

GRECO-ROMAN LIGHT ON RABBINIC TEXTS¹⁾

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(1) At *Canticles Rabbah* 1.9.6 the entry of the Egyptians into the Red Sea is described. An Egyptian horseman is addressed by his steed, ראה מה בים. איפחיסים נעשיח לכם בים. "Behold what is in the sea. איפחיסים is prepared for you in the sea." Commentators wrestle with the unknown word. Brüll suggests ὄπτασια (Schauspiel), while noting also ὕψωτος and τάρφος.²⁾ Jastrow reads איפוחורוס (= ἰπποθόρος, sc. στόμος) and comments "a satire on Egyptian lasciviousness." Löw (*apud* Krauss) emends the text in two places and argues for ὕψιστος. All these are vain conjectures. Most hold איפחיסים to be ἐπίθετος (e.g., Levy, Krauss, Aruch) in the sense "an attack." This seems possible though the phrase ἐπίθετος נעשיח is a bit strange and neither the sense nor the rhetoric is eminently suitable.

Another option seems better. The noun is ἀποθέωτος. This usually means "deification," but it also occurs in the sense "burial," which is precisely what is desired here (cf. *CIG* 2832.3). It is, however, possible that the noun may retain its fundamental sense here and reflect a touch of humor. Given the Imperial custom of automatic deification upon

1) The following reference works are throughout referred to in abbreviated form (usually by author's name): *Plenus Aruch Targum-Talmudico-Midasch Verbale et Reale Lexicon*, edit. A. Kohut (4 volumes, Vienna 1878-92); M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (repr. New York 1967); S. Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, vol. 2 (Berlin 1899); J. Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (Darmstadt 1963; reprint of second edition of 1924).

2) N. Brüll, *Jahrbücher f. jüd. Gesch. und Litt.* 5-6 (1883) 121.

death, the horse's remark may signify, "look; you are about to be deified"; i.e. you are about to die. This would be the sort of humor embodied in Vespasian's observation when on the point of death, *vae, puto deus fio* (Suet. *Vesp.* 23.4). אפחורטיס may be the correct spelling. For ון = θεω cf. אוריא = θεω-ρία.³⁾

(2) At *Esther Rabbah* 3.12 God is said to instruct his angel to inflict punishments on the chamberlains of the king Ahasuerus. The punishments are listed in a series of word-plays based on the names of the chamberlains. Most are fairly clear but the final one is difficult and the text may show some degree of corruption. The earlier section states: "despoil his house, destroy his house, spoil and plunder it... behold the profligacy of that evil man." The text continues with an obscure play on the name of the last chamberlain Carcas. It concludes, "it is Greek. As one says, וןכרנסו." A number of views have been offered as to the Greek involved here and the sense of the final item in the series. Brüll suggests κερήσια,⁴⁾ Fürst κερχήσιον (Weinfass),⁵⁾ Levy κέρκος, Kohut (s.v. כרנסו) κεραχίς = κερχον, while also noting κουρξ. All these are far-fetched and unpersuasive.

Jastrow, however, takes וןכרנסו = ἐκήρυξεν, "proclamation has been made." This is, I think, close to the truth. But the context should lead us to a slightly different understanding of the Greek behind וןכרנסו, one which also better suits the spelling, namely κήρυξον. Thus we have "behold the profligacy of that evil man and proclaim it." κήρυξον is the order to proclaim issued by the figure of authority; cf. ἐκέλευσεν κηρῦσαι.⁶⁾ For the aorist active imperative transliterated we may have rabbinic examples in וןכרנסו = βρέξον and וןכרנסו = ἀπάντησον.⁷⁾

3) See A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. 2 (repr. Jerusalem 1967³) 23.

4) Brüll (supra n. 2) 128.

5) J. Fürst, *Glossarium Graeco-Hebraicum* (Strassbourg 1890).

6) See Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. κηρῦσαι.

7) Jer. Tal. *Schebuoth* 34d, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 146a (ed. Friedmann).

(3) The Aruch cites from Yelamdenu Shmini (s.v. קפלארניא), אינו עשוי לקופלארניא, הוי לא איש דברים אנכי. The unknown word is generally taken to be *κουφολογία* = empty talk.⁸⁾ But this simply makes no sense. The context is God's commission of Moses at the burning bush. Moses seeks to turn down the appointment. In the words of the Bible (*Exodus* 3:11), "who am I to go unto Pharaoh and to take the children of Israel out of Egypt" and (4:10) "I am not a good speaker." Within this context what genuine sense could one derive from such a description of Moses, "he is not suited for empty talk."? This is not merely inappropriate but probably inconsistent.

We should rather take קופלארניא to be a slightly corrupted form of *καλοπραγία*. The text would then mean, "he is not suited for noble, heroic acts" and makes perfect sense. The word *καλοπραγία* is only known to us from schol. *ad* Apollonius Rhodius 3.68 where it appears to mean "justice, righteousness." But there is no reason to believe that its range would not have been broader, as is the case for its relatively common counterpart *κακοπραγία*, (failure, misdeeds, evil actions). We know that *καλὰ πράττειν* was used in the sense "to do noble acts" (e.g., Thuc. 6.16). This may also suggest that the exegete was taking דברים = action. We might compare Philo's paraphrase at *Moses* 1.83, τὰ λίαν μεγάλα κρίνων οὐ καθ' αὐτόν, which is virtually "not suited for great deeds," as in our text.

(4) In the Midrash *Aggadat Ester* 5.2 we read that the sons of Haman, believing the queen doomed, proceed to divide up her possessions.⁹⁾ They all seize items at random. But when they come upon her פורפירה (the royal robe of purple), they decide to cast lots: אבל פורפירה שלה שהוא קוהאיוסיס מפילין

8) See N. Brüll, *Jahrbücher f. jüd. Gesch. und Litt.* 8 (1887) 70f. Levy (s.v. קופלא, קופלא) translates the sentence "er ist nicht zur Verbindung, Ordnung der Worte geeignet" which would fit the context. Unfortunately, he gives us no indication as to how he gets this sense from the text.

9) See S. Buber's edition (Cracow 1897); also W. Bacher, *MGWJ* 41 (1897) 356.

לרלל, "but as for her purple robe which is קוּחַאִירוּסִים, for this they cast lots". Krauss (568) believed the word a corrupted form of κάρησις, and Sperber improved on this with καταίωσις.¹⁰⁾ The point then is clear. The courtiers can haphazardly divide up the queen's possessions, but when they come to the purple robe "which is the symbol of the royal authority," they pause and decide that so significant an item should be given away by lot.¹¹⁾

Sperber's suggestion is brilliant, but entails two difficulties. First, the word καταίωσις is extremely rare. Second, it does not occur in the sense "majesty, authority." Thus, I should like to offer another possibility, one which is paleographically reasonable (if not as good as Sperber's), is fairly common, and occurs in precisely the sense desired, namely καθοσίωσις. This Greek word was used as the equivalent of Latin *maiestas* (CGL 2.335.36) and was employed in the sense "majesty, authority" with reference to officials (cf. e.g., SIG³ 905.11). We find it as the Greek equivalent for the Latin (*laesa*) *maiestas* (Suda, s.v. εὐνοῦχος). It is then the appropriate word in the present context.

(5) At *Midrash Haggadol ad Gen.* 24:53 we read that the gifts the servant brings are various fruits, silk, pepper and פּוּרְסִינָה. Krauss lists the word with a question mark. Kohut (supp. p. 69) offered πύσον and Sperber πύσινος.¹²⁾ The latter is open to objection as it is an adjective and we expect a noun here. But both seem unlikely since the context and the other gifts in the series suggest a luxury item, something exotic. I would propose φασιανός which occurs often in Rabbinic texts, though usually in the form פּוּרְסִינָה (*vel sim.*). The glossator of *Sepher Ha Margalit* evidently under-

10) D. Sperber, *Sinai* 79 (1976) 55.

11) The identification of "the purple" and "royal authority" is evident in various texts from the Empire. Note e.g., Lucan's *purpuram sumere* (7.228) and Claudian's *Tyria maiestas* with reference to "purple" (*Stilicho* 1.79-80).

12) D. Sperber, *Annual of Bar-Ilan University: Studies in Judaica and the Humanities*, vols. 14-15 (1977) 19, n. 38.

stood the word in this way for he explains, "a kind of quail."

(6) At the end of this text we read that the servant also took grain with him. This teaches us, the Midrash elaborates, שׂאם ירצא אדם לדרך ואין אסטרכיא עמו מסחגף, that if a man goes on a journey without אסטרכיא, he will suffer. Two manuscripts read צ in place of ס. The word clearly means "traveling necessities, provision" (Jastrow). It occurs again (in the form איצטרכיא) at *Koh. Rab.* 11.1, where the context also makes it clear that it means "provisions." Indeed, the *Yalkut ad Gen.* 24:53 gives the same exegesis as is found in *Midrash Haggadol* but substitutes מזונותיר for אסטרכיא.

Now it is a well known and fascinating fact that occasionally Greek loan words are assimilated to Semitic roots. Perhaps the best examples are טמירן (= ταμειρον, but "related" to טמך) and מסטוריך (= μιστριον, but "related" to סחר). It is generally believed that the word under discussion here is merely an Aramaic noun from the root צרך. Thus, the form אסטרכיא does not even occur in the lexica. I suspect, however, that אסטרכיא is no error, but rather an illuminating clue to the real word here. The noun is the common Greek word for "provisions," namely σιταρχία. It has evidently been "semiticized" into an Aramaic noun as if from the root צרך. In the process it has acquired an א at the beginning. I am not sure whether there is any guaranteed example of such syllabic prosthesis in a loan word preceding a single consonant. אספור from σάπφειρος, אסקרטיר from *secretarius*, אלכסון from λοςξόν are possibilities, but all are disputed. However, the fact that *this* loan word is fashioned so as to seem Aramaic makes such prosthesis more readily understandable and acceptable.

(7) A passage in *Midrash Tanhuma* relates how God bestows His personal apparatus on only a very few select individuals.¹³⁾ Thus, for example, Elijah received His chariot, Solomon His throne. Verses from the Bible are brought as evi-

13) See the edition of S. Buber (Vilna 1913; reprint Jerusalem 1964) p. 51.

dence for the various gifts. Moses, we are told, was the sole recipient of God's crown. As proof, *Exodus* 34:29 is quoted: כִּי קֶרֶן עָרַר פָּנָיו, "Moses' face shone." The difficulty is patent. How can a verse "Moses' face shone" be evidence for his use of God's crown?

We might argue that a mystical doctrine equating light and God's crown functions here. But the answer is simpler. The Rabbis are working with a bilingual pun. קֶרֶן is associated with Latin *corona*. Such bilingual word play is attested elsewhere in Rabbinic texts. A nice example occurs at *Pesiqta deRav Kahana* 3.1 (Mandelbaum p. 40) where the Biblical אֵלֶּךָ is interpreted as if it were ἄλλον.¹⁴⁾

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14) For another example see D. Sperber's discussion of *Lekah Tov ad Lam.* 3:65 at *Sinai* 79 (1976) 57-8.

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