More Roman Light on Rabbinic Texts

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The word "אליעקב אליעקב" occurs in two Rabbinic texts. Of the numerous explanations that have been offered, most have been rejected because they are linguistically absurd (e.g. Jastrow’s derivation from "אליעקב") or because they make no contextual sense. But one solution is widely accepted, that "אליעקב" derives from Greek εἰκὸς plus Hebrew ב and means, “in vain, for nothing, rashly.” It therefore needs to be pointed out that this view has serious difficulties and should not be wholeheartedly applauded.

In the first place, the addition of ב to the adverb εἰκὸς is puzzling. It is true that Syriac uses εἰκὸς frequently but this makes the addition of ב here all the more questionable. Hebrew parallels like יesterday and יesterday provide but little support. Further, though the manuscripts differ in their spelling of this word, they are unanimous in reading ב and not ב .

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2 For lists of suggestions see the lexicons of Jastrow (p. 70), Fürst (p. 49), the Aruch (1. 106), Krauss (vol. 2, p. 50), and also S. Buber’s edition of the Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (Lyck 1868), p. 104a, note 81.

3 The solution is De Lara’s and is accepted by Fürst, Krauss, S. Lieberman (Hellen- ism in Jewish Palestine, New York 1950, p. 213) and B. Mandelbaum in his edition of the Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (New York 1962), p. 212.

4 Though י中铁 (על זכר) might provide a useful parallel.
Secondly, in one of the two passages in which \( \text{εἰκάπ} \) occurs, \( \text{εἰκάπ} \) hardly makes sense. One can see the point at Cant. Rab. ad 1:4:

\[
\text{בשעת שיעדר ישראל לפני תר שיכינו לכנל}
\]

\[
\text{תוראה אмар להמה הביצה, אליעךי איני בורח}
\]

\[
\text{לכתי את התורה, אלה היסר לי ערביס}
\]

\[
\text{שופים ששמורות אדם גוזנת לך.}
\]

But *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, Bahodesh Hashelishi* is problematic: 5

\[
\text{לפלר חיה מקושל לקית אשה בטבריס בת}
\]

\[
\text{กระบים. אמר, אליך ביני אפיי תובע ב', משאיבי}
\]

\[
\text{ועשה אם כאמה טברות ואחר קר אפיי תובע ב'.}
\]

Does “rashly” or “vainly” give good sense here? Mandelbaum translates "במבנה". If by this he means “at no expense” (which makes some contextual sense), 6 we should note that \( \text{εἰκάπ} \) does not carry this meaning.

\( \text{αἰλικός} \) (the spelling of the *Aruch* and evidently also of the best manuscript of the *Pesikta*) 7 may then be *ilio*, a colloquial word used at all stages and periods of the Latin language. This matches the Hebrew orthography quite well 8 and gives impeccable sense in both passages: “Shall I give you the Torah on the spot? Bring me guarantors and I will give it to you.” “I don’t ask her hand on the spot. After I have done several good things for her, then I will ask for her hand.”

The word \( \text{קורדיקוס} \) occurs several times in the Talmud 9 and it is clear from the contexts that it refers to a temporary seizure of "insanity" (or to the person suffering from such an attack). Translators, lexicons and commentators assert that this is the Greek word

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5Buber, p. 104a, Mandelbaum, p. 212.

6W. G. Braude and I. J. Kapstein (trans.), *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana* (London 1975), p. 236, seem to follow this line, translating “Without doing something in her behalf, I shall not ask her hand in marriage. Only after I do a great many good things in her behalf, will I ask for her hand.”

7So, at all events, Buber reports of the Oxford manuscript. There is no such indication in Mandelbaum.

8For \( \text{ח} \) = *i* cf. \( \text{אמפרור} \). The only flaw in an otherwise perfect transliteration is the final “yod,” which could be a degeneration in pronunciation or perhaps a corruption in the manuscripts of “vav” to “yod.”

9*Gittin* 7. 1; *bGittin* 67b, *jGittin* 48c36, *jTerum* 40b36.
καρδιακός, though most note that the Greek word never seems to convey this meaning. The illness known as καρδιακός (ḥ) is a rather more elaborate physical disease as can be seen from the lengthy clinical description of its symptomatology at Caelius Aurelianus celerum vel acutatarum passionum II. 30. 161 - II. 36. 190, and scarcely seems to suit the requirements of the Talmudic contexts.

In spite of this, the view that מַרְדִּיקֵהוּ = καρδιακός is fundamentally correct. But we must look to the Roman version of the word, cardiacus. For it is clear that there was a Roman use of the term, perhaps colloquial, to signify a temporary state of "insanity" (delusion, ecstasy, vel sim.). Thus, Firmicus Maternus (III. 5. 29) notes that a certain conjunction of the planets makes some people deliro aut cardiacos aut freneticos and similarly Tertullian (de anima 43. 8) couples phreneticam atque cardiacam (valetudines) as abnormal conditions that adversely affect a person's sleep. And from a particularly illuminating passage in Cicero (de div. I. 38. 81) we can easily infer that there were people who believed that the ability to foretell the future was connected to one's being cardiacus, which makes perfect sense within the ancient context of the association of prophetic ability with insanity. Finally, all commentators seem to ignore the difficulty posed by the spelling רוד to represent καρ-. But this too is explicable when we realize that the influence here derives from Roman, not Greek, roots. Evidently the Romans not only adopted Greek καρδιακός in its Greek pronunciation and spelling (cardiacus), but also used a second pronunciation and spelling, cordiacus, most probably by assimilation to Latin cor. Thus, we find in several sources cordiacus, as well as cardiacus. Gloss. II 338.55 gives καρδιακός — cordiacus and the Notae Tironianae (ed. Schmitz) lists both cardiacus (Tab. 111.51) and cordiacus (111.52).

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10E.g., Jastrow p. 1341, Aruch 7. 189, Levy 4. 275, Krauss p. 519, the Soncino translation of Gittin (ad 67b, p. 320), Albeck in his edition of the Mishnah (Seder Nashim, p. 404).

11Some refuse to accept the identification on precisely these grounds, e.g. L. Goldschmidt ad Gittin 67b (Berlin 1932, p. 411) who suggests a derivation from κόρδάκος, "Der Taumler." This view is approved by H. and H. Guggenheimer in Leshoneinu 35 (1971), p. 209, n. 14. If κόρδάκος is meant to be genitive of κόρδαξ (the accent is wrong), it should be noted that κόρδαξ does not mean "Der Taumler." If it is intended to be a nominative, it should be noted that such a word does not seem to exist.

12I am indebted to Professor Daniel Sperber for helpful criticisms.