

CLARIFYING
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BIBLICAL PASSAGES

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

ARABIC COGNATES WHICH
CLARIFY THE MEANING OF
“HASMONEAN,”
“THE SEEKERS OF FLATTERY”
AND “THRACIDA”

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ARABIC COGNATES WHICH CLARIFY THE MEANING OF “HASMONEAN,” “THE SEEKERS OF FLATTERY” AND “THRACIDA”

I. HASMONEAN

The name of the Hasmoneans, **חֲשִׁמוֹנָאִי** / Ἀσαμωναῖος,¹ who were prominent in Judah from 165–37 B.C.E and ruled Judah from 142–63 B.C.E., is unrelated to the **הַשְׂמֵעוֹנִי** (Greek Συμεων) in Num 26:14 and Jos 21:4. The proper name **חֲשִׁמ** appears in Ezr 2:19, 10:33; Neh 7:22, 8:4, and 10:19. The Septuagint renders this name as Ασεμ or Ησαμ or Ωσαμ. In the Hebrew text of Jos 15:27 the Judean town of **חֲשִׁמוֹן** is mentioned (with no corresponding name in the Septuagint),² and a wilderness encampment named **חֲשִׁמוֹנָה** (with the Septuagintal variants Σελμωνα [B-text] and Ασελμωνα [A-text]) appears in Num 33:29.³

The ambiguous **יְאֹתִיו חֲשִׁמָּנִים מִנִּי מִצְרָיִם** of Psa 68:31 (MT 68:32), rendered “Princes shall come out of Egypt” in the KJV and “let bronze be brought from Egypt” in the RSV, provides one clue for the derivation of “Hasmonean.” The Arabic cognate **حشيم** (*ḥašīm*) can mean one who is “regarded with reverence, veneration, respect, honour, awe, or fear” (Lane 1865: 577). This cognate explains the Septuagint’s translation of this phrase as **πρέσβεις ἐξ Αἰγύπτου** “elders / ambassadors / venerable men from Egypt.”⁴ In the language of Psa 68:32 (MT), the Hasmoneans (**חֲשִׁמוֹנָאִי**) would have been the **מִנִּי יְהוּדָה חֲשִׁמָּנִים** “the men from Judah held in high esteem” or “the men from Judah regarded with fear.”⁵

The second clue for the derivation of חַשְׁמוֹנִי, חַשְׁמוֹנִיָּה, and חַשְׁמוֹנִיאִי is found in 1 Macc 3:4, where Judas Maccabeus was said to have been “like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey.”⁶ This reference to a roaring lion suggests that the חַשְׁמ of חַשְׁמוֹנִי, חַשְׁמוֹנִיָּה, and חַשְׁמוֹנִיאִי is the cognate of Arabic خَشَام (*ḥuṣā m*) “lion” (Lane 1865: 744), so called because of the greatness of the lion’s nose. (The Arabic for a large nose is خَشَام [ḥaṣā m], a flat nose is خِشْم [ḥaṭī m] and a regular nose is خِطْم [ḥiṭam] or أَنْف [ʾanf] (= אַנְף > אָנְף).⁷

The third clue for the meaning of the stem חַשְׁמ is the Arabic cognate حَشِمَة / حَشِم (*ḥašima / ḥiṣmat*) “he became angry/anger” (Lane 1865: 576–577). The anger of the Hasmonians is well noted in I Macc 2: 24–27 and 2: 49.

When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king’s officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: “Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!” . . . Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: “Arrogance and reproach have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger.”

In light of the cognates cited above, 1 Macc 3:4, coupled with 1 Macc 2:24–49, suggests several layers of meaning for the name חַשְׁמוֹנִיאִי, including “lions” and “angry (men).” The Hasmonians as *angry* (חַשְׁמ) *lions* (חַשְׁמ) were *feared* (חַשְׁמ) by their enemies and *held in awe* (חַשְׁמ) by their followers.

II. “THE SEEKERS OF FLATTERY”

Support for the derivations meaning “lion” and “angry” comes from 4Q169 (4Qp Nahum), where—with reference to Nahum 2:12, “he fills his cave with prey and his den with game”—the interpretation was given that

. . . this refers to the Lion of Wrath (כפיר החרון) . . . vengeance upon the Flattery Seekers (בדורשי החלקות), because he used to hang men alive, as it was done in Israel in former times . . .⁸

Although Doudna (1999) identified the “Lion of Wrath” here in 4Q169 with Pompey (who killed 12,000 Jews in his seige against Jerusalem),⁹ most scholars have identified him as Alexander Jannaeus, the Hasmonean who ruled 103–78 B.C.E.¹⁰

The translation of חלקות in 4Q169 by “flattery” or “easy interpretations,” as if it were from חלק “to be smooth” (BDB 325; KBS 322), is very misleading.¹¹ According to Josephus (*Antiquities* XIII: 13: 376),¹²

He [Alexander Jannaeus] fought against them [his own people who were seditious against him] for six years, and slew no fewer than fifty thousand of them, and when he desired that they would desist from their ill will to him, they hated him so much the more, on account of what had already happened; and when he asked them what he ought to do, they all cried out that he ought to kill himself.

The outcry for Alexander to commit suicide could hardly qualify as “flattery” or “easy interpretations.” It was after this outcry for his death that Alexander’s forces of 20,000 Jews and 6,200 Greek mercenaries were defeated by Demetrius Eucerus’ 3,000 horsemen and 40,000 footmen which included some 6,000 Jews. However, once Demetrius return to Greece,

Alexander Jannaeus successfully defeated those Jews who had fought with Demetrius, culminating in Alexander’s crucifixion of 800 Jewish fighters while still alive after the murder of their wives and children before their eyes,¹³ which earned him the enigmatic name $\Theta\rho\alpha\kappa\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha\nu$ (discussed below).

Flattery may have been used by Demetrius when he attempted out of ethnic loyalty to get Alexander’s Greek mercenaries to defect to his side; and Alexander, likewise, may have used flattery in his attempt to get Demetrius’ Jewish fighters to defect to his side. But there is no hint that “smooth talk” led to Alexander’s mass crucifixions and the slit throats of the wives and children of the crucified men.

The החלקות in 4Q169 is better read as the cognate of the Arabic epithet *حالقة* (*ḥâliqat*) rather than being the cognate of *خلق* (*ḥalaqa*) with any of its varied meanings cited in standard Hebrew lexicons.¹⁴ The epithet *الحالقة* (*alḥâliqat*), meant

The cutting, or abandoning, or forsaking, of kindred, or relations; syn[onym of] *قطيعة الرحم* (*qatî'atu 'arraḥimi*) [‘the forsaking, abandoning of kindred or relations’] . . . and mutual wrong doing, and evil speaking . . . or that which destroys, and utterly cuts off, religion; like as a razor utterly cuts of hair.¹⁵

Lane noted also “the tradition in which *البغضاء* (*lbağ dâ'*) [i.e. vehement hatred] and *الحالقة* (*alḥâliqat*) are termed the diseases of the nations.”

The allegations of the Pharisees that Alexander, like his father Hyrcanus, was born of a captive woman, along with the outcry for his death, are good examples of “evil speaking,” but are hardly examples of “flattery.” The abolition of the Pharaonic decrees by Hyrcanus was his attempt *to cut off the*

religion (= حَلَاة [ḥâliqat] = חלקה) of the Pharisees, which, according to Josephus, led to “that hatred which he and his sons met with from the multitudes.”¹⁶

When the חלקות in 4Q169 is read as the cognate of حَلَاة (ḥâliqat), the meaning of which includes the “cutting, or forsaking, or abandoning, of kindred, or relations,” it becomes obvious that חלק can be a synonym of פֶּרַשׁ “to divide, to separate, to secede.” The חלקות may not be a plural noun but an abstract, the equivalent of פְּרִשׁוֹת “secession, separation” (Jastrow 1222, 1244). The חלקות דורשי of 4Q169 would then mean “the ones seeking secession” or simply “the secessionists.” The compound חלקות דורשי, then, is synonymous with פְּרוֹשִׁים the “Separatists,” i.e., the Pharisees.

4Q169, col, I: 5ff. can be translated, “This concerns the furious lion [who executes revenge] on the secessionists and hangs men alive.” Similarly, col. II: 11b can be translated, “Demetrius, King of Greece, who sought the counsel of the secessionists to enter Jerusalem” The latter phrase corresponds quite closely to Josephus’ statement, “They [the secessionists in Jerusalem] also sent to Demetrius Eucerus, and desired to make a league of mutual defense with them.”¹⁷

III. THRACIDA

The unusual nature of the name Θρακίδα led Whiston (1741: III, 266) to comment, “This name Thracida, which the Jews gave Alexander, must, by the coherence, denote *as barbarous as a Thracian*, or somewhat like it; but what it properly signifies is not known.”

This unknown becomes intelligible when Θρακίδα is dis-

associated from the place name Θράκη/Thrace and is recognized as a transliteration from a Hebrew source used by Josephus which contained a name composed of (1) תרך “to drive out, to divorce, to banish” (Jastrow, 1699) and (2) עדי / ערו the cognate of Arabic عدو/عدى (*‘adûw/‘iday*) “enemy, foe, hostile party” (Lane, 18:74: 1980). Josephus followed Θρακίδαυ with a definition of sorts, stating, “whereupon the soldiers that had fought against him, being about eight thousand in number, ran away by night and continued fugitives all the time that Alexander lived.”¹⁸ The interpretation of Θρακίδαυ as the “Banisher-of-the-Enemy” is particularly attractive since the cognate عدو (*‘adûw* = עדי) is the antonym of صديق (*ṣadiq* = צדיק) “true, sincere friend,” with all the rich associations of this stem with the Zadokites and the Sadducees who were especially friendly with the Hasmoneans.

Given the fact that Alexander had overcome the Arabians, at least for a while (Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII: 13: 374–376), it should not be surprising to learn that the Arabians not only paid Alexander tribute, but they may also have contributed the cognates in his title of Θρακίδαυ, “Banisher-of-the-Enemy.”

It was not only the barbarity of his live crucifixions and slit throats which earned him this title. It was the terror created by his barbarity which eventually caused his adversaries to abandon their struggle and flee as fugitives beyond his reach. The “Banisher-of-the-Enemy” by terror vanquish his foes. As the “Lion of Wrath” who succeeded against the secessionists, Alexander Jannaeus exemplified well the multiple meanings of “Hasmonean.” He was an *angry lion* who instilled *fear* in many and inspired *awe* in some.

NOTES

1. See Jastrow, 511. Note Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12: 265–266, (Taber 1892: II, 111–112; Whiston 1964: III, 184) “Now at this time there was one whose name was Mattathias, who dwelt at Modin, the son of John, the son of Simeon, the son of Asamoneus (Ἀσσωμωναίου), a priest of the order of Joarib, and a citizen of Jerusalem. He [Mattathias] had five sons; John, who was called Gaddis, and Simon, who was called Matthes, and Judas, who was called Maccabeus and Eleazar, who was called Auran, and Jonathan, who was called Apphus.” (Note also 14: 490; 16: 187; 20: 189, 238.) The name Gaddis (Γαδδῆς) may reflect the Hebrew גַּד, the cognate of Arabic جَد (*jad*) “greatness, majesty, good fortune” (Lane 1865: 384–385; BDB 151). The name Ἀπφοῦς is probably the same name as the אַפּוּס cited by Jastrow (99) as the allegorical name of the angel administering justice, which may be the cognate of Arabic أَنْف [*ʿanf*] “nose,” which can also mean “lord or chief” (Lane 1863: 116).
2. The form of this name is analogous to the name Aaron (אַהֲרֹן / אֶהְרֹן). For the אֵ- and יוּ- affirmatives on the names, see GKC 85^u and 86^{h-i}.
3. Loewenstamm (1958: 315), after citing Noth’s reference (1928: 227) to the Arabic خِطْم (*ḥiṭam*) “nose, noseband, a halter for an animal,” concluded that מַשְׁמַעוֹתוֹ שֶׁל הַשֵּׁם לֹא הִתְבַּרְרָה “the meaning of the name is not clear.” Lane’s definitions (1865: 767–768) include (1) حِطْم (*ḥaṭm*) “a thing, an affair, or business of magnitude,” (2) خَاطِم (*ḥāṭim*) “leader, conductor, manager” and (3) “nose and noseband.”
4. Liddell and Scott (1966: 1462) noted that πρέσβεις “elder, chief, prince, ambassador” was a term of respect and veneration.

Compare Dahood (1968: 32), who considered חֲשֵׁמֹנִי here to be the cognate of Akkadian *ḥašmānu(m)* “blue cloth.”

5. Simon (1793: 627) identified חֲשֵׁמֹנִי “*magnas, optimas*” with the Arabic cognate حاشم / حشيم (*ḥāšim / ḥašīm*) “*magnus magnique famulitii vir.*” Ewald (1870: 520), cited by Tregelles (1875: 313) had identified חֲשֵׁמֹנִי with the Arabic خشم (*ḥašam*) “*the nose which may be applied to a prince.*” (Lane 1863: 116 cited أنف [*ʾanf*] “nose,” which can also mean “lord or chief.”)

6. The Greek text reads, $\text{Καὶ ὁμοιώθη λέοντι ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ὡς σκύμνος ἐρευγόμενος εἰς θήραν.}$ Note the title $\text{ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα,}$ “the lion from the tribe of Judah” in Rev 5:5. The personal names חֲשֵׁמֹנִי or חֲשֵׁמֹנִי would be analogous to the לִיֹּן “Lion” in II Kings 15:26, as well as the Arabic أسامة (*ʿusāma*) (Simon 1793: 188; Lane 1863: 59–60).

7. In Persian خشام (*ḥašām*) signified *anger*, about which Lane (1865: 744) commented, “this meaning is with probability deductible from the literal root of this art.; for he who is angry raises his nose and makes it pointed.” The association of “nose” and “anger” is very widely attested with חֲשֵׁמֹנִי “nostril, nose, anger” and the denominative verb חֲשֵׁמֹנִי “to be angry.” The Arabic خشم (*ḥašim*) “flat nose” is cited by Hava (1915: 157), who also noted خشم (*ḥašim*) “lion,” which is probably related (see GKC 85^m for examples of stems extended by the addition of an ع). KBS (I: 362) cited Arabic *ḥašim* “flat nose” and *ḥašam* “big nose,” but made no mention of *ḥašām* “big nose” or *ḥušām* “lion.” The ش / ث (*š / ṯ*) variants in the Arabic cognate explain the Hebrew חֲשֵׁמֹנִי (with a ש), rather than חֲשֵׁמֹנִי (with an anticipated ש). The place names חֲשֵׁמֹנִי and חֲשֵׁמֹנִי would be analogous to the name כְּפִירָה in

Jos 9:17, 18:26, Ezra 2:25, and Neh 7:29, which, in light of כְּפִיר “lion” and כְּפָר “village,” could have a double meaning and be the equivalent of Leoville or Lionville.

8. See Allegro, 1968: 38–39, Column I, lines 5–8; and Vermes, 1995: 336–340. For a summary of the scholarly discussions on *Pesher Nahum*, see Berrin, 2000: 653–655.

9. *Wars of the Jews*, I: 7. 5 (Naber, V: 30–31; Whiston, I: 30) and *Antiquities of the Jews* XIV: 4. 4 (Naber, III: 235; Whiston, III: 286).

10. See Turner 1962: 528–535. Note especially Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII: 14: 381, “This was indeed by way of revenge for the injuries they had done him; which punishment yet was of an inhuman nature.”

11. See Martínez and Tigchelaar (2000: 334–377) and Rabinowitz (1978: 397), where he suggested: “the ‘Resorters-to-Flatteries,’ those imitators of the way-of-life of the Greeks of the Selucid Empire, are clearly the Hellenizers of whom we read in the Book of Maccabees.”

12. See Whiston 1974: III, 265; Naber 1892: II, 211.

13. Josephus, *Antiquities* XIII: 14: 379–383 reads as follows:

Now as Alexander fled to the mountains, six thousand of the Jews hereupon came together [from Demetrius] to him out of pity at the change of his fortune; upon which Demetrius was afraid, and retired out of the country; after which the Jews fought against Alexander, and being beaten, were slain in great numbers in the several battles which they had; and when he had shut up the most powerful of them in the city Bethome, he besieged them therein; and when he had taken the city, and gotten the men into his power, he brought them to Jerusalem, and did

one of the most barbarous actions in the world to them; for as he was feasting with his concubines, in the sight of all the city, he ordered about eight hundred of them to be crucified; and while they were living, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes. This was indeed by way of revenge for the injuries they had done him; which punishment yet was of an inhuman nature, though we suppose that he had been never so much distressed, as indeed he had been, by his wars with them, for he had by their means come to the last degree of hazard, both of his life and of his kingdom, while they were not satisfied by themselves only to fight against him, but introduced foreigners also for the same purpose; nay, at length they reduced him to that degree of necessity, that he was forced to deliver back to the king of Arabia the land of Moab and Gilead, which he had subdued, and the places that were in them, that they might not join with them in the war against him, as they had done ten thousand other things that tended to affront and reproach him. However, this barbarity seems to have been without any necessity, on which account he bare the name of a Thracian (Θρακίδαν) among the Jews whereupon the soldiers that had fought against him, being about eight thousand in number, ran away by night, and continued fugitives all the time that Alexander lived; who being now freed from any further disturbance from them, reigned the rest of his time in the utmost tranquillity.

14. Lane’s definitions (1865: 799–802) of خلق (*ḥalaqa*) included “he measured, he brought into existence, it was smooth, she was goodly in make” and the nouns “perfect/complete” and “all created things.” KBS (322–324) noted خلق (*ḥalaqa*) “to make smooth, to measure off” and حلق (*ḥalaqa*) “to shave,” but made no reference to the epithet حالقة (*ḥâliqat*), cited in this study.

15. See Lane 1863: 231; 1865: 630; 1867: 1056; and 1874: 2090. In light of the Arabic *حَالِقَة* (*hâliqat*) and *جَادِل* (*jâdal*) “he contended in an altercation, or disputed, or litigated, by advancing what might divert the mind from the appearance of truth and of what was right” (Lane 1865: 392), the *חִלְקוֹת* and *גְּדִלוֹת* in Psa 12:4 (*יִכְרֵת יְהוָה כָּל-שִׁפְתֵי חִלְקוֹת לְשׁוֹן מִדְּבַרֵּת גְּדִלוֹת*) need to be revocalized as abstract nouns rather than as feminine plurals, and translated idiomatically as “may Yahweh cut off all lips of *spuriousness* (and every) tongue speaking *acrimoniously*.”

16. *Antiquities* XIII: 10: 296.

17. *Antiquities* XIII: 13: 376.

18. See Whiston 1974: III, 266–267; Naber 1892: II, 212–213. Note also Hatch and Redpath 1954: Supplement 69–73, where many examples are cited of the Hebrew *ת* having been transliterated by a *θ* instead of the *τ*.