

²⁰ The name *zblwn* comes from the root *zbl* which in 1 Kings viii 13 and Isa. lxiii 15 denotes being elevated, exalted. In Ugaritic *zbl* means “Prince”, “Exalted one”; see C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1965). See also M. Held, “The Root *zbl/sbl* in Akkadian, Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew”, *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 90-6.

²¹ See M. Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19-35:22)”, *JJS* 26 (1975), p. 32, and G.A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, 1986), p. 66.

²² Later on, Jacob also gave Joseph the city of Shechem as a token of their special relationship. This possession was not to be reckoned as part of his share in the inheritance (Gen. xlviii 22). Shechem, part of the Ephraimite territory, later served as an important national and cultic center. Rehoboam went there for his coronation, and Jeroboam built it up and used it as his base after the schism between Israel and Judah (1 Kgs xii 1, 25).

²³ It is interesting to note that Joseph’s great gift of divination facilitated his mercurial rise. Although there is no mention of the teraphim in the cycle of stories concerning Joseph’s career, the connection of this gift to the power attributed to the cultic objects should not be overlooked.

²⁴ Jephthah was also removed from the family by his agnatic brothers (Judg. xi 1, 2).

²⁵ Perez was listed in the genealogy of the Dabidic royal line (Ruth iv 18-24).

²⁶ Dan and Naphtali may also be assumed to belong to this house since they were the children of Rachel’s surrogate Bilhah.

²⁷ Jeroboam’s insurrection began during Solomon’s reign. The latter was so impressed with the young man that he placed him in charge of the work due to the crown by the entire house of Joseph (1 Kgs xi 8 26-8). No genealogy is given for Omri, but the construction of the new capital at Samaria, in the heart of the Ephraimite territory, suggests a close affiliation with that tribe.

²⁸ Jehu’s place of origin, Ramoth-gilead, was a strategically important city in the territory of Manasseh.

HAMÔR LEHEM (1 SAMUEL XVI 20)¹

A literal translation of 1 Sam. xvi 20 reads: “And Jesse took an ass of bread (*hamôr lehem*), a skin of wine, and a kid of she-goats, and sent them by the hand of his son David to Saul.” The expression “an ass of bread” has apparently caused problems from ancient times.

Translations that follow the MT translate it with the equivalent of “an ass laden with bread” (*Authorized Version*, *Revised Standard Version*, *Jewish Publication Society*, *New National Version*) though the meaning of the Hebrew has been noted as uncertain. Following the “Lucianic” LXX and the Old Latin version, P.K. McCarter reconstructs the “original” reading as *hmwr wysm lyw mr lhm*, and translate it as “an ass, laden it with an omer of bread”. He thinks that the MT has suffered a haplography.² The *New English*

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Bible emends *hmwr* to *hmr* “with Sept.”³ and translates “a homer of bread”. Also the emendation to the numerals “five” (*hamiššâ*) or “ten” (*‘asārâ*) has been suggested by other scholars, since “as elsewhere *lhm* is regularly numbered (by loaves)”.⁴ Thus everyone seems to agree that the MT is textually deficient or at the least obscure. However, I wish to show that the Hebrew text makes perfectly good sense as it is.

It is unlikely that Jesse sent Saul one omer of bread. An omer is about 2.3 litres, and an omer of bread is about the size of one modern loaf, a trivial amount to send to a king. A homer, one hundred times as much, is more likely, but if one can avoid emendation, one should.

I suggest that “ass” in this passage does not refer to an actual animal, but is a unit of measure called an “ass”. This would present no problems grammatically or textually. There is good reason to recognize the existence of this measure.

The measure called in Akkadian the *imēru*, “the ass-measure” “is widely attested in northern Mesopotamia from the early 2d mill. on as the most common large capacity measure”.⁵ The size of this measure is however naturally difficult to determine. The ratio 1 *imēru* = 10 *sūtu* was standard but a *sūtu* varied from 8 to 10 *qū*. The various types of *sūtu* vary between 8 and 16 litres.⁶ From this, *imēru* was probably somewhere between 80 and 160 litres. It is not unlikely that the unit *imēru* was used in Canaan at the end of the second millennium and called an “ass-measure” (Ugaritic *hmr* = Hebrew *hamôr*)⁷ by loan translation or calque of the Akkadian *imēru*, which is always written with the Sumerogram ANŠE.⁸ It is unnecessary therefore to take the term *hamôr* in 1 Sam. xvi 20 as a corruption of *hōmer*.

It is possible that this system developed or merged into the homer-ephah-omer system of the Bible, but at this point that is speculation. It suffices to say that the *hōmer*, a dry measure,⁹ may “originally” have had the “meaning ‘ass-load’”.⁹

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¹ I would like to thank my wife Susan for her help in various stages of this article.

² *1 Samuel* (Garden City, 1980), pp. 279-80.

³ L.H. Brockington, *The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament: the Readings Adopted by the Translators of the New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge, 1973), p. 47.

⁴ S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1913), p. 136. See also, for example, H.P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Edinburgh, 1899), p.1 150; H.J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis* (Gütersloh, 1973), p. 308.

⁵ M.A. Powell, "Masse und Gewichte", *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 7 (1987-90), p. 500.

⁶ Cf. Powell, pp. 501-2.

⁷ For Ugaritic examples see *hmr kšmm* (KTU 4.691:5) and *hmr škm* (4.14 [CTA 142; UT 12 + 97]: 6, 12, 18). Cf. C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1965) § 19.879, on *hmr* "ass; homer"; J. Sanmartín, "Notas de Lexicografía Ugarítica", *UF* 20 (1988), pp. 270-1, especially n. 26. Of course, what it was in Canaan cannot be determined, but in the neighbourhood of 100-200 litres seems likely.

⁸ Cf. *The Assyrian Dictionary*, I-J (Chicago, 1960), p. 114. It is to be noted that the area measurement "yoke" (*šemed*), the "amount of land planted in 1 day's work", in 1 Sam. xiv 14 is also a loan translation from Akkadian *šimdu*, which is normally written in the Sumeroogram AŠ. For Akkadian *šimdu*, see Powell, p. 482, and CAD, S (1962), pp. 197-8; for Ugaritic *šmd* as a land measure, see Gordon, § 19.2168.

⁹ On the basis of W.F. Albright's calculation of the Lachish "royal bath" as being 22 litres, the biblical *hōmer* is usually identified with 220 litres. See R.B.Y. Scott, "Weights and Measures of the Bible", in E.F. Campbell and D.N. Freedman (ed.), *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* 3 (Garden City, 1970), pp. 351-2.

¹⁰ R.P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter, 1986), p. 152.