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TARGUMIC כְּרוּבָה (ZECHARIAH 14:20)
= GREEK κορυφαία?

The penultimate verse of the book of Zechariah speaks of מְצִלוֹת הַסּוּסִים, a phrase that is today almost always rendered “the bells of the horses.” The modern lexicographical consensus on this point is a relatively recent development, however; the ancient versions present us with a number of different translations of מְצִלוֹת, but “bells” is not among them. Especially puzzling is the rendering we find in the *Targum to the Latter Prophets*, which has כְּרוּבָה (or some variant thereof). Since we here have an example of an Aramaic *hapax legomenon* rendering a Hebrew one, it is not surprising that previous scholarship has been at a loss with respect to the targumic word here used, both as to its correct reading and its semantic reference.

Although the reading כְּרוּבָה is found in most printed sources (the *Arukh*, the rabbinic Bibles, the London and Antwerp Polyglots, and the lexica of J. Levy, M. Jastrow, and G. Dalman), there is considerable variation in the manuscripts. A. Sperber's edition lists the following variants: כְּרוּרָה, כְּרוּרָה (the reading adopted in Sperber's own text), כְּרוּבָה, כְּרוּבָה, and כְּרוּבָה.¹ P. de Lagarde's edition printed the reading כְּרוּרָה,² while that of Wilna adopted yet a sixth variant, namely, כְּרוּכָה.³ In the recent English translation of the *Targum of the Twelve Prophets* by K. J. Cathcart and R. P. Gordon, it is again the reading כְּרוּבָה that serves as their *Vorlage*.⁴

It is in fact only for the reading כְּרוּבָה that a translation has been attempted, although it is clear from the lexicographical tradition that the translations offered were little more than guesses. A. Kohut's edition of the *Arukh* relates the word to Greek κορυφαία, which is said to be the equivalent of German “*Schall, Geklingel*.” It also suggests the possibility that the true reading is כְּרוּכָה and represents a Persian loanword denoting a musical instrument resembling the tambourine.⁵ The seventeenth-century lexicon of J.

My thanks to Professor Robert Gordon of Cambridge University, and Dr. Edward M. Cook of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (Cincinnati) for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, Vol. 3, *The Latter Prophets according to Targum Jonathan* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 499.

² Paul de Lagarde, *Prophetiae Chaldaice* (Leipzig, 1872; reprint, Osnabrück: Zeller, 1967) 486.

³ Teste Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York, 1893; reprint, New York: Judaica Press, 1989) s.v. כְּרוּכָה.

⁴ Kevin J. Cathcart and Robert P. Gordon, *The Targum of the Minor Prophets* (The Aramaic Bible 14; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989) 226.

⁵ *Arukh Completum* (ed. Abraham Kohut; Vienna, 1878–92; reprint, Tel Aviv: Ramah, 1961) s.v. כְּרוּכָה.

and J. Buxtorf offers three possibilities: “*pack-saddle*, or *horse-cloth*. Others have *medallions*.”⁶ The third of these options is the one adopted in the Latin version of the targum included in the London Polyglot (*phalerae*),⁷ and the second is the one favored by Levy’s lexicon (*Pferdedecken*).⁸ Some nineteenth-century commentators on Zechariah state that the enigmatic Aramaic word refers to horse trappings in general.⁹ Jastrow’s dictionary relates the word to the root כרב and renders the noun as “wrap, blanket,”¹⁰ while Dalman’s dictionary suggests a link with Greek κρωβύλος, and gives the meaning as *Federbusch*, “plume” or “crest.”¹¹ Cathcart and Gordon opt for the translation “blanket,” accompanied by a prudent question mark and a sensible footnote.¹²

It is clear from the foregoing that everyone is guessing, and that no convincing interpretation of כרובה (or any of its textual variants) has yet been put forward. It is the purpose of the present note to suggest a candidate for such an interpretation. My proposal is to accept the most widely adopted reading¹³ (to be vocalized as כְּרוּבָה, the feminine singular construct of *כְּרוּבָה¹⁴), and to interpret it as a Greek loanword based on κορυφαία, which is defined in LSJ as “headstall of a bridle.” This proposal is supported by two considerations: its agreement with other ancient versions of מצלותה in Zech 14:20, and its conformity with the pattern of Greek loanwords in rabbinic usage.

With respect to the first point, it is significant that three of the other ancient versions interpret מצלותה to refer to a horse’s bridle or part thereof: (1) Septuagint: χαλινός (“bit” or “bit and bridle”¹⁵); (2) Peshitta: *pēgūdētā* (“bridle”¹⁶); (3) Vulgate: *frenum* (“bit” or “bridle”¹⁷). Although translations of מצלותה that diverge widely from this interpretation are offered by both the Minor Greek versions¹⁸ and the anonymous Jewish scholar con-

⁶ Joannes Buxtorfius P. and Joannes Buxtorfius F., *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum et Rabbinicum* (ed. B. Fischerus; Leipzig: Schaefer, 1869–74) s.v. כְּרוּבָה: “*clitellae, vel ephippia. Alii phalerae.*” A *phalera* was a medallion or ornamental disc on a horse’s trappings.

⁷ B. Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (6 vols.; London: Roycroft, 1657) 3.140.

⁸ J. Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (2d ed.; 4 vols.; Berlin, 1924; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963) s.v. כְּרוּבָה.

⁹ See the editorial note by John Owen in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, Volume Fifth* (Edinburgh, 1849; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986) 449; similarly E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets: A Commentary* (Oxford, 1877; reprinted as vol. 8 of Barnes’ Notes; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 458.

¹⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, s.v. כְּרוּבָה.

¹¹ Gustaf H. Dalman, *Aramäisch-Neuhebräisches Wörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (Göttingen, 1938; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1967) s.v. כְּרוּבָה.

¹² Cathcart and Gordon, *Targum of the Minor Prophets*, 226.

¹³ The other readings are readily explained as scribal errors due to the graphic similarity of כב/כ and ר/ד, and to the unfamiliarity of both the Aramaic word and the Hebrew term which it renders.

¹⁴ The singular vocalization כְּרוּבָה is to be preferred over the plural כְּרוּבָה (*pace* Buxtorf, Levy, and Dalman), since all other ancient versions construed מצלותה as a singular noun.

¹⁵ LSJ, s.v. χαλινός, I.1.

¹⁶ J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903) s.v. *pēgūdā*, *pēgūdētā*; cf. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879–1901) col. 3030.

¹⁷ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) s.v. *frenum*, I.

¹⁸ Aquila and Theodotion both have βύθος (“depth”), while Symmachus has περίπατος σύσκιος (“shady walkway”). See F. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae Supersunt* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1875; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) 2.1030.

sulted by Jerome,¹⁹ it is clear that there was a significant exegetical tradition in antiquity that supported it. The strength of this tradition can be gauged from the fact that the Vulgate did not break with it, despite Jerome's own preference for another interpretation.²⁰ It is altogether plausible that the targumist too should have aligned himself with this exegetical tradition, especially since the Hebrew מַצְלוֹת of his *Vorlage* was a puzzling *hapax legomenon*, and the *Targum to the Twelve Prophets* elsewhere shows affinities with the Peshitta.²¹

With respect to the second consideration mentioned above, it is beyond dispute that Greek loanwords were common in the language of the rabbis—notably including terms describing horse trappings²²—and that the correspondence between כְּרוּבָה (or rather its absolute form כְּרוּבָה) and Greek κορυφαία is much closer than that between כְּרוּבָה and Greek κορυμα (as suggested by Kohut) or Greek κρωβύλος (as suggested by Dalman). We know from S. Krauss's study of Greek and Latin loanwords in rabbinical Hebrew and Aramaic that the fricative φ of later Greek was often represented by the fricative כּ of later Hebrew and Aramaic,²³ and that the Greek vowel υ was frequently represented by the vowel letter וּ,²⁴ while ο was often not transcribed at all.²⁵ The correspondence between κορυφ- and כְּרוּב- therefore occasions no surprise. As for the correspondence between the ending -αία and the single letter ה, we need to remember that endings of Greek loanwords were frequently elided,²⁶ and that the diphthong αι had come to be pronounced as [ε] in later Greek,²⁷ so that Greek παλαιά could be transcribed as *pylh*,²⁸ and ὑμεναία as *hynwm*²⁹ (with metathesis).

If our proposal is admitted, it is also instructive to take a closer look at the precise

¹⁹ See Jerome, *In Zachariam Prophetam* (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 76 A, Pars I,6; Turnholt: Brepols, 1970) 897: "Quod cum ab Hebraeo quaererem quid significaret, ait mihi, non debere nos legere mesuloth, sed mesaloth, quod significat phaleras equorum et ornatum bellicum." ("But when I inquired of a Jew what it [i.e., מַצְלוֹת] meant, he said that we ought not to read מַצְלוֹת, but מַצְלוֹת, which means the medallions and military trappings of horses.")

²⁰ Jerome, *In Zachariam Prophetam*, 897: "Soli Septuaginta χαλινόν id est, frenum, transtulerunt, quos et nos in hoc loco secuti sumus, ne nouum aliquid in quaestione uulgata uideremur afferre." ("Only the Seventy translated it as χαλινόν, that is, 'bridle,' and we too have followed them in this place, lest we should appear to be introducing something new in a much-publicized question.") Jerome does not explain what the mysterious *quaestio uulgata* was that induced him to follow the LXX, but he goes on to make it clear that he himself prefers the interpretations of the Minor Greek versions.

²¹ See A. Gelston, *The Peshitta of the Twelve Prophets* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 178–90; and Robert P. Gordon, *Studies in the Targum to the Twelve Prophets from Nahum to Malachi* (VTSup 51; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 117–29.

²² See Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum* (2 vols.; Berlin, 1898–99; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1964) esp. 2.635, where the following Greek terms productive of rabbinic loanwords are included: ἐπίπιον ("saddle-cloth"), κανθήλια ("pack-saddle"), φορβεία ("halter"), χαλινάριον ("small bit"), χαλινός ("bit" or "bridle").

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.42 (§55) and 98 (§155).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.20 (§28).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.19 (§27).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.118 (§§214–15).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.55 (§69).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.434, 454.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.228.

technical meaning of *κορυφαία* in Greek usage. As used by Xenophon in the fifth century BCE, the word is generally understood to refer either to the “headstall” of the bridle (everything but the bit and reins),³⁰ or to one or more of its upper straps.³¹ Julius Pollux, however, a Greek writer who flourished in the late second century CE, defines it as “the strap that extends from the crown of the horse to the bit (ὁ ἀπὸ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ ἵππου ἐκτεταμένος ἰμάς ἐπὶ τὸν χαλινόν).”³² This last definition, which is probably relatively close in date to the targum, is particularly suggestive with respect to the exegesis of Zech 14:20. For one thing, the phrase ἐπὶ τὸν χαλινόν is reminiscent of the LXX, which renders the words מַצְלוֹת of the MT as τὸ ἐπὶ τὸν χαλινόν, which could have been interpreted to mean “that [strap] which [extends] to the bit.” For another, the specific sense of “crown-to-bit bridle strap” suggests a connection with yet another witness to the Jewish exegesis of this verse in late antiquity.

According to the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Pesah.* 50a), Rabbi Eleazar stated that the מצלות of Zech 14:20 (understood as a plural) were the מַצְלוֹת שְׁחוּלֵין לְסוּס בֵּין עֵינָיו, usually translated as “the bells which are hung on a horse between its eyes.”³³ This translation is unlikely, however, both because the interpretation of מצלות as “bells” is a modern one,³⁴ and because bells, if they were attached to horses at all in classical antiquity, were not hung between their eyes.³⁵ A better translation of Rabbi Eleazar’s words would be “the bridle-straps which are attached to a horse between its eyes.” There is clear pictorial evidence from the first and second centuries CE that at least some Roman bridles had crown-to-bit straps which crossed between the horse’s eyes,³⁶ and could therefore be said to “be attached” there—a possible meaning of the verb הִלָּחַץ in Mishnaic Hebrew.³⁷ These straps are the objects which Rabbi Eleazar’s audience would have most naturally assumed to be situated between a horse’s eyes. In other words, the rabbi and the targumist may have understood מצלות in the same way—as referring to a specific component of a horse’s bridle, which in Greek had the precise designation *κορυφαία*.

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³⁰ So LSJ, s.v. (“head-stall of a bridle”) and the translation by E. C. Marchant in Xenophon, *Scripta Minora* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) 309, 317, 323 (“head-stall”).

³¹ So P. Vigneron, *Le cheval dans l’antiquité gréco-romaine* (2 vols.; Nancy: Annales de l’Est, 1968) 1.54, and E. Delebecque in his edition of Xenophon, *De l’art équestre* (Collection Budé; Paris: Belles Lettres, 1978) 46, 50, 54.

³² Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon* (ed. I. Bekker; Berlin: Nicolai, 1846) 33 (§147).

³³ So H. Freeman in *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Pesahim* (ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1967) 50a.

³⁴ Or possibly medieval, if Rashi’s Hebrew and Old French glosses are understood as referring to bells and not more generally to tinkling ornaments.

³⁵ There is almost no evidence that the Greeks and Romans (unlike the Assyrians and Persians) regularly attached bells to their horses.

³⁶ See Vigneron, *Le cheval dans l’antiquité*, 1.54; and his *Planche* 16 (b and c).

³⁷ See Jastrow, *Dictionary*, s.v.