MISCELLANEOUS BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER NINE

NOTES ON JOHN 19:39, 20:15 AND MATT 3:7

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IX

NOTES ON JOHN 19:39, 20:15 AND MATT 3:7

Raymond Brown (1966: cxxix) noted that the presence of Aramaisms or Hebraisms in the Greek text of the Gospels

is not sufficient to prove that a Gospel was first written in one of the two languages; at most it may prove that certain sayings once existed in Aramaic or Hebrew, or that the native language of the evangelist was not Greek.

A case in point are the three accounts in the Gospel of John dealing with Nicodemus (John 3:1–21, 7:37–52, and 19: 38–42). There is good reason to conclude that at least the third account was initially written in Hebrew. The primary clues are hidden in Greek variants of John 19:39, which reads as follows in most manuscripts and in the Peshitta:

ηੌλθεν δὲ καὶ Νικόδημος, ὁ ἐλθών πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς τὸ πρῶτον, φέρων μίγμα σμύρνης καὶ ἀλόης ὡς λίτρας ἑκατόν.

And there came also Nicodemus, he who at the first came to him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.

Peshitta

הילדון אלה להע, בל מצים מטרלעם יצער ברוונט בל מצים נטיף אנטיטט טציקטי מאר ברוונט מטר ברוונט מאר המאנים מינים לינים מאר לינים לינים

ואתא אף ניקדמוס הו דאתא הוא מן קדים לות ישוע בלליא ואיתי עמה ¹חונטתא דמורא ודעלוי איך מאא ליטרין:

And there came also Nicodemus, who at first had came to Jesus by night; and he brought with him a mixture1 of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pints.²

The list of the major textual variants in John 19:39, as cited by Aland (1968: 406–407), is as follows:

- μίγμα \mathfrak{p}^{66vid} \mathfrak{R}^c A D^{supp} K L X Δ Θ Π 054 f^1 f^{13} 28 33 565 700 1009 1010 1071 1195 1216 1239 1241 1242° 1365 1546 1646 2148 Byz Lect it a, aur, b, c, f, ff², n, q, r¹ vg syr p, h copsa, bo arm geo
- ἕλιγμα **Χ*** B W cop^{boms}
- σμίγμα Ψ 892 2174 l^{47} (a variant of σμημα)
- σμήγμα $1242*l^{181}$ syr pal (a variant of σμήμα)
- malagmani it = (= μάλαγμα, malagmam).

These variants can be translated (in sequence) as: "mixture," "packet," "ungent," "ointment," and "emollient."4

J. H. Bernard (1928: 653) called attention to the μεῖγμα "mixture" in Sirach 38:7; and for the variants σμίγμα and σμήγμα he suggested, "Probably the original was CMIΓMA which could easily be corrupted to ΕΛΙΓΜΑ." Brown (1970: 940) acknowledged Bernard's suggestion but accepted the μίγμα in the majority of manuscripts as original, noting that the ἕλιγμα in Vaticanus and Sinaiticus* "is the more difficult reading and might well be favored if it were really meaningful." The fact is that all the Greek variants cited here are contextually meaningful. Thus, there is no reason to conclude that scribal corruptions were involved in producing these Greek variants. Rather the variants reflect differences in the Hebrew *Vorlage* involving (1) אַר "sack, bag, package, 5" (2) אַר "ointment, ungent" (3) אָר "flask," and (4) אָר "mixture, mix."

Assuming a Hebrew *Vorlage* the following identifications can easily be made:

- μίγμα "mixture" (p^{66vid} ℵ^c A D^{supp} K L X Δ Θ Π etc.) translated ¬□□
- ἔλιγμα "packet" (** B W cop^{boms}) translated ¬ō,⁹
- σμίγμα "ointment" (Ψ 892 2174 l⁴⁷) translated ¬10,
- σμῆγμα "ointment" (1242* l¹⁸¹ syr pal) translated ¬10,
- malagmani [=malagmam] "ointment" (it") translated 7.10.

These identifications suggest the following reconstruction of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of this verse:

And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, came bringing a flask¹¹ of ointment,
—a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a liter—
moaning/wailing.

The following haplographies (highlighted in red underline) in the phrase אַסוֹך סוֹך "flask ointment mixture"

produced the variants found in the Greek texts noted above:

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"bringing a mixture" מביא אסוך סוך מסך מסך "bringing a packet" מביא אַסור מור מסף "bringing ointment."
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Recognition of another haplography or a defective spelling of the last word of the verse, (בַּוֹלְּהָבְּהְ "bemoaning," which mistakenly became מֵלְּבָּה "one hundred"), clarifies a second crux about the actual volume or weight of the spices Nicodemus brought.

Raymond Brown (1970: 941, 960) noted,

The Roman pound was about twelve ounces, so that this would be the equivalent of about seventy-five of our pounds; but the amount is still extraordinary. . . . This Johannine penchant for extravagant numbers is explained in the other instances [2:6, 21:11] in terms of symbolism, and that may be true here as well.

He suggested that "the large outlay of spices may be meant to suggest that Jesus was given a royal burial, for we know of such outlay on behalf of kings," as in the case of Herod the Great as told by Josephus¹² and in the case of Rabbi Gamaliel as found in the Talmud, *Tractate Ebel Rabbathi*. ¹³

Leon Morris (1971: 825) called attention to II Chron 16: 14, "they laid him [Asa] in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds *of spices* prepared by the perfumers' art." He recognized that the lavish amount of myrrh and aloes brought by Nicodemus to the grave site was unusual and if taken literally it suggests that the wealthy Nicodemus was "trying to make some reparation for his failure to do more in Jesus' life."

Barnabas Lindars (1972: 592) interpreted the "mixture of myrrh and aloes" to be in a liquid form (as in John 12:3) and

calculated one hundred liters to equal eight gallons, which he noted, "is obviously an exaggeration."

More recently Craig Keener (2003: 1163) commented on Nicodemus's "one hundred pounds" of myrrh and aloes:

But the amount of the spices mentioned in 19:39 is extraordinary. The Roman pound was about twelve ounces by modern standards, and hence the figure probably presents about seventy—five pounds; some have proposed that if one takes the amount as a measure of volume equivalent to the biblical *log*, one might find an abundant but hardly impossible amount close to seventy fluid ounces. . . . the lavish amount of spices here, however, are "as befits a king". . . . Nicodemus honored Jesus lavishly, as had the woman in 12:3; but, if her gift had been worth 300 denarii (12:5), Nicodemus's was worth 30,000, a gift befitting "a ruler of the Jews" (3:1).

Had the participle "bewailing" in the Hebrew Vorlage been the Qal אַהַה, rather than the Picel מַאַהָּה, there would have been no confusion with מַאָּהְה "one hundred." But this מַאַה which followed the noun בּיִּלְּהְאָ "liter" was understandably—though mistakenly—misread as a number. The simple loss of a הוה increased "a liter" into "a hundred liters."

The fact that Nicodemus came to the grave bewailing loudly disappeared in the Greek texts. In Greek the focus shifted to Nicodemus's wealth which permitted him to contribute so extravagantly and implied that servants carried the 75-100 pound container of myrrh and aloes—not Nicodemus himself with a more modest gift of a liter of perfumed ungent.

If the Hebrew Vorlage presented here approximates what was original, the אָסוֹנְי "flask" is especially noteworthy. It appears only in II Kings 4:2–7, when Elisha asked the prophet's widow who was being threatened by a creditor what she had of worth in her house, she replied, אַרְרָ שְׁבִּוֹן בִּי אָבִיתְ בִּי אָבְּיתְ בִּי אָבְּיתְ בִּי אָבְּיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּי אָבְיתְ בִּיתְ בִיתְ בִּיתְ בְּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בְּיתְי בְּיתְיּבְיתְ בְּיתְּיִיתְ בְּיתְּיִיתְ בִּיתְ בִּיתְ בְּיתְּי בְּיתְּי בְּיתְ בְּיתְּיִיתְּיִיתְּי בְּיתְּיִיתְיי בְּיתְיי בְּיתְ בְּיתְיי בְּיתְיי בְּיתְיי בְּיתְּייִי בְּיתְיי בְּיתְייי בְּיתְייִיי בְּיתְייִיי בְּיתְיי בְּיתְייִיי בְּיתְייִייי בְי

the widow (I Kings 17), the סלך סלך סוף (as reconstructed) "a flask of ointment, a mixture of . . ." pays off nicely in ascertaining what Nicodemus actually brought to the grave. Moreover, the ἐκατόν/ מֵאֶה "one hundred," when read as "bewailing," pays off well in ascertaining the actual depth of Nicodemus's grief after the death of Jesus.

Just as the (ahha) and (ahhaha) "he expressed pain or grief," cited above, for provides clarity for the interpretation of the מָּאָהֵה in the Vorlage of John 19: 39, the Arabic (jan), the cognate of the Hebrew בָּבָּן "gardener," provides insight into the function of the "gardener" mentioned in John 20:15,

λέγει αὐτῆ Ἰησοῦς,
Γύναι, τί κλαίεις; τίνα ζητεῖς;
ἐκείνη δοκοῦσα ὅτι ὁ κηπουρός ἐστιν λέγει αὐτῷ,
Κύριε, εἰ σὺ ἐβάστασας αὐτόν,
εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας αὐτόν, κἀγὼ αὐτὸν ἀρῶ.

Jesus saith unto her,
Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?
She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him,
Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me
where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Lane (1865: 462) included in his definition of — (jan) the following: "it/he veiled, concealed, hid, covered, or protected, him; it veiled him, concealed him, or covered him, with its darkness; . . . He concealed it; namely, a dead body; he wrapped it in grave clothing: and he buried it." This definitely suggests that the Hebrew "gardener" could in some contexts be better translated as "mortician."

Moreover, there are also the following derivatives:

- جنرن (janan) "dead body" (= إلله إلمان),
- (إلان (janîn) "grave clothes" (= إلان إ
- جنين (janîn) "buried, placed in the grave" (= إلاا إ

These are not related to the words جنان (jannat) "garden," جنان (jannān) "gardener," or جنان (jinn) "invisible demons," even though they appear on the same page in the Arabic lexicons (Lane 1865: 463; Wehr 1979: 164).

Whereas the Greek κηπουρός "gardener" took care of the flowers, plants, and trees, the Hebrew "gardener" may also have handled dead bodies. Thus, Mary Magdalene assumed that the man she saw outside the tomb was the "gardener / mortician" responsible for having removed Jesus' body.

In support of this appeal to Arabic cognates, haplographies, or dittographies in the Hebrew *Vorlagen* to explain variants in the Greek texts of John 19:39 (or a puzzling piece in John 20:15), an example from the Ethiopic text of Matt 3:7 can be cited as a fitting conclusion to my arguments. In the Ethiopic text of the London Polyglot (1667) of Matt 3:7 it states that the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptism *secretly* (the Latin *clàm* translates the Ethiopic *samamita*). 16

The Greek text of Matt 3:7a reads,

Ίδων δὲ πολλοὺς των Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῦς...

But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them

The Hebrew *Vorlage* for this could well have been (minus the vowels),"

If so, the Hebrew text behind the Ethiopic variant must have read טללטבילתו "secretly to his baptism" rather than "to his baptism." Thus, there was a dittography of the initial לטבילתו and ט of the לטבילתו (or a haplography in the Vorlagen of the majority texts). (This やっ "secrecy" [BDB 532], was an adverbial accusative, and would not have required a preposition.) The private visit of the Pharisee Nicodemus to Jesus at night (John 3:2), provides a striking parallel to this Ethiopic variant which has Pharisees and Sadducees going out to John secretly in the daytime. Whereas in Luke 3:7 John *publicly* called the multitude (ὄχλος) "a generation of vipers," in Matt 3:7, according to the Ethiopic text, only many (πολλούς) Pharisees and Saducees were privately declared to be "a generation of vipers." Jesus issued this same charge only against the Pharisees (Matt 12:24-34) and against the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt 23:29–33).

NOTES

- 1. See J. Payne Smith (1957:132) for אחנטת "a mixture of spices to bury the dead."
- 2. "Pint" is Lamsa's translation (1967: 1079).
- 3. This phrase in Codex Palatinus, reads "ferens malagmam murrae et aloen quasi libras centum." The malagmani was an obvious error for the original malagmam. See Liddell Scott (1966: 1076) for the $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\gamma\mu\alpha$ "emollient."

- 4. See Liddell Scott 1132, 533, 1619, 1619, 1076, respectively, for these definitions.
- 5. See BDB 974; Jastrow 1019, 1620; and Payne Smith 387.
- 6. A cognate of the Arabic ناس (suk), "a sort of perfume prepared from رامك ($ra^{\circ}mak$) or from musk and رامك ($ra^{\circ}mak$)," the رامك ($ra^{\circ}mak$) being a Persian loanword for a certain astringent medicine (Lane 1867: 1159; 1872: 1387). Hava (1915: 345) cited ساك ($s\bar{a}k$) "to rub."
- 7. See BDB 691–692; Jastrow 963 "to pour oil, to be oiled, to be perfumed." Montgomery (1951: 370) noted that the TIDN in II Kings 4:2 was translated in Codex *Vaticanus* and in Origen's *Hexapla* as the verb ἀλείψομαι "I anoint myself; but in the Lucianic texts it appears as the noun ἀγγεῖον "vessel, receptacle, sack." The initial \S of TIDN is a prosthetic \S (GKC 19^m), the root being TID, as noted by Montgomery, who stated, "for the unusual development from the root TID, 'to anoint,' cf. TINN (Akk. $zup\bar{u}$), TINN (Syr. $g\bar{u}z$) But it doubtless means an ointment pot." Montgomery called attention to Honeyman's study of TIDN in PEQ 1939, 70.
- 8. See BDB 587; Jastrow 807, "to mix wine."
- 9. The אסך here is a variant spelling of אסך "a sack," like the variants אין דכך אודער "to crush" and אין דכך אונה "to be thin, weak."

- 10. In light of the syntax in 2 Sam 24:2,4 שַּׁקְלִּים חֲמָשִׁים יִּקְלִים מִּקְלִים מִּקְלִים מַּקְלִים מַּרְבָּעִים "forty she-kels," the retroversion of λίτρας ἐκατόν to לִיטָרִין מֵאָה לִיטָרִין מַאָּה לִיטָרִין.
- 11. Another option would be to retrovert the μίγμα to הַּתִישָּׁה "mixture" (Jastrow, 155–156; Payne Smith 41) which was confused with הַבְּישָׁה "packet" (Jastrow, 491–492), the cognate of the Arabic cognate בֹּהׁה (hifš^{un}) "receptacle, vessel, sack" (Hava 132). But this would not account for the variants σμῆγμα and σμίγμα "ointment."

12. Josephus, Antiquities VXII: 196ff.:

After this was over, they prepared for his funeral, it being Archelaus' care that the procession to his father's sepulcher should be very sumptuous. Accordingly, he brought out all his ornaments to adorn the pomp of the funeral. The body was carried upon a golden bier, embroidered with very precious stones of great variety, and it was covered over with purple, as well as the body itself; he had a diadem upon his head, and above it a crown of gold: he also had a scepter in his right hand. About the bier were his sons and his numerous relations; next to these was the soldiery, distinguished according to their several countries and denominations; and they were put into the following order: First of all went his guards, then the band of Thracians, and after them the Germans; and next the band of Galatians, every one in their habiliments of war; and behind these marched the whole army in the same manner as they used to go out to war, and as they used to be put in array by their muster-masters and centurions; these were followed by five hundred of his domestics carrying spices.

So they went eight furlongs to Herodium; for there by his own command he was to be buried. And thus did Herod end his life.

Josephus War I: 673ff.:

They betook themselves to prepare for the king's funeral; and Archelaus omitted nothing of magnificence therein, but brought out all the royal ornaments to augment the pomp of the deceased. There was a bier all of gold, embroidered with precious stones, and a purple bed of various contexture, with the dead body upon it, covered with purple; and a diadem was put upon his head, and a crown of gold above it, and a secrete in his right hand; and near to the bier were Herod's sons, and a multitude of his kindred; next to which came his guards, and the regiment of Thracians, the Germans. also and Gauls, all accounted as if they were going to war; but the rest of the army went foremost, armed, and following their captains and officers in a regular manner; after whom five hundred of his domestic servants and freed-men followed, with sweet spices in their hands: and the body was carried two hundred furlongs, to Herodium, where he had given order to be buried. And this shall suffice for the conclusion of the life of Herod.

13. Tractate Ebel Rabbathi 8:6

The bodies of kings, and their clothes may be burned, their cattle ham-stringed, without fear that it is after the usages of the Amorites. The ceremony of burning clothes and other things is performed for the corpses of kings only, but not for princes. When Rabban Gamaliel died, Aquilas the proselyte, however, burned in his honor clothes of the value of eight thousand Zuz, and when he was asked why he did so, he answered: It is written [Jer. 34:5]: "In peace shalt thou die; and as burnings were made for thy father," etc. Was not Rabban Gamaliel more worthy than a hundred kings, for whom we have no use?

The text highlighted in red appears in Brown's commentary (1970: 960) as "the proselyte Onkelos burned more than eighty pounds of spices." But in *Abodah Zarah*, 11*a*, it is stated that burning of clothes was also done for princes, and Aquilas' deed was used as a support without any explanation. (The 137 was one fourth of a shekel [Jastrow, 385]).

- 14. See BDB 13, 17 and GKC 38°. Compare the English denominatives "wail/ bewail" and "moan/bemoan."
- 15. Lane (129–130) cited the by-form $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwaha) in form 5, $\frac{1}{2}$ ($\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwah), meaning "He said $\frac{1}{2}$ (°āhi) or $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awhi) [i.e. Ah! or Alas!]; he moaned; or uttered a moan, or moaning, or prolonged voice of complaint." He also cited under this root about twenty-five variant pronunciations of the Arabic equivalents of "Ah!" and "Alas!" including $\frac{1}{2}$ (°ahi) and $\frac{1}{2}$ (°aha). Wehr (1979: 46) also cited the verb $\frac{1}{2}$ (°āha) and its by-form $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwaha), in forms II and V meaning "to moan, to sigh." Hava (1915: 16–17) cited verbs $\frac{1}{2}$ (°ah), $\frac{1}{2}$ (°ahha), $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwah), and $\frac{1}{2}$ (°ahha), all meaning "to groan, to sigh," and the exclamatory particles $\frac{1}{2}$ (°āha) "Aha!" $\frac{1}{2}$ (°āha) "Alas!" $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwah) "Alas!" and $\frac{1}{2}$ (°awwah) "Alas!" and "Alas!"
- 16. This variant was not noted by Allen (1912; 24), nor by Davies and Allison (1988: 301). It was noticed by Adam Clarke (1850: 52) and was called to my attention by my friend and colleague, Dr. Parker Thompson. Also, thanks to Rev. Preston Bush who called my attention to the Arabic جن (jan), the cognate of the Hebrew