

CLARIFYING  
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CHAPTER NINE

THE REHAB OF RAHAB  
JOSHUA 2:1, 6:17, 6:25

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INTRODUCTION

In the Greek texts of the Bible there is no ambiguity about the vocation of Rahab of Jericho. In Joshua 2:1, 6:17, 6:25, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25 she is identified as ἡ πόρνη “the harlot.” But in the Hebrew text there is ambiguity about the meaning of זֹנֶה זֹנֶה since זֹנֶה can be derived from the ה”ל verb זָנָה “to fornicate” (a cognate of Arabic زنى [*zana-ya*]) or from the ו”ע verb וָיָן “to feed” (BDB 275, 266), as well as a number of other derivations proposed in this study.

Although all the Greek texts opted for זֹנֶה “harlot,” the Targum Jonathan understood it to be זֹנֶה “hostess,” from the root וָיָן. However, the Targumist did not use the readily available Aramaic cognate וָיָן in his translation (see Sperber, 1959: 2). Instead, the Greek loanword πανδοκεύς “innkeeper,” *transliterated* as פִּינְדִּיקָי (Jastrow 1903: 1143), was used to *translate* the זֹנֶה (or just זֹנֶה, the *scriptio defectiva* spelling in manuscripts 8, 16, and 111 cited by Kennicott [1780: 446]). Obviously, the Targumist did not want the ambiguity of זֹנֶה (= זֹנֶה or זֹנֶה) carried over into the Aramaic translation.

The care taken by the Targumist to make sure Rahab was recognized for having been a זֹנֶה “innkeeper” rather than a זֹנֶה “harlot” has not been fully appreciated, even by translators of Targum Jonathan. Harrington and Saldarini (1987: 20) actually translated וָאֵזְלוּ וָעָלוּ לְבֵית אִיתָא פִּנְדִּיקָיָא as “and they went and they entered the house of the *harlot woman*.” To translate the פִּנְדִּיקָיָא as “harlot”—as though it were synonymous with נִפְקֵת בְּרָא “harlot” (Jastrow, 926a)

— is analogous to making the English “bed and breakfast,” a synonym of “brothel.” Even if someone participates in commercial sex at a “bed and breakfast,” the inn itself does not thereby become a brothel, nor do the proprietors thereby become prostitutes or pimps. In light of the Targumist’s choice of a Greek loanword to describe Rahab—so as to avoid ambiguity about the meaning of זנה—a literal translation of פנדקיהוֹ “innkeeper, hostess” seems obligatory, even if it disagrees with the ἡ πόρνη in canonical traditions (Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25). Any suggestion that Targum Jonathan was “cleaning up” the Rahab story would need to account for the embarrassing presence of the נפקת ברהֹא “prostitute” in Targum Jonathan’s story of Judah in Gen 38:15 (Sperber, 1959: I: 64).

Josephus (*Antiquities* V: 2, 1) followed the same tradition as the Targum, referring to Rahab’s καταγωγίον “inn, lodging, resting place” rather than to her πορνείον or her χαμαί-τυπέιον, the common Greek words for “brothel.”<sup>1</sup>

### ARABIC COGNATES

When one turns to Arabic cognates of Hebrew זנה and זון (and the ז"נ by-form זון, like שום/שום) the ambiguity of זנה (originally *scriptio defectiva* זנה) in Jos 2:1 becomes very apparent. The following is a list of possible cognates of זנה:

- (1) زنى (*zanaya*) “he fornicated, he committed adultery” (Lane, 1867: 1260), noted above and followed by many commentators.
- (2) زينه (*zinat*) “a beauty, a comely quality, an intellectual, a grace, an adornment” (Lane, 1867: 1279). This is an especially noteworthy cognate in light of Jewish traditions

that Rahab, along with Sarah, Abigail, and Esther, were the four most beautiful women in the world. (Ginzberg, 1968: 4: 117). Although this cognate is not cited in Hebrew lexicons, it would seem that the meaning was known in earlier Jewish tradition. The significance of “intellectual” is noted below in paragraph (8).

- (3) زونة (*ziwannat*) “short,” when applied to a woman; زون (*ziwann*) when applied to a man (Lane, 1867: 1273). If this were the derivation of רַנְנָה, the ר would have been an original consonant rather than a later vowel letter.
- (4) زناً (*zanâ'*) “short,” possibly a by-form of the above (Lane, 1867: 1255c)
- (5) زناً (*zanâ'*) “to have recourse for refuge, protection, preservation, concealment, covert, or lodging” (Lane, 1867: 1255b). This cognate preserves the meaning which was known to Josephus and to Targum Jonathan. Even though καταχώριον and פִּנְדָּקִיּוֹת address the “lodging” element of زناً (*zanâ'*), they do not touch on the fact that Rahab as רַנְנָה הַיְשֻׁבָה was by anticipation the woman who would provide refuge and concealment for the spies, not just routine lodging. If زناً (*zanâ'*) is the cognate of MT רַנְנָה, the ו of רַנְנָה is a mis-vocalization.
- (6) زناً (*zanâ'*) “he was, or became, affected with a lively emotion of joy or grief; syn طرب (*taraba*) [“he was or became affected with emotion, or a lively emotion, or excitement, agitation, or unsteadiness . . . yearning or longing of the soul . . . with the emotion of him who is bereft of offspring or friends or like him who is insane in mind . . .]” (Lane, 1867: 1255c; 1893: 1835–1 836).<sup>2</sup>

- (7) *zanâ'* (זנא') "to ascend." The LXX B-text of Jud. 19:2 has nothing corresponding to the זנא' (see note 2, below), perhaps due to an erroneous assumption that זנא' was nothing more than a variant for the זנא' "she went [up]" which follows it.
- (8) *dahin* (דחין) "one was or became intelligent, possessed of understanding, sagacious, acute, skillful" (Lane, 1867: 984). Arabic ذ appears as a ד in Hebrew, and the דחין\* would be to דחין what דחין is to דחין (BDB, 626 and 632). The "intellectual" dimension may be reflected in the tradition that Rahab was the ancestress of seven kings, eight prophets, and the prophetess Huldah (Ginzberg, 1968: 6: 171). (See item [2] زينه [*zinat*]), above.)
- (9) *zanûn* (זנון) "one in whose goodness no trust, or confidence is to be placed, someone possessing little good or goodness," and *zanîn* (זנין) "[one who is] suspected, to be under suspicion." Arabic ظ usually becomes a ז in Hebrew but ז and ז may appear closely related to ז, as with *zahîrat* (ظهيرة) "midday" and זאהר (*zâhir*) "shining, bright" and זאהר "shining brightness" (Lane, 1867, 1262; 1874: 1925; and BDB, 263 [with no reference to ظهیر] and 843 [which notes ظهیر]). Support for this association comes from Jewish traditions that Rahab lived an immoral life from age ten to fifty—which is to say Rahab was held under suspicion for a very long time even though, according to these same traditions, she had become Joshua's wife (Ginzberg, 1968: 4: 5; 6: 171). Needless to say, Rahab's fellow citizens in Jericho may have considered her as "one in whose goodness no trust or confidence is to be placed." Since זנון (*zanûn*) is an זנ"ל stem, זננה would be a זנ"ל by-form.<sup>3</sup>

- (10) **זון** (*zûn*) “an idol, and anything taken as a deity and worshiped beside God, . . . a place in which idols are collected and set up,” as also **זור** (*zûr*) “anything that is worshiped in place of God’] (Lane, 1867: 1273 and 1268). Although it is unlikely that **זון** is the cognate of **זון** in Jos. 2:1, it may well be the cognate and by-form of **זנה** used in prophetic literature when Israel and Judah are castigated for their idolatry and worship of other gods. Instead of understanding an expression like **זנה תזנה** in Hosea 1:2 strictly as a metaphorical use of **זנה** “to fornicate,” it may be better understood as a verb meaning literally “to worship other gods or idols.” A *double entendre* may well have been intended.

### IMPLICATIONS

In view of these Arabic cognates, **אשה זנה** — in good Lucianic or *Amplified Bible* style—indicates that Rahab was an “*intelligent, beautiful, short woman emotionally upset and suspected of little-good as a harlot and as a covert idol worshiper.*” Such a statement, while not to be taken seriously, amply illustrates the point that the interpretation of **זנה** will always present a *problem*, but not necessarily a *prostitute*. The interpretation of **זנה** may tell more about the *preoccupation* of the interpreter than the *occupation* of the character.

Boling (1982: 145), who made no reference to **פנדקיתא** “innkeeper” in Targum Jonathan or to Josephus’ **καταγωγίου** “inn,” commented

Probably the narrator intends to titillate by reminding readers of an immemorial symbiosis between military service and bawdy house. It is reliably reported that at the height of the 1948 warfare, morale in the desperately besieged Jewish quarter of Jerusalem was considerably bolstered by the arrival of a barber and a prostitute . . . .

It is difficult to see, however, how a prostitute in Jerusalem in 1948 C.E. can be used as evidence that Rahab was a harlot in Jericho 3,000<sup>+</sup> years earlier. Stereotypic generalizations and anecdotal hearsay are poor substitutes for philological inquiry into all lexicographic options. Castell's (1669: I: 234) citing of Jos 2:1 under the root  $\text{הָזַן}$ , rather than  $\text{הָזַהַר}$ , has gone unnoticed or unappreciated by subsequent lexicographers, including the most recent revision of Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm's *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon* (1994: I: 267).

The use of  $\text{הָזַן}$  in the Jewish prayer after meals

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
הָזַן אֶת הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ בְּטוֹבוֹ . . . .

“Blessed art thou, the Eternal, our God, king of the universe who *sustaineth* the whole universe in his goodness.”<sup>4</sup>

may well retain a use of the *Hebrew* stem  $\text{הָזַן}$ , a stem attested — although not widely attested — since the time of Joseph and Joshua, precluding the necessity of making the  $\text{מִזֶּן}$  “food, sustenance” of Gen 45:23 a late Aramaic gloss (BDB, 266).

### RAHAB IN MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY

The appearance of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5) is in line with Jewish traditions, already noted, which made Rahab the ancestress of numerous kings, prophets, and a prophetess. Quinn (1981: 225–228) attempted to distinguish between the Rahab ( $\text{Ραχάβ}$ ) of Matthew from the Rahab (LXX =  $\text{Ρααβ}$ ) of Joshua since the Rahab of Jericho is, according to Quinn, always known in Greek as  $\text{Ρααβ}$  and consequently, “the  $\text{Ραχάβ}$  of Mt 1,5 ought not to be associated with Rahab, the name of the harlot of Jericho.” Brown (1982: 79–80) rightly faulted Quinn's conclusion, but neither Quinn

nor Brown noticed that in Josephus both spellings, Ῥαχάβης and Ῥααβης, are used for Rahab of Jericho, depending on which manuscript tradition was being followed for the printed editions of Josephus. Naber's edition (see note 1) seems to have gone unnoticed.

The Shem Tob Hebrew Gospel of Matthew (Howard, 1987: 2–3), interestingly, has  $\text{הַזְנוּתָּהּ בְּרַחַב}$ , which Howard rendered traditionally “from Rahab the harlot,” assuming the vocalization should be  $\text{הַזְנוּתָּהּ}$  with the MT of Jos 2:1, rather than  $\text{הַזְנוּתָּהּ}$  with Targum Jonathan and the Josepus tradition.<sup>5</sup> Either way, the Shem Tob text mitigates against Quinn's proposal to make the Rahab of Matthew someone other than the Rahab of Jericho.

### CONCLUSIONS

Hebrew  $\text{זָנוּ}$  in certain contexts surely means a “harlot,” but it does not have this meaning in all contexts.  $\text{זָנוּ}$  is a homograph for several distinctly different words. In prophetic literature it may literally—not metaphorically—mean “to worship other gods” as suggested by the Arabic *زون* (*zûn*) “idol, place of idols.” The  $\text{זָנוּ}$  in Hos 1:2 need not be a by-form of  $\text{זָנוּ}$  “harlot,” but may be related to the Arabic *ظنون* (*zanûn*) “being of little good, being suspect.” The concubine in Jud 19:2 was more likely to have been just plain “home-sick” (= *زناً* [*zanâ*] =  $\text{זָנוּ}$ ) rather than her having acted against the Levite by becoming a harlot or an idolater.

When it comes to Rahab she could have been a  $\text{זָנוּ}$  and a virgin at the same time. She could have been *زناً* (*zanâ*) “short,” *زناً* (*zanâ*) “hyper-emotional,” *ذهن* (*dahin*) “smart and skillful,” or just plain *زينه* (*zînat*) “beautiful.” However,

the adjective which best fits the context of providing the spies with “bed and breakfast” is زانأ (*zaná*) “having the ability to offer lodging, refuge, and concealment.” For the spies, Rahab was הַזֹּנֶה “the sustainer (feminine),” which corresponds to the masculine הַזֹּנֵה “the sustainer,” mentioned in the Jewish prayer above. Rahab gave her guests more than “bed and breakfast,” for by giving them cover and concealment—at risk to herself—she gave them life. Rahab’s brief encounter with the Israelite spies ended in covenant of life-for-life.

The multiple nuances of הַזֹּנֶה are sacrificed unnecessarily when the זֹנֶה זֹנֶה is treated simply as a titillating tidbit about a harlot. The narrator’s choice of הַזֹּנֶה, with all of its layers of meaning, to describe Rahab was probably intentional. Unfortunately, in this case the erudition of many lexicographers and commentators has not matched the artistry of the narrator.

### NOTES

1. See Naber, 1888: 268, ἐς τῶ τῆς Ῥαχάβης καταγωγίω and ἡ Ῥαχάβης καταγαγοῦσα; and Thackeray, 1926: 5: 4–5, where Rahab is spelled Ῥαάβης rather than Ῥαχάβης.

2. This cognate provides a clue for the LXX A-text translating the הַזֹּנֶה עָלָיו פִּילְגָשִׁי in Jud 19:2 as καὶ ὠργίσθη αὐτῷ “and she became angry with him” (followed by the RSV and NRS). Given the emotional range of زانأ (*zaná*)—which is greater than that of the Akkadian cognates *zenû* “to be angry” and *zinûtu* “anger” (*CAD* 1961: 85, 124)—the concubine may have been guilty of nothing more than an extreme case of “homesickness” which led her to return to her father. To interpret uncritically הַזֹּנֶה as “harlot” in Jud 19:2, used in reference to an abused and murdered woman, further impugns the integrity of the woman, as well as the reputation of the interpreter.

3. The Arabic *ظنون* (*zanûn*) must be considered as the cognate of *זְנוּנִים* in Hos 1:2. Lane (1872: 1925b) included the following in his definition of *ظنون* (*zanûn*): “a woman suspected in relation to her grounds of pretension to respect, or honour, on account of lineage etc. . . . and a woman of noble rank or quality, who is taken in marriage . . . from a desire of obtaining offspring by her, when she is advanced age. In addition *ظن* (*zann<sup>um</sup>*) “in all these exs. the verb denotes a state of mind between doubt and certainty . . .” (1924c), and “a preponderating wavering between two extremes in indecisive belief” (1925a). Aside from the matter of age, this definition matches the situation in Hosea—so well exemplified by the children, who in 1:6–8 are named *לֹא רַחֲמָה* “Not Pitied” and *לֹא עַמִּי* “Not My People,” but in 2:3 they are called *רַחֲמָה* “Pitied” and *עַמִּי* “My People.” The ambivalence and wavering between punishment and forgiveness throughout Hosea is more than hinted at in *זְנוּנִים* when the word is related to *ظن* (*zann<sup>um</sup>*). Thus, by disassociating the *זְנוּנִים* in 1:2c from the *זְנוּנָה* in 1:2d, simple repetition is removed and a striking paranomasia is recovered.

4. סדור עבדות ישראל. Tel Aviv: Sinai Publishing, 1969, 424–425.

5. The vocalization of *זוּנָה* is patterned after *דוּמָה* and *דוּמָה* “silence,” and *בוּשָׁה* and *בוּשָׁה* “shame” (BDB 101 and 189).