MISCELLANEOUS BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER TWELVE

REDEFINING THE εἰκῇ, ῥακά, AND μωρέ IN MATTHEW 5:22

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XII

REDEFINING THE
εἰκῇ, ῥακά, AND μωρέ
IN MATTHEW 5:22

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ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ
ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ [εἰκῇ]* ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει· ὃς
δ᾽ ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, Ῥακά, ἔνοχος ἔσται
τῷ συνεδρίῳ· ὃς δ᾽ ἂν εἴπῃ, Μωρέ, ἔνοχος ἔσται
εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.[1]

But I say unto you that whoever is angry with his brother
[without a cause]* will be in danger of the judgment: and
whoever will say to his brother "Raka" shall be in danger
of the Sanhedrin: but whoever will say "Fool" will be in
danger of the fire of Gehenna.[2]

The manuscript evidence for the textual variant in Matt
5:22 (marked above with asterisks) as cited by Aland (1968:
13) and Davies and Allison (1988: 512, n. 4) is as follows:

- ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ("his brother"): B C 𝔭[67vid] ℵ[*] vg eth
  Gospel of the Nazarenes Ptolemy Justin Irenaeus[lat1/3] Ter-
  tullian[vid] Origen Eusbius Basil mss[acc. to Jerome] Augustine
  Greek mss[acc to Augustine] Cassiam Ps-Athanasius;

- ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ εἰκῇ ("his brother without cause"): ℵ[c] D
  K L W Δ Θ Π f[1] f[13] 28 33 565 700 892 1010 1071 1079
  1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1365 1546 1646 2148 *Byz Lect*
  it[a, aur, b, c, f, ff', g', h, k, l, q] syr[c, s, p, h, pal] cop[sa, bo] goth arm geo

Diatessaron Irenaeus[gr, lat2/3] Origen Cyprian Eusebius Lucifer Ps-Justin Chrysostom Cyril.

The English translations which have a word for the variant εἰκῇ—which appears in the *Peshiṭta* and Old Syriac as ܐܝܩܐ (ʾîqaʾ) (Lewis 1910: 11)—include Murdoch's *Peshiṭta* ("rashly"),[3] Lamsa's *Peshiṭta* ("for no reason"), the Bishops Bible of 1599 ("unadvisedly"), the Geneva Bible of 1595 ("unadvisedly"), and the KJV and NKJ ("without a cause"). The Hebrew translations made by Delitzsch (1877, 1937) and Salkinson (1885) have חִנָּם "for nothing, gratuitously, gratis" for the Greek εἰκῇ.

However, the εἰκῇ is not reflected in the early translations of Wycliffe (1389) and Tyndale (1534), who followed the Vulgate and the shorter Greek text without the εἰκῇ.[4] Subsequent English translations which followed the shorter text include (in alphabetic order) the ASV, DRA, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRS, and the RSV. The Shem Tob *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Howard 1995: 18–19) lacks any word equivalent to the Greek εἰκῇ, although it reads פחות "inferior" for the Greek Ῥακά and שׁוטה "madman, fool" for the Greek Μωρέ.

Aside from citing the texts which have the εἰκῇ, Davies and Allison (1988: 512, n. 4) simply asserted that the εἰκῇ was inserted "after αὐτοῦ, no doubt to allow room for righteous indignation (cf. Eph 4.26 [ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε 'Be angry and sin not'])." This assertion followed that of Allen (1951: 49) who conjectured,

> The word [εἰκῇ] has strong second century attestation, but may perhaps more probably have been added as a limitation of a wide generalisation, than omitted as unnecessary.

Keener (1999: 183, n.70) noted that the εἰκῇ "may, how-ever, represent a legitimate interpretation of Jesus' more graphic statement, which may have circulated orally in both forms." By contrast, Albright and Mann (1971: 60–61) made no reference to the variant εἰκῇ and translated 5:22 (with two parenthetical glosses) as,

> But I tell you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of (divine) judgment. Whoever insults his brother will answer to the Sanhedrin, while whoever says 'Rebel! (against God)' merits a fiery death.

Contrary to the prevailing preference of New Testament scholars, translators, and Bible publishers for the shorter Greek texts of Matt 5:22, which lack the adverbial εἰκῇ (as listed above), a challenge to that preference is in order once it is acknowledged

- that Jesus' statements in Matt 5:21–26 were spoken in Aramaic or Hebrew rather than Greek, and

- that the translator(s) may have misunderstood a word in the Aramaic or Hebrew text of 5:22a, similar to the uncertain meaning of the μωρέ in 5:22b, which became "traitor" in the NJB, "curse" in the NLT, "rebel" in the YLT, and "fool" in most other English translations.

As noted above, Salkinson and Delitzsch translated the Greek εἰκῇ "without a cause" into Hebrew as חִנָּם "for no reason," which is equivalent to the Aramaic מַגָּן "for nothing, undeserved, gratis" (Jastrow, 1903: 729). Had Jesus spoken in Aramaic one can assume that the written record would have had an unambigious מגן (מַגָּן), with the homographs מגן [=מִגֵּן] "he delivered" and מגן [=מָגֵן] "shield" being con-textually irrelevant.

However, if Jesus spoke in Hebrew one can readily assume that the Hebrew text behind the Greek ἐικῇ contained the adverb חנם. The Hebrew חנם, like the Aramaic מגן, had three possible derivations—but with חנם all three derivations could be contextually relevant. First is the widely attested חַנַם "for no reason, without a cause" from חָנַן, stem I, "to show favor, to be gracious," with its Arabic cognate being حن (ḥanna) "he was merciful, compassionate, he longed for." Second is the rare חָנַן, stem II, "to be loathsome," attested in Job 19:16–17 (along with חָנַן, stem I). This text reads in part: אֶתְחַנֶּן־לֹו . . . וְחַנֹּתִי לִבְנֵי בִטְנִי, "I entreated him . . . And I am loathsome to my own brothers.[5] The standard Hebrew lexicons cite the Arabic حن (ḥanna) "it emitted a stench" as the cognate of חָנַן, stem II (BDB 337). (This accounts for the translation of Job 19:17 in the NJB as "My breath is unbearable to my wife, my stench (וְחַנֹּתִי) to my own brothers.")

The third derivation of the חנם in the hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage* of 5:22a is חָנַן, stem III. This would be the cognate of the Arabic خنى (ḥanaya) "he uttered foul, abominable, unseemly, or obscene speech," with the noun خنى / خنا (ḥannâ / ḥannay) meaning "foul, abominable, unseemly, or obscene speech" (Lane 1865: 819; Wehr 1979: 305).[6]

This third חנם [=חַנָּם] in the *Vorlage* of Matt 5:22 was —understandably but mistakenly—misread as the חִנָּם from stem I; and in the Greek translations it became ἐικῇ "without cause." The חַנָּם of חָנַן, stem III, is a contextually perfect match for 5:22a. Consequently, simply by repointing the חִנָּם

"without a reason" to חִנָּם "obscenely" the translations of
Delitzsch (כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יִקְצֹף עַל־אָחִיו חִנָּם) and Salkinson
(הַמִּתְעַבֵּר בְּאָחִיו חִנָּם) could be read as "the one / everyone
who is *obscenely* angry with his brother." Once the חִנָּם is
modified to חַנָּם, either translation could well approximate
what Jesus said. There was no ambiguity when he *said* "who-
ever becomes *obscenely* (חַנָּם) angry with his brother." How-
ever, once his spoken words were written down, the חנם
(without vowels) was for no apparent reason read as חִנָּם "for
no reason"—even though Jesus immediately identified in
5:22b the words which he considered vile and obscene.[7]

   The two obscene words identified by Jesus are Ῥακά [8] and
Μωρέ. The former, Ῥακά, is simply transliterated as *Raca* or
Raqa in most English texts, although "Fool" appears in the
NJB, "You fool" in the RSV, "idiot" in the NLT, and "You
good-for-nothing" in the NAU. The latter, Μωρέ, appears as
"Fool" in the KJV, ASV, NIV, NIB, NAS, NAV, NKJ, NAB,
as "Rebel!" in the YLT, and as "Traitor" in the NJB.

   According to Allen (1951: 49) and many other commenta-
tors the Ῥακά seems to be equivalent to the Aramaic רֵיקָא
"empty"—even though it is spelled as Ῥακά rather than as
Ῥηκά—which was evidently a term of contemptuous ad-
dress.[9] (Allen compared this Ῥακά to the κενέ in James 2:20,
ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ "O foolish fellow.") Davies and Allison
(1988: 513) agreed with Allen and cited not only the κενέ in
James 2:20 but also the κενός in Neh 5:13. They suggested
that Ῥακά could be translated as "empty-head," "good for
nothing," or "fool," and conjectured that,

   Matthew's failure to translate the term might suggest an audience
   familiar with an oriental word of abuse, although it is also

possible that the evangelist could leave *raka* untranslated because its field of meaning was roughly indicated by the *mōre* in 5:22c.

But the equation ῾Ρηκά = רֵיקָא = "*empty*" = "*empty-head*" = "*Fool*" is seriously flawed. It is a no-brainer because in the Hebrew and Aramaic mind-set it was the *heart*, not the *brain*, which was the seat of reason and intelligence. The *mindless* fool was one who "lacked heart" (חֲסַר לֵב)[10] and the intelligent, smart person was one with an "understanding heart" (לֵב נָבוֹן) or a "wise heart" (חָכָם לֵב). Being a fool had nothing to do with the head, empty or otherwise, or the brain. Hatch and Redpath (1954: 306–307) cited thirty seven texts in which the Hebrew לֵב / לֵבָב "heart" was translated in the Septuagint as διάνοια "mind, intelligence." This is why in Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30 the commandment from Deut 6:5 to "love the LORD your God with all your *heart*, and with all your *soul*, and with all your *might*," was expanded to include ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου "all of your *mind*." The διανοίᾳ "intelligence" in Luke 10:27 and Mark 12:30 is an explanatory gloss on the Hebrew לֵב "heart," for in Greek καρδία "heart" was used "especially as the seat of feeling and passion, as rage or anger, . . . of sorrow or joy" (Liddell Scott (1940: 877). Consequently, there must be a better derivation of this ῾Ρηκά than that based upon רֵיקָא "empty."

Philologically, there are five Arabic lexemes which come into focus for clarifying the meaning of the Hebrew / Aramaic רֵיק / רֵיקָא / רָקָה —none of which support the idea that רֵיק / רֵיקָא "empty" meant "empty-headed," which could then be paraphrased as "fool." These Arabic cognates are:

1. راق/ريق (*ra'qa / rayq*) "it poured out, he poured forth," with the nouns ريق (*rîq*^{un}) "strength" and ريق (*rîq*^{un}) "saliva," noting that the phrase "he swallowed his saliva" means "he restrained his anger" (Lane 1867: 1203; BDB 937). This is the basis for Lamsa's (197: 955) parenthetical gloss in Matt 5:22, "Raca (which means, I spit on you)." This lexeme does not mean "empty," "empty-head," or "fool."

2. راق/روق (*ra'qa / rawq*) "he exceeded in excellence," and in form 4, أروق (*'arwaqa*) he poured out, he poured forth," with the noun روق (*rawq*^{un}) "pure or sincere love" and the adjective ريق (*rayyiq*^{un}) "most excellent, goodly, or beautiful" (Lane 1867: 1190–1192). Likewise, this lexeme has nothing to do with being "empty," "empty-head," or a "fool."

3. رقيق (*raqîq*) "weak, abject, mean, paltry contemptible," with the feminine رقة (*riqqat*) meaning "weakness (of religion), abjectness, meanness, paltriness, contemptibleness" (Lane1867: 1131–1132). This lexeme has nothing to do with being "empty" or "empty-head," but were it translated as "fool" the translation would be on target.

4. رقيق (*raqîq*) "a slave," with مرق (*muraqq*^{un}) meaning "made a slave, possessed as a slave, kept as a slave" (Lane1867: 1131–1132). This lexeme has nothing to do with being "empty" or "empty-head," but the pejorative "Slave!" might well be on target (see below).

5. ركيك (*rakîk*) "low, ignoble, vile, mean, sordid, possessing no manly qualities, weak in his intellect, and in his judgment or opinion" (Lane1867: 1141). This is a by-form of رقيق

(*raqîq*), number (3) above. There is nothing with this lexeme meaning "empty" or "empty-head," but its being translated as "fool" would be on target.

Cognates (1) and (2) are obviously contextually irrelevant; but cognates (3) and (5) are most relevant. They permit—if not require—the Ῥακά to be translated as a "Vile Fool!"[11] Cognate (4) is especially noteworthy in light of the statement in *Kiddushin* 28[a], "He who calls his neighbor a slave (עבד), let him be excommunicated;[12] he who calls him a bastard, let him be punished with forty stripes; if he calls him a malefactor, this is to cost him his life."[13] With definitions 3–5 in focus it is reasonable to conclude that Ῥακά had three layers of meaning: "*vile, fool, slave*," which can be paraphrased in English by the compound pejorative "*Vile-Foolish- Slave!*"[14]

The second obscene word pinpointed by Jesus in Matt 5:22 is Μωρέ, which, as noted, appears as "Fool" in most English translation, but as "Traitor" in the NJB and as "Rebel!" in the YLT. Μωρέ could be a transliteration of מורה or מורא, which could be read as מוֹרֶה "authority," מוֹרֶה "teacher," or מוֹרָא "reverence." But these do not fit the context of obscene anger. Bertram (1968: 840) suggested that Μωρέ "may be regarded as the rendering of a Heb-Aram term from the stem מרר (מוֹרָדה) [sic] מרה or מרא, to be bitter, recalcitrant." He called attention to Psalm 78:8, דּוֹר סוֹרֵר וּמֹרֶה "a stubborn and rebellious generation." Allen (1951: 48) noted that Μωρέ "has quite unnecessarily been identified with the Hebrew מוֹרֶה, Nu 20[10] ["Please listen, O rebels"]."[15] Nevertheless, Albright and Mann (1971: 60–61) opted for "Rebel!"

Allen suggested that Μωρέ, a vocative of μωρός "fool," may be a translation of Ῥακά, and this idea is duly noted by

Arndt and Gingrich (1957: 533).[16] Bertram (1967: 841) came to the same conclusion, arguing as follows:

> It is in fact difficult to distinguish between these two [ῥακά and μωρέ], or to differentiate them from anger. Hence these sayings may be regarded as an explanatory addition [by Jesus] to the saying about anger, and this gives us a saying we might well expect from Jesus, in which all such things as anger and terms of abuse are characterised as equally reprehensible and culpable.
> . . . This implies that there can hardly be a crescendo in the three sayings. Terms of abuse are not a heightened form of anger; they are its most obvious and common expression. It is also hard to make any basic distinction between the two terms of abuse, namely, ῥακά and μωρέ. They both belong to the category of sins of the tongue, and are both subject to judgment.[17]

The translations of Μωρέ in the Peshiṭta as ܠܠܐ (lelaʾ) "fool," in the Old Syriac as ܫܛܝܐ (šāṭyāʾ) "fool," in the Shem Tob Hebrew Matthew as שׁוּטֶה "fool," provides sufficient reason to conclude that μωρός "moron" had become in pre-Christian times the loanword מוֹרוֹס "fool."

With reference to Μωρέ Davis and Allison (1988: 514–515) concluded,

> . . . it follows that Μωρέ = 'you fool', and it presumably translates either mrṣ [sic][18] or—more probably—the Aramaic šṭyʾ. This conclusion means in turn that raka and mōre are practically indistinguishable; both could be translated by 'fool' or by 'idiot'.

Were that the case the question arises, "Why is it that the one who says Ῥακά "Vile Fool!" will only be in danger of the Sanhedrin, while the one who says Μωρέ "Moron!" will be in danger of Gehenna? The Aramaic / Hebrew words for "fool, moron, numskull, nitwit, dunce" include לֵלָא, כְּסִיל, אֱוִיל, שׁוּטֶה, סָכָל, נָבָל, and שָׁטְיָא. Were these words on Jesus'

proscription list, or did Μωρέ and Ῥακά only make up the list? How is one to account for the fact that μωρός "fool," which appears twenty-six times in Sirach, still appears nine times in I Corinthians, and in Matt 7:26; 25:2, 3, 8, 17; plus II Tim 2:23; Titus 3:9; and Eph 5:4? Did the proscription involve only the *vocative* when an argument became personal, whereas, if the μωρός was applied to oneself or to others in general, it was not considered an obscene pejorative?

Similar questions were raised and answered by Davies and Allison (1988:515), which I present in the following lengthy quotation (with the bullets added by this writer).

> Because there is an ascending order of punishments in 5:22—local court, sanhedrin, Gehenna—one expects a corresponding ascent in the severity of the crimes listed. It does not attain. Anger, rebuking a fellow with *raka*, and insulting another by calling him *more* [Μωρέ]—one is not more obviously heinous than the others. The difficulty thus created has been solved in several ways—
> • by arguing that *more* [Μωρέ] is more odious than *raka* [Ῥακά] and that the uttering of either is worse than anger (cf. Augustine, *De serm. mont.* 1.9.24, and Schweitzer, *Matthew*, p. 119);
> • or that by claiming κρίσις, συνέδριον, and γέεννα are functionally similar, each being three different ways of referring to the death penalty (J. Jeremias, TWNT 6, p. 975);[18]
> • or by emending or rearranging the text;
> • or by seeing 22a as a general statement which is then illustrated by two concrete examples (so Luz I, p. 253);
> • or by inferring that the incongruity is intentional and serves as an ironic commentary on a parody of scribal exegesis: as all wrongs against one's neighbour are equally wrong, it is foolish to make casuistic distinctions with regard to degrees of punishment.

We [Davies and Allison] should like to add another possibility. As spoken by Jesus, the saying consisted only of 5:21–2b and affirmed, in hyperbolic fashion, that anger and insulting words were deserving of punishment as murder; and, originally, the Aramaic or Hebrew words behind κρίσις and συνέδριον were roughly synonymous or of similar import, both referring to judicial trials. Problems arose only when Matthew, in order to clarify *raka* [ʿΡακά] and to create a triad, tacked on the final clause. His choice of *more* [Μωρέ] created no difficulty; but 'into the Gehenna of fire' (cf. 18.9 diff Mk 9.47), which he no doubt felt justified in adding to underline the severity of the named offences, created the possibility of apprehending an ascending order of punishments.

None of these speculations cited and offered by Davies and Allison are convincing. Better answers to the questions raised above are available once the focus of attention shifts to this one sentence above from Davies and Allison: "*the Aramaic or Hebrew words behind* κρίσις *and* συνέδριον *were roughly synonymous or of similar import, both referring to judicial trials* (italics added). However, Davies and Allison did not speculate as to what were the Aramaic or Hebrew words behind κρίσις and συνέδριον. But this is the direction in which the speculation must go.

Speculation about the Hebrew *Vorlage* of ʿΡακά was very productive once the lexemes רקק and רקה came into focus and produced the layered pejorative "*Vile! / Fool! / Slave!*" Speculation about the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Μωρέ will prove to be equally rewarding.

As noted above, the Hebrew words for "fool" include אויל, כסיל, סכל, and נבל. Of these four only נבל is ambiguous. The consonantal נבל has four different meanings: (a) נֵבֶל

"skin-bottle, jar, pitcher"; (b) נֵבֶל "a musical instrument"; (c) נָבַל "be foolish," נָבָל "a fool"; and (d) נָבֵל "to wither, to die," with the noun נְבֵלָה "carcass, corpse."[19] The Arabic cognate of this נבל is نبل (nabala) which, in forms 5 and 8, also means "to die" (BDB 614–615).

Once lexemes (c) and (d) are in focus the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Matt 5:22b could well approximate these translations:

וְאִם נבל יִקְרָא־לוֹ יִפֹּל לְאֵשׁ גֵּיהִנֹּם: (Salkinson)

אֲשֶׁר נבל יִקְרָא לוֹ הוּא מְחֻיָּב לְאֵשׁ גֵּיהִנֹּם: (Delitzsch).

The vocalization of the נבל in both translations has intentionally been omitted. To approximate more closely what Jesus said, should this נבל be vocalized as the *vocative* נָבָל (= Μωρέ) "Fool!" or as the intensive *imperative* נַבֵּל, (= Ἀποθνήσκε) "Die! / Drop Dead!"[20] One can further speculate that a Greek μορέ "death!" was changed to μωρέ "fool," on the assumption that this נבל was a synonym of the רקה/ רכה/Ῥακά "Vile Fool." But the introductory component of Jesus' statement in 5:21 alludes to Exod 20:13 and Deut 5:17, ". . . whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." Jesus' *halakah* in Matt 5:22 expands the law to include any brother who becomes angry enough to use vitriolic pejoratives so as to humiliate or "verbally assassinate" his kinsman.[21]

Thus, the last phrase in Matt 5:22 needs to be translated as "whoever says '*Die!/Drop Dead!*' will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna." This was indeed a more offensive pejorative than calling someone a "*Vile-Fool-Slave*"—for which the Sanhedrin[22] might well apply the penalty of "forty stripes" as stipulated in Deut 25:1–3.[23] To tell a brother to '*Drop Dead!*'

would be an expression of hate, and as spelled out in I John 3:15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."[24] Anyone uttering the imperative נָבֵל '*Drop Dead!*' was himself a נָבָל "fool," for in so speaking he would open the gates to Gehenna—not for his brother but for himself.

Bertram (1967: 841) and France (2007: 199) called attention to *Meṣia* 58b which indicates how seriously evil epithets were taken in Jewish tradition.[25] Here is an abbreviate text of *Meṣia* 55b:

> Our Rabbis taught: Ye shall not therefore wrong one another [Lev 25:17]. Scripture refers to verbal wrongs . . . . Then to what can I refer, ye shall not therefore wrong each other? To verbal wrongs. E.g., If a man is a penitent, one must not say to him, 'Remember your former deeds.' If he is the son of proselytes he must not be taunted with, 'Remember the deeds of your ancestors.' If he is a proselyte and comes to study the Torah, one must not say to him, 'Shall the mouth that ate unclean and forbidden food, abominable and creeping things, come to study the Torah which was uttered by the mouth of Omnipotence!' If he is visited by suffering, afflicted with disease, or has buried his children, one must not speak to him as his companions spoke to Job . . . .

> Abaye asked R. Dimi: What do people [most] carefully avoid in the West [sc. Palestine]? — He replied: putting others to shame. For R. Hanina said: All descend into Gehenna, excepting three. 'All' — can you really think so! But say thus: All who descend into Gehenna [subsequently] reascend, excepting three, who descend but do not reascend, viz., He who commits adultery with a married woman, publicly shames his neighbour, or fastens an evil epithet [nickname] upon his neighbour. 'Fastens an epithet' — but that is putting to shame! — [It means], Even when he is accustomed to the name.

The ῾Ρακά "*Vile / Fool / Slave!*" would certainly qualify as an "evil epithet," and saying נָבֵל "*Die! / Drop Dead!*" to a brother would surely cause public shame for the person so addressed.

CONCLUSION

Wernberg-Møller (1956–57: 72)[6] wisely argued that the ἐικῇ in Matt 5:22a was original and that the Greek translator followed his Semitic *Vorlage* word by word. But he was wrong in assuming that the ἐικῇ "went back to some Aramaic phrase (the equivalent of לא במשפט in Classical Hebrew)." The case has been made in this study for a Hebrew *Vorlage* which was misunderstood because of the ambiguities involved when reading a consoantal Hebrew text.

It has been argued that ἐικῇ "without cause" was in the original Greek translation for the חנם that was in the original Hebrew *Vorlage*. This חנם should have been read as חַנַם "obscenely," an adverb derived from חֶנָה "foul, obscene speech," rather than being read as חִנָּם "without cause."

While disagreeing with Davies and Allison that the best solution for understanding the meaning of ῾Ρακά is the equation "*Empty = Empty-head = Fool*," they were on target with their suggestion that "Matthew's failure to translate the term [῾Ρακά] might suggest an audience familiar with an oriental word of abuse." That Jewish audience, no doubt, understood the layered meaning of this Hebrew ῾Ρακά / Ραχά ("*Vile / Fool / Slave!*") which is why the רקה / רכה) in the Hebrew *Vorlage* was transliterated rather than translated. What Greek word was there that could match the layered meanings of "*Vile/Fool/Slave*"?

It has also been shown that the μωρέ "moron/fool" in Matt 5:22b is a translation of an ambiguous נבל in the Hebrew *Vorlage*. Jesus, using an intensive imperative, spoke of the abusive expression נַבֵּל "*Drop Dead! / Die!*" But the consonantal נבל was mistakenly read as נָבָל "fool."

Once the חנם, רקה, and נבל in the *Vorlage* became in Greek εἰκῆ, ῥακά, and μωρέ Jesus' statement was given a new meaning. As interpreted in this study Jesus no doubt said,

Whoever is ***obscenely*** angry with his brother
shall be in danger of the court:
and he who says to his brother "***Vile Fool Slave***!"
shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin:
and he who says "***Drop Dead***!"
will be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

Though not prurient, רָקָה and נַבֵּל were definitely obscene expressions.

Although Black (1988: 7) accepted the εἰκῆ as original, with no hint of there being a mistranslation, he rightly noted:

> There is anger that is both legitimate and justified. Jesus himself looked on the hypocritical Pharisees "with anger" (μετ᾽ ὀργῆς, Mark 3:5). This anger, or indignation against sin, is not what Jesus speaks of here. What he condemns is anger without cause, anger that erupts where no offense has been given . . . it is a feeling which would lead one to commit murder if it were fully acted out.

Following the *halakah* of Jesus, when anger is legitimate and justified it must also be civil—free from profanities and obscene expressions like "*Vile/Fool/Slave!*" and free from the violence insinuated in the death threat, "*Drop Dead!*" Otherwise, the gates to Gehenna will open and the stench (חָנָה) of the obscene (חָנָה) offender will fill the air.

Noland (2005: 230) stated, "interpreters have struggled to find some ascending sequence in being angry, saying 'Raka', and saying 'Fool'. But such efforts are probably misplaced." This echoes the earlier sentiments of Hendrickson (1973: 298) who cited four objections for finding in Matt 5:22 three gradations of offenses (anger, saying "Raka!" or "Fool!") and three gradations of punishments (danger of the judgment, danger of the Sanhedrin, and danger of a fiery Gehenna).

But if my reconstruction of the Hebrew *Vorlage* and its interpretation are on target there is (1) a therapeutic *anger* and (2) a pathological *obscene anger*. The first imperative in Eph 4:26 "Be angry!" involves therapeutic *anger*; and the second imperative "do not sin!" involves the pathological *obscene anger* that manifests itself in (a) vitriolic speech "*Vile/Fool/Slave*" (רָקָה / ῾Ρακά) and in (b) explicit death threats, "*Drop Dead!*"). Jesus' anger in Mark 3:5 (μετ᾽ ὀργῆς) and in 10:14 (ἠγανάκτησεν) was a therapeutic **n** ger revealing his passion for the eternal salvation of friend and foe. But the hateful obscene anger of his adversaries was pathological, revealing their desire for his damnation and death: "*Die! Drop Dead!* then finally, *Crucify him!*"

France (2007: 199) duly noted the statement of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (circa. A.D. 100): "One who hates his neighbor is among those who shed blood" (*Der Er. Rab*, 576 [11:13]). Had Jesus' enemies been content with simply shouting at him רָקָה / ῾Ρακά, "*Vile/Fool/Slave*," he may well have responded with a Aramaic or Hebrew saying comparable to "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but nasty words will never hurt me." But when they said נָבֵל "*Die!/Drop Dead*" he knew his days were numbered and his execution would amount to legalized murder, with his murders doomed to Gehenna along with his accusers.

Obscene words may not always hurt those to whom they are addressed, *but the speaker will pay*—sooner (with the lashes ordered by a Sanhedrin) or later (with the stench and fires on the dung heaps of γέεvναν "Gehenna." Most English translations render γέεvναν in 5:22 as "hell," but the simple transliteration, "Gehenna," in the NAB is the most accurate. The Valley of Hinnom (גֵי הִנֹּם = Gehenna) was accessible through Jerusalem's Dung Gate (שַׁעַר הָאַשְׁפֹּת) and became the municipal dump for corpses, carcasses, excrement, and garbage. There the maggots thrived on the rotting entrails and the partially cremated remains of those who were not wealthy enough or honorable enough to be buried. The spontaneous combustion of the methane gas generated by the offal and dung produced endless fires and hot spots ready to reignite. Criminals executed by stoning were more likely to be cremated in the גֵי הִנֹּם / Gehenna than to be buried in the tombs of their fathers. Verbal assassins who in anger order someone to "Drop Dead" are en route to this Gehenna along with the actual assassins who carry out the murders.

Though in disagreement with Bertram (1967: 842) that ῥακά and μωρέ may be equivalent, there is agreement with his conclusion that "All material arguments against the authenticity of Mt. 5:22 are thus dispelled *at once*" (italics added). I would change Bertram's "*at once*" to just "*once*," and complete his sentence this way: ". . . *once* it is recognized that behind the words εἰκῆ, ῥακά, and μωρέ was a Hebrew *Vorlage* with the ambiguous words חנם, רקה, and נבל." The interpretations presented above for εἰκῆ, ῥακά, and μωρέ provide examples of how Arabic cognates provide the requisite clues for recovering lost Hebrew words which can clarify enigmas found in the Greek text of the Gospels.

NOTES

1. The Peshiṭta reads,

<div dir="rtl">

אנא דין אמר אנא לכון

דכל מן דנרגז על אחוהי איקא

מחיב הו לדינא

וכל דנאמר לאחוהי רקא

מחיב הו לכנושתא

ומן דנאמר ללא

מחיב הו לגהנא דנורא:

</div>

See below, note 3, for Murdock's translation of this verse.

2. Note the statement in the *Manual of Discipline* "One shall not speak to his brother in anger, or in complaint, or with a [stiff] neck, or a callous heart, or a wicked spirit." See Brownlee 1951: 22.

3. Murdock translated this verse as "But I say to you, That every one who is angry with his brother rashly, is obnoxious to judgment: and every one that saith to his brother, Raka! is obnoxious to the council: and every one that shall say, Fool is obnoxious to hell-fire." Murdoch's translation of the ܡܚܝܒ (*mĕḥaya³*) as "obnoxious" should not be misunderstood as meaning "objectionable, offensive, unpleasant." In this context *obnoxious* means "to be liable (for punishment), to be censurable." (Click HERE to view James P. Murdock's *The New Testament: Translated from the Syriac Peshito Version*, published in 1852.)

4. Black (1988:2) noted that Jerome, Erasmus, Mill, Bengel, Lachman, Tischendorf, Westcott, Hort, Metzger, and Carson

thought the ἐικῆ was suprious, with only Whitney, Hodges, Farstand, and Wernberg-Møller finding the ἐικῆ to be original.

5. Note here the Septuagint which did not recognize חָנַן, stem II, "to be loathsome," but read the אֶתְחַנֵּן and the וְהַנֹּתִי as if both were from חָנַן, stem I. It reads, ἐδέετο . . . προσεκα-λούμην δὲ κολακεύων υἱοὺς παλλακίδων μου, "I supplicated . . . I earnestly entreated the sons of my concubines."

6. On the by-forms חָנַן and חָנָה see GKC 77ᵉ where eight examples of the interchange of ע״ע and ל״ה verbs are cited, including חָנַן/חָנָה. For the use of the adverbial ָה– see GKC 100ᵍ.

7. Wernberg-Møller (1956–57: 71–73) argued that the ἐικῆ was original and

> that the Greek translator followed his Semitic *Vorlage* word by word, and that consequently the word [ἐικῆ] is not a later addi-tion, intended to make allowance for 'just' anger in certain cir-cumstances.

Wernberg-Møller cited the phrase ואשר יטור לרעהו אשר לוא במשפט "and the one who bears a grudge against his neighbour without reason" in the *Manual of Discipline*, VII, 8 —noting that the לא במשפט "without reason" appears also in Jer 17:11 and Ezek 22:29. He cited the Arabic بغير حق (*biġayri ḥaqqi*) "without right" in the Qurʾan (3:20) as a close parallel. However, Wernberg-Møller did not assume that the לוא במשפט was in the Semitic *Vorlage* of 5:22; rather "some Aramaic phrase (the equivalent of לא במשפט) . . . ."

8. The variant Ῥαχά appears in mss 𝔸[*] D W lat Tert Cypr.

9. Jastrow 1903: 1476.

10. See BDB 524 §3, where the חֲסַר לֵב "fool" in Prov 6:32, 7:7, 9:4, 9:16, 10:13, 10:21, 11:12, 12:11, 15:21, 17:18, and 24:30 is noted.

11. On the by-forms רִיק and רָקַק, see GKC 77^b where other examples of the interchange of ע"ע and ע"ו stems are noted. This interchange of an ע"ע and an ע"י stem is analogous. On the interchange of ק and כ compare דָּקַק / דָּכַך "to crush," and רָקַק / רָקַק "to be thin, weak."

12. On the issue of slavery note especially Exod 21:1–11, Deut 15:12–17, and Lev 25:39–55.

13. Jeremias (1968: 974) called attention to the use of ܪܩܐ (raqaᵓ) as a Syriac term for addressing servants, and suggested that the *a* vowels of the Syriac *raqaᵓ* may be the basis for the *a* vowels in Ῥακα. He made no mention of the Arabic رقيق (raqîq) "slave."

14. For quotations in which *Raca* appears in the Talmud, see Lightfoot 1859: 109. Click HERE for an online edition of Lightfoot or HERE for just his Matthew Commentary.

15. The הַמֹּרִים of Num 20:10 was interpreted by Jastrow (1903: 749, 842) as (a) "rebellious" (the plural participle of מָרָה "to rebel"), noting that in the *Hiphᶜîl* of post-biblical

מָרָה meant "to disregard the authority of the Supreme Court" or (b) "fools" ("for in the sea towns they call fools *morim*," with the מוֹרֶה being the Greek vocative μωρέ of μωρός (= מוֹרוֹס) "fool"—with the adjective μωρά "foolish" having been transliterated as מוֹרָה / מוֹרָא. For an entirely different interpretation of Num 20:10, see McDaniel, "Moses Said 'Please! Behold!' (Exodus 17 & Numbers 20)," available online by clicking HERE.

16. Davies and Allison (1988: 514) rightly noted that μωρός was "a word beloved by Sirach." It was also well loved by Paul for it appears in I Cor 1:18, 21, 23, 25, 2:14; 3:18, 19; and 4:10.

17. Surprisingly, Lamsa (1967: 955) translated Μωρέ as "effeminate," with only a footnote citing "Aramaic, *brutish*, *abnormal*."

18. The words *môrôṣ* and *mrṣ* in the middle of page 514 appear to be typographical errors for *môrôs* (= מוֹרוֹס "fool") and *mrs* (= מרס). The Hebrew *mrṣ* (מָרַץ) means "to be sick" or "to flow rapidly" (BDB 599; Jastrow 1903: 749, 846).

19. Note the phrase וּכְיֶרֶק דֶּשֶׁא יִבּוֹלוּן in Psalm 37:2, which appears as "like green plants they will soon die away" in the NIV and NIB. Compare Gen 25:18, עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו נָפָל, which appears as "he died in the presence of all his brethren" in the KJV, DRA, and NKJ.

20. The *Pi^cel* imperative here would match the Arabic cognate نبل (*nabala*), which means "to die" in forms 5 and 8. The nouns מַפֶּלֶת "carcass" and נְבֵלָה "carcass" indicate that נָפַל "to fall down in a violent death" (Jud 5:27) and נָבֵל "to die" were by-forms.

21. For the Mosaic law dealing with anger, killing someoe, and then the slayer being sentenced to death, note Deut 19:4–13.

22. Contra Jeremias (1968: 975), who stated that "the three phrases which follow in 5:22a-c do not refer to three different courts, the local, the supreme, and the divine (hell), but are simply three expressions for the death penalty in a kind of crescendo." Jeremias suggested the following translation of 5:22, which lacks a word for the disputed εἰκῇ.

> Any man who is angry with his brother
>   deserves to be punished (with death).
> He who says to his brother 'Thou blockhead!'
>   deserves to be condemned (to death) by the supreme court
> He who says: 'Thou idiot!'
>   deserves to suffer (death) in hell."

23. Deut 25:1–3 reads:
> If there is a dispute between men, and they come into court, and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty, then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense. Forty stripes may be given him, but not more; lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.

24. For the enigmatic statement of Jesus in Luke 14:26, "If any one comes to me and does not hate (οὐ μισεῖ) his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple ," see McDaniel "The Misreading which Led to the 'Hate' in Luke 14:26–27," available online by clicking HERE .

25. Daiche, Salis and H. Freedman. 1937. *Baba Maẓia Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices.* London: Soncino Press. Click HERE to view the full text of *Baba Maẓia*; or click HERE to view other texts in the Talmud.