn Hani (near Ugarit) “removes the uncertainty regarding the biblical יחרך.”¹⁹ The text on the tablet

¹³ Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 268. Delitzsch argues that “רמיה is here incarnate slothfulness, and thus without ellipse equivalent to איש רמיה,” and that “חרוך does not mean ἀποτόμως, decreed (Löwenstein), nor gold (Targum, Jerome), nor that which is excellent (Syriac), is manifest from this contrast as well as from x. 4, xii. 24. ... a precious possession of man is it that, or when, he is industrious, הייתו חרוך briefly for הייתו חרוך.”

¹⁴ Ernst Bertheau and Wilhelm Nowack, *Die Sprüche Salomo’s* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1883), 82.

¹⁵ Gesenius, *Lexicon*, 305a.

¹⁶ Toy, *Proverbs*, 258-259. Toy suggests reading לאדם חרוך. In his view “The insertion of אדם between the two words is possible, but here hard (1:13, 24:4).”

¹⁷ A. Cohen, *Proverbs* (7th ed.; London: Soncino Press, 1976), 79.

¹⁸ Naphtali H. Torczyner, *משלי שלמה* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1947), 12-13. Torczyner takes חרוך = “lost.”

¹⁹ Andre Caquot and Pierre Bordreuil, “Les textes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découverts en 1977 à Ibn Hani,” *Syria* 56 (1979), 295-315, 296.

reads: *whmš wmlht [y]hrkn wysšhmm* (“et du vinaigre et du sel / qu’il le mette au feu et chauffe”). Caquot and Bordreuil note, “Le verb *hrk* est nouveau en ougaritique, de même le causatif de *hmm* qui le suit.” In Dahood’s opinion, “the juxtaposition with *yšhmm*, ‘that he heat up,’ leaves little doubt as to the meaning of Ugaritic *hrk*,” and establishes the meaning of Hebrew חָרַךְ, “to singe, roast.” Also, the appearance of the phrase *hwn ym* “wealth of the sea,” in a Phoenician inscription (*Byblos 13*) suggests, in his view, understanding of אָדָם in the second-colon phrase הוֹן אָדָם as referring to “wealth of the steppe,” namely, the wild animals living in the desert.²⁰ He translates 12:27: “the languid man will roast no game for himself, but the diligent will come on the wealth of the steppe.”²¹ This hyperbole means that the lazy person does not complete a project.

Eitan notes that in Amos 5:8b, קָרָא should be understood to mean “to gather, bring or hold together,” as in Arabic *kārā*, “to collect (water).”²² Such a meaning would provide inner-verse contrast for Amos 5:8b. Eitan claims that: “Such identification will best solve the crux in Prov. 12.27b which is to be vocalized חָרוּץ (א) יִקְרָה (ה) הוֹן אֲדָמָה (ה) ‘But the diligent man *collects* the wealth of the *earth*. There could be no better parallel (antithetic) to רָמִיָה צִידוֹ (r. יַחֲרֵף) ‘The sluggard gathers not his provision.”²³ Unfortunately, the כ/פ confusion is not attested in the Ketib-Qere apparatus. Also, orthographically, the two letters differ considerably in both the paleoscript and square script. Moreover, while it is possible that Hebrew קָרָא had the sense “gather (liquid),” such a sense would not be suitable for Prov 12:27b. Finally, Eitan’s clever interpretation assumes too many textual emendations for a relatively short text. These emendations, though not impossible, make the interpretation dubious.

Zer-Kavod explains: “The slacker does not singe his game, and because of his laziness eats raw meat (אֹמֵצָא), but the fortune of the diligent man is heavy.”²⁴ It is difficult to understand how Zer-Kavod concludes that the slacker eats raw meat. Moreover, אֹמֵצָא is a piece of meat that can be eaten raw after processing.²⁵ Finally, is singeing the feathers of game a necessary step for getting its meat?

Murphy understands the verse as comparing the lazy and the diligent. The lazy do not get their prey, but what happens to the diligent? The second line does not really explain. Murphy says: “The second line is difficult due to the order of the words in the MT: literally, perhaps, it

²⁰ Jean Starcky, “Une inscription phénicienne de Byblos,” *MUSJ* 45 (1969, appeared 1970), 259-273. The statement on the inscription is: *whwn ym l’gd lm mlhm* [..., ‘and the wealth of the sea the sailors indeed (emphatic *lamedh*) bound up for themselves.’ Dahood argues: “Though the precise meaning of *hwn ym* cannot be pinned down (fish? sea booty?) its existence suffices to suggest that biblical *hôn-’ādām* might signify ‘wealth of the steppe,’ namely, the wild animals living in the desert. Among the several texts where scholars admit that *’ādām* is the masculine counterpart of feminine *’ādāmāh*, ‘earth,’ for our present purpose the most relevant passages are Gen 16,12 and Job 11,12, *pere’ ’ādām* ‘wild ass of the steppe.’ In Proverbs the most widely accepted example is 30,14, where the parallelism with *me’eres* renders the sense of *me’ādām* quite obvious.” However, Dahood misreads Job 11:12, which speaks about a man being born a עֵר פָּרָא, Gen 16:12 is more naturally understood as “wild man” or “wild as of a man,” and in Prov 30:14 the parallelism of *me’eres* and *me’ādām* could at most imply that *me’ādām*= *me’ādāmāh*, but not “steppe.”

²¹ Mitchel Dahood, “The Hapax *harak* in Proverbs 12:27,” *Bib* 63 (1982), 60-62.

²² Israel Eitan, “An Egyptian Loan Word in Is. 19,” *JQR* 15 (1924/25), 420-422. A similar meaning for קָרָא would serve well also in Prov 27:16.

²³ Israel Eitan, “Biblical Studies II: Stray Notes to Minor Prophets,” *HUCA* 14 (1939), 6. Eitan observes that in Arabic حَرف is “to gather (fruit)” and Hebrew חָרַף means “harvest-time, autumn.”

²⁴ Mordechai Zer-Kavod, *ספר משלי* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1983), 75.

²⁵ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Brooklyn: Traditional Press, 1903), 27b.

is: ‘the precious possessions of a man, diligent.’²⁶ He translates: *Slackness will not have a roast to cook, but the wealth of a diligent person is precious.* However, the abstract *slackness* cannot possess a roast, or cook. Moreover, *slackness* cannot be the contrast of a *diligent person*. Finally, Murphy’s translation transposes “diligent” with “precious.”

Clifford views the verse as abstractly presenting a contrast between sloth and diligence, and concretely the contrast “between a bird, which is the food of the poor, and vast wealth.”²⁷ He interprets: *A lazy man hasn’t even a bird to roast, but the diligent possesses great wealth.*²⁸ However, the Hebrew צִידוֹ does not necessarily mean “a bird.” While, the sacrifice of the poor could be a dove, that does not mean that birds were the food of the poor. Also, there is considerable difference between “singeing,” or “charring,” which Aramaic חרך might mean in Dan 3:27, and “roasting.”

Longman explains that the slack “are pilloried by saying that they do not even cook the prey that they catch. On the other hand, the second colon associates determination with riches. ... The obvious intention of this proverb is to encourage determination and diligence and discourage laziness.”²⁹ The challenge of 12:27b leaves him with the strange translation: *Slack people do not roast their prey; determined people, precious riches.*³⁰ It has been already noted that this rendition of 12:27b makes no sense. Moreover, slackers could be very determined people.

Fox translates 12:27: *The slacker will not roast his game, but the wealth of the honorable man is pure gold.* He says: “Though generally considered obscure, the first line makes good sense. “Roast his game” is a natural metaphor for enjoying one’s spoils.”³¹ The meaning “roast” for חרך relies on Dan 3:27b, which reads *on whose bodies the fire had no effect, the hair of whose heads had not been singed (התחרך), whose shirts looked no different, to whom not even the odor of fire clung.* Obviously, חרך in Dan 3:27b cannot mean “roast,” and there is considerable difference between “singed” and “roasted.” If the game was a beast, its skin was taken off with its hair on and singeing was necessary. If the game was a bird, the feathers were plucked and the feather undergrowth was removed with hot water or sometimes singed.³² This occasional procedure could not serve as “a natural metaphor for enjoying one’s spoils.”

Fox’s explanation that the slacker would not enjoy his spoils is puzzling. One would have expected that the slacker would not have any spoils. Moreover, if the slacker gets his spoils, why shouldn’t he enjoy them? Fox explains: “Although the deceitful slacker may cheat and ‘hunt’ others, he will not be allowed to enjoy his gains.” This elaboration introduces another characteristic (“deceitful”), and a tension between being “slack” and unsuccessful, and being “deceitful” and successful, but unable to consummate. Which of these two characterizations is the dominant one in the first colon as a stand-alone, and in the entire verse? It seems as though Fox wanted to catch two birds but caught none.

Fox thinks that “The second line is loosely related to the first. The point seems to be to contrast the illusory character of the slacker’s gains with the high value of the man of honor’s achievements.” This is, *prima facie*, an invalid contrasting comparison. A *slacker* is not necessarily the opposite of the *man of honor*.³³ The word רַמִּיָּה could mean “slacker” or “deceitful”,

²⁶ Roland Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Thomas Nelson, 1998), 44.

²⁷ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 133.

²⁸ Clifford, *Commentary*, 128.

²⁹ Longman, *Proverbs*, 280.

³⁰ Longman, *Proverbs*, 269.

³¹ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* (AnB 18B; New Haven: Yale University, 2009), 559.

³² Sometimes the skin of the bird was removed with the feathers (Lev 1:16).

³³ Fox, *Proverbs*, 269. Fox suggests that רַמִּיָּה as an Aramaism (or rabbinic usage), can mean “honorable” (Esth 1:20, 6:6, 7:11). In his view, this nuance gives a better antithesis to “deceitful man.”

but “slacker” does not also mean “deceitful.” Finally one wonders why the author of *Proverbs* would want to stress that the wealth of a man of honor is “pure gold.” What is the added value in this specification? Does reality support such a contention?

It is obvious from this partial overview of the exegesis for 12:27 that commentators are still at loss concerning what the proverb is conveying. The consensus seems to be that the abstract רמיה “slothfulness” takes on a concrete meaning because of its parallelism with a concrete substantive (חרוץ), and that the verse contrasts laziness and diligence.³⁴ Unfortunately, all the attempts to anchor this general notion in the specifics of the text are unsatisfactory. Clearly, a new approach is required. In the following a text-critical approach is offered.

Proposed Solution

Since none of the meanings that were suggested for יחרך gives a satisfactory sense, it is reasonable to assume that the word was miscopied. Tov notes that textual variations in the Bible occurred because of the phonetic similarity of the guttural letters א/ה/ח/ע. It is possible that the ח/ע confusion resulted in the reading יחרך instead of יַעֲרֶךְ “will set up, arrange” (Isa 21:5, 65:11, Ez 23:41, Prov 9:2, Ps 78:19, 23:5). This confusion is attested in 1 Sam 17:7 where we have וַחֲזִי (ketib) and וַעֲזִי (qere); in Ex 28:26 עֵבֶר (MT) and חֵבֶר (Samaritan); in Deut 32:14 חֲמֹר (MT) and עֲמֹר (Samaritan); the Septuagint reads in Job 24:12 עֲלֵלִים instead of חֲלֵלִים; the Septuagint reads in Job 29:7 שָׁחַר instead of שָׁעַר; there is an opinion that the Easterners (מִדְּנַחֲאִי) had in 2 Chr 34:13 וַיַּחֲתֵר (ketib) and וַיַּעֲתֵר (qere);³⁵ perhaps in Prov 26:17 one should read מִתְחַבֵּר instead of מִתְעַבֵּר;³⁶ perhaps in Zec 12:3 one should read חֲמִסִּיָּה instead of עֲמִסִּיָּה; perhaps in Job 20:2b one should read חֲלָמוֹ instead of עֲלָמוֹ; etc.

The term צִידוֹ does not necessarily have a hunting connotation. It could also mean more generally “his food supply, his food” (Ps 78:24, Josh 9:11, Jud 7:8, 20:10). Since the hunting metaphor does not extend to the parallel colon it makes sense to adopt this meaning for צִידוֹ in 12:27a. These understandings result in the following cogent meaning for 12:27a: “The slacker will not set up his food.” The implied message of this statement is that the slacker has no food to put on the table.³⁷

In 12:27, it seems that the imperfect of the root קרה was incorrectly vocalized יִקֵּר (adjective) instead of the verbal form יִקֵּר or יִקֵּר. “will chance upon, will occur, will befall,” the *Qal* imperfect of the root קרה “encounter, meet, befall” (Ruth 2:3, Num 23:4, 16).³⁸ The phrase הוֹן־אָדָם occurs only here. It probably should be considered equivalent to הוֹן־בֵּיתוֹ “the wealth of his house” (Ps 112:3, Prov 6:31, Song 8:7). Thus, the construct הוֹן־אָדָם would mean “all a person has.” The word III חרוץ occurs only in *Proverbs* (4 times). According to *Qimchi* it describes a person who does a proper (or efficient) job. Mandelkern notes that some derive the meaning of חרוץ from the Aramaic חרצא “hip, loin,” understanding it as “industrious, girded (ready),” and that this meaning of חרוץ applies to 12:27b.³⁹ The term “diligent” captures these

³⁴ G.R. Driver, “Hebrew Studies,” *JRAS* (1948), 164-176.

³⁵ Solomon Mandelkern, *Concordantiae Hebraicae Atque Chaldaicae* (Lipsiae: Veit, 1896), 939d. Mandelkern notes that *b. Sanhedrin* 113 supports this view.

³⁶ See Mandelkern (*Concordantiae*, 815c) and Crawford (*Proverbs*, 481). The Peshitta reading מתערבים is equivalent to מתחברים.

³⁷ The verb ערך is often collocated with שלחן “table.”

³⁸ Dahood, “Hapax,” 62. Dahood also understands יקר as a verb. He says: “With the repointing of MT *yāqār* to defectively written *yiqre* (for *yiqreh*), one recovers the verb missing from the second colon, the imperfect of *qārāh* ‘to meet, encounter.’” Similarly, Eitan (“Biblical Studies,” 6) considers יקר (א) a verb.

³⁹ Mandelkern, *Concordantiae*, 428d.

meanings of III חרוץ. These understandings of the verse components result in the following cogent meaning for 12:27a: “All a person has befalls the diligent.” The implied message of this statement is that one has to be diligent to have any possessions.

The minimal emendations that are suggested here reveal a clear parallelism between the two cola of 12:27, as well as a thematic connectedness.⁴⁰ It is obvious that לא יַעֲרֹךְ || יִקְרָ/יִקְרָ, חרוץ || רמיה, and צידו || יהון־אדם. This parallelism also vividly illustrates the disparity between the “slacker” and the “diligent,” displaying the contrasting parts of a single idea—the advantage of being diligent. This idea, a staple of wisdom literature, is reiterated in 6:6, 9, 10:4-5, 12:24, 13:4, 15:19, 19:15, 20:4, 13, 21:5, 25-26, 24:28-34, 26:13-15, 31:27, Qoh 10:18, Sir 22:1-2, etc.

Conclusion

Commentators seem to have missed the possibility that the gutturals are often confused in the Tanach, and that the unpointed יקר could have been by mistake pointed יִקְרָ (adjective), when the verbal form יִקְרָ/יִקְרָ was intended. By making these emendations two balanced comma are obtained, which make eminently good sense without any rearrangement of the order of words in the MT. The emended text reads:

*The slacker will not set up his food,
All a person has befalls the diligent.*

לא־יַעֲרֹךְ [חָ] <ע־רָךְ רַמְיָה צִידוֹ
וְהוֹן־אָדָם יִקְרָ/יִקְרָ חָרוּץ

⁴⁰ Relatively few emendations have been suggested for Prov 12:27. BHS mentions יַחֲרִיק for יַחֲרִיךְ. Cf. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (5th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 1291.