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

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 חנהוּד since חנהוּ can be derived from the ה נ verb חנִי “to fornicate” (a cognate of Arabic زنّى [zana-yah]) or from the ת נ verb חנִי “to feed” (BDB 275, 266), as well as a number of other derivations proposed in this study.

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

The care taken by the Targumist to make sure Rahab was recognized for having been a חנהו “innkeeper” rather than a חנהו “harlot” has not been fully appreciated, even by translators of Targum Jonathan. Harrington and Saldarini (1987: 20) actually translated אולא אמרו לברון איתחה as “and they went and they entered the house of the harlot woman.” To translate the אולא אמרו לברון as “harlot”—as though it were synonymous with אולא אמרו לברון “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 הָנִז—a literal translation of שָׁם הָנִז “innkeeper, hostess” seems obligatory, even if it disagrees with the הָנִז in canonical traditions (Hebrews 11:1 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 שָׁם הָנִז “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 καταχωγίαν “inn, lodging, resting place” rather than to her πορνεία or her χαμαιπεία, the common Greek words for “brothel.”

ARABIC COGNATES

When one turns to Arabic cognates of Hebrew הָנִז and נְזִ (and the * by-form נְזִ, like מַעָזְמֶה) the ambiguity of הָנִז (originally scriptio defectiva הָנִז) in Jos 2:1 becomes very apparent. The following is a list of possible cognates of הָנִז:

(1) زنى (zanaya) “to fomite, to commit adultery” (Lane, 1867: 1260), noted above and followed by many commentators.

(2) زينة (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.
THE REHAB OF RAHAB

(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,” included in this definition, is noted below in paragraph (8).

(3) **זָוָה** (ziwannat) “short,” when applied to a woman, **זָוָה** (ziwann) when applied to a man (Lane, 1867: 1273). If this were the derivation of הַנָּוֵז, the ה would have been an original consonant rather than a later vowel letter.

(4) **זָנָא** (zanā’) “short,” possibly a by-form of the above (Lane, 1867: 1255c)

(5) **זָנָא** (zanā’) “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 καταγωγίαν and ἡνωμένον address the “lodging” element of זָנָא (zanā’), they do not touch on the fact that Rahab as הַנָּוֵז was by anticipation the woman who would provide refuge and concealment for the spies, not just routine lodging. If זָנָא (zanā’) is the cognate of MT הַנָּוֵז, the ה of חַוֵּז is a misvocalization.

(6) **זָנָא** (zanā’) “he was, or became, affected with a lively emotion of joy or grief; syn طَرَب (taraba) [“he was or became affected with emotion, or a lively emotion, or excitement, agitation, or unsteadiness . . . . yeaning 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 . . . [used of] camels yearning for their accustomed places of abode”]” (Lane, 1867: 1255c; 1893: 1835–1836).2
(7) נָבַע (zanâ‘) “to ascend.” The LXX B-text of Jud. 19:2 has nothing corresponding to the נָבַע (see note 2, below), perhaps due to a erroneous assumption that נָבַע was nothing more than a variant for the קֵלֵב “she went [up]” which follows it.

(8) דָּהַן (dâhin) “one was or became intelligent, possessed of understanding, sagacious, acute, skillful” (Lane, 1867: 984). Arabic alezayn appears as a א in Hebrew, and the אֶזֶר would be to א what א is to כ (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] אֶזֶר [zinat], above.)

(9) טַנְנוֹ (zânîn) “one in whose goodness no trust, or confidence is to be placed, someone possessing little good or goodness,” and טַנְנוֹ (zânîn) “[one who is] suspected, to be under suspicion.” Arabic alezayn usually becomes א in Hebrew but א and א may appear closely related to א, as with זָהֵירת (zahîrat) “midday” and זָהָר: זָהָר “midday”; זָהוֹר (zâhir) “shining, bright” and זָהוֹר “shining brightness” (Lane, 1867, 1262; 1874: 1925; and BDB, 263 [with no reference to זָהוֹר] and 843 [which notes זָהוֹר]). 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 טַנְנוֹ (zânîn) is an אֶזֶר stem, אֹזֶר would be an א by-form.
THE REHAB OF RAHAB

(10) "an idol, and anything taken as a deity and worshiped beside God, . . . a place in which idols are collected and set up," as also "anything that is worshiped in place of God''] (Lane, 1867: 1273 and 1268). Although it is unlikely that is the cognate of in Jos. 2:1, it may well be the cognate and by-form of used in prophetic literature when Israel and Judah are castigated for their idolatry and worship of other gods. Instead of understanding an expression like in Hosea 1:2 strictly as a metaphorical use of "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, — 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 will always present a problem, but not necessarily a prostitute. The interpretation of may tell more about the preoccupation of the interpreter than the occupation of the character.

Boling (1982: 145), who made no reference to "innkeeper" in Targum Jonathan or to Josephus’ "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+ 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 קָנַה, rather than קָנַה, has gone un-noticed or unappreciated by subsequent lexicographers, including the most recent revision of Koehler and Baumgartner’s Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon (1994: II: ).

The use of קָנַה in the Jewish prayer after meals

כָּרוּם אָחָה יִזְעַר אלהינו מלך הָעָלָמִים
וּמְלַא הַנְּעָלָמִים טוֹבָּהוּ

“Blessed art thou, the Eternal, our God, king of the universe who sustaineth the whole universe in his goodness . . . .” may well retain a use of the Hebrew stem קָנַה, a stem attested — although not widely attested— since the time of Joseph and Joshua, precluding the necessity of making the קָנַה “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 (Ῥαχάβ) of Matthew from the Rahab (LXX = Ῥααβ) of Joshua since the Rahab of Jericho is, according to Quinn, always known in Greek as Ῥααβ and consequently, “the Ῥααβ 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, Ῥααβης.
and ḫoḇḥ, 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 ḫoḇḥ bn ḥ, which Howard rendered traditionally “from Rahab the harlot,” assuming the vocalization should be ḫoḇḥ with the MT of Jos 2:1, rather than ḥ with Targum Jonathan and the Josepus tradition.5 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 ḫ in certain contexts surely means a “harlot,” but it does not have this meaning in all contexts. ḫ 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 ẓun (ẓūn) “idol, place of idols.” The ḫ in Hos 1:2 need not be a by-form of ḫ “harlot,” but may be related to the Arabic ẓanûn (zanûn) “being of little good, being suspect.” The concubine in Jud 19:2 was more likely to have been just plain “homesick” (= ẓanâ’ [zanâ’] = ḫ) 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 ḫ and a virgin at the same time. She could have been ẓanā’ (zanā’) “short,” ẓanā’ (zanā’) “hyper-emotional,” ẓânâ’ (ḍâhin) “smart and skillful,” or just plain ẓânâ’ (zinat) “beautiful.” However, the adjective which best fits the context of providing the spies with “bed and breakfast” is ẓânâ’ (zanā’) “having the ability to offer lodging, refuge, and concealment.” For the spies, Rahab
was ἐπὶ “the sustainer (feminine),” which corresponds to the masculine ἐπὶ “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 give them life. Rahab’s brief encounter with the Israelite spies ended in covenant of life-for-life.

The multiple nuances of ἰπֶי are sacrificed unnecessarily when the ἰμα is treated simply as a titillating tidbit about a harlot. The narrator’s choice of ἰπֶי, 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 τῆς Ῥαχάβης καταγωγίαν and ἰ Ῥαχάβης καταγωγοῦσα; and Thackeray, 1926: 5: 4–5, where Rahab is spelled Ῥαχάβης rather than Ῥαχάβης.

2. This cognate provides a clue for the LXX A-text translating the ἰπείν in Jud 19:2 as καὶ ὄργισθη σύν ὑμῖν “and she became angry with him” (followed by the RSV and NRS). Given the emotional range of ἵνα (zānan)—which is greater than that of the Akkadian cognates zënu “to be angry” and zinnu “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 ἰπεί 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 طَوُنون (zāunûn) must be considered as the cognate of ἰπεί in Hos 1:2. Lane (1872: 1925b) included the following in his definition of طَوُنون (zāunûn): “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 (zannum) “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 "Not Pitied" and "Not My People," but in 2:3 they are called "Pitied" and "My People." The ambivalence and wavering between punishment and forgiveness throughout Hosea is more than hinted at in when the word is related to (zannum). Thus, by disassociating the in 1:2c from the in 1:2d, simple repetition is removed and a striking paranomasia is recovered.


5. The vocalization of the feminine noun is patterned after the morphologically analogous "silence," and "shame" (BDB 101 and 189, respectively). For the varied plene and defectiva spellings of nouns and participles of " stems, see GKC 72^p, noting especially the of Mic 2:8, which lends support for vocalizing "innkeeper, hostess" as rather than as, as if it were a homophone of "harlot."