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CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

WHAT NOT TO DO
WITH A LAMP

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WHAT NOT TO DO WITH A LAMP

INTRODUCTION

The Greek synoptic gospels, along with the *Gospel of Thomas*, are in agreement that the place for a λύχνος / 𐤊𐤍𐤁𐤄 [hēbs] “lamp” is on a λυχνία / 𐤊𐤎𐤊𐤍𐤁𐤄 [luxnia] “lamp-stand.” The Shem Tob *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* concurs with the Greek and the Coptic traditions, stating that the נר “lamp” was placed on a מנורה “lamp stand.” But there are five different ideas in the tradition as to what people do *not* do with a lamp, including the fact that people do not place a lamp (1) under a bushel, (2) or under a vessel, (3) or under a bed, (4) in a hidden place (5) or in a cellar. The question to be addressed is whether Jesus’ made multiple statements using different terms on different occasions, or did he make one statement which was interpreted in multiple ways in the Gospels and tradition. The six relevant texts for review follow (with the key words in bold font).

PROBLEMATIC TEXTS

Matthew 5:15

They do not light a lamp to put it in a **hidden place** (במקום נסתר) where it cannot shine, but they place it on a lamp stand (המנורה) so that it might shine for all in the house.”¹

Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a **bushel** (μόδιου),² but on a stand (λυχνία),³ and it gives light to all in the house.”⁴

Luke 8:16 and 11:33

No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a **vessel** (σκεύει),⁵ or puts it under a **bed** (κλίνης),⁶ but puts it on a stand (λυχνίας), that those who enter may see the light.”

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a **cellar** (κρύπτην)⁷ or under a **bushel** (μόδιον), but on a stand (λυχνίαν), that those who enter may see the light.”⁸

Mark 4:21

And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought⁹ in to be put under a **bushel** (μόδιον), or under a **bed** (κλίνην), and not on a stand (λυχνίαν)?”

Gospel of Thomas Logia 33

No one lights a lamp and puts it under a **bushel** (μααγε [maage]), nor does he put it in a **hidden place** (μαεφρηπ [maefhēp]), but sets it on a lamp stand (λυχνία [luxnia]) so that all who come in and go out may see its light.¹⁰

OBSERVATIONS

The first observation is that the Shem Tob text is not a translation of the Latin *sub modio* nor of the Greek ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον “under a bushel.” Surprisingly, the נסתר במקום “hidden place” of Shem Tob agrees with the μαεφρηπ [maefhēp] “hidden place” of *Logia* 33 and the κρύπτην “hidden/secret place, cellar” of Luke 11:33. If the text of Shem Tob were a translation from the Latin or Greek, as some scholars insist, it is very difficult to explain why the translator misunderstood the common word μόδιον/*modio*,

“a measure for grain” and ended up with a “secret/hidden place.”

Luke’s different doublets, “vessel” and “bed” followed by “cellar” and “bushel,” do not match Mark’s doublet of “bushel” and “bed” or the doublet of “bushel” and “hidden place” in *Logia* 33. The “Q” source might account for Matthew’s “bushel” and Luke’s “bushel,” but as currently defined, “Q” cannot account for Luke’s four-fold “vessel,” “bed,” “cellar,” and “bushel”—nor the “hidden place” in the Shem Tob text and in the Gospel of Thomas *Logia* 33.

Since “Q” provided no help in understanding the differences in this saying of Jesus, commentators have given only passing attention to them. Davies and Allison (1988: 477) compared Matt 5:15 with Luke 11:33 and simply raised the question: “But what of εἰς κρύπτην (= ‘in a cellar’, ‘in a dark and hidden place’ or ‘grotto’; cf. Josephus, *Bell.* 5.330)?” There was, however, no answer given to the question. They simply made two assertions: (1) that κρύπτην is not found in the Septuagint and is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, “and so not obviously from Luke”; and (2) “one may doubt whether ‘under the bed’ (or: bench?) first stood in the saying.” Mann (1986: 268) noted only that Matthew and Mark agree in substance, without any mention of the five variants in the tradition. He concluded, “The saying is somewhat enigmatic, for making the point that the function of the lamp is to give light does not accord well with the earlier text (4:12), which suggest that in some fashion the revelation is deliberately hidden.”

ORTHOGRAPHIC AND LEXICAL ISSUES

All the variations of this saying can be accounted for by a written Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* which was understood in different ways, depending of the reading of one letter as either a ך or a ך and a second letter as a ך or a ך. The Hebrew Bible has a number of *Qere/Kethib* variants reflecting scribal confusion of ך or ך, as in Prov 23:5 where the הַתְעוּף was to be read as הַתְעוּף “you make [your eyes] flutter,”¹¹ and the וְעוּף (*sic*) was to be read as וְעוּף/וְעוּף “he will fly.” A *Qere/Kethib* variant reflecting a misreading of a ך and ך occurs in Jer 35:11, where the MT אַרָם “Aram” was read as אֶדָם “Edom” in the Syriac tradition.¹²

The variants “bushel,” “vessel,” “bed,” “cellar,” and “hidden place” may simply go back to a Hebrew/Aramaic word spelled either סוּר / סוּר or סוּר / סוּר. The ambiguously written word would have been one of the following well attested words:

(1) Syriac ܣܘܕܐ (*sawdā*⁹ or *sūdā*⁹) “a measure for grain, less than a pound.” The Hebrew/Aramaic cognate would be סוּרָא or סוּר.¹³

(2) Syriac ܣܘܕܐ (*sēwad*) “a rug, a divan-cushion,”¹⁴ which is related to the Arabic وسادة (*wisâd*) “a pillow or cushion.”¹⁵ The Hebrew/Aramaic cognate would be סוּר or סוּדָא.

(3) Hebrew/Aramaic סוּר (*sîr*) “a pot, water pot, a utensil for boiling,” as in 2 Kings 4:38–41. It would be equal to Greek σκύφος and Arabic زير (*zîr*)¹⁶

(4) Hebrew סוד (*sôd*) “a foundation, a secret place, a base.”¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The *Vorlage* of the Hebrew Matthew of Shem Tob probably had at one time בסוד “in a hidden place” in its text. Given the ambiguity of סוד, which could also be (a) “a foundation,” (b) “a measuring container,” or (c) “a cushion,” the synonym סתר “secret place” replaced the original סוד in the *Shem Tob* text. The Greek Matthew understood the סוד /סור in its *Vorlage* to be סני, (1) above. The uncertainty of the reading produced a doublet in Luke 8:16 derived from סיר and סני, (3) and (2) above. In Luke 11:33 a conflation of סוד and סני, (4) and (1) above, appeared. Mark’s Hebrew source read the סוד as סני and סני, (1) and (2) above. However, the Gospel of Thomas reflects a tradition which conflated סני and סוד, (1) and (4) above.

The κρύπτειν “hidden place” of Luke 11:33, the מקום נסתר “hidden place” in Matt 5:15 of Shem Tob, and the μαεφῆπ [*maefhēp*] “hidden place” of *Logia* 33 reflect the obvious: people do not light a lamp to hide the light. Were darkness preferred, lamps would not be lit in the first place. Were the saying focused on fire-safety, a reminder that careful people do not put a lighted lamp under flammable containers, cushions, or sleeping mats would make sense. But Jesus’ focus was not on fire-safety. The μόδιον “bushel” and the κλίβης “bed,” both of which could be flammable, are not likely to have been the intended meaning of the original סוד.

Luke's "covering the lamp with a vessel" (σκεύει = סִיר), instead of "putting the lamp under a vessel" may be a logical adjustment since the סִיר, as suggested by its Arabic cognate, could have been a water jar which was nearly pointed on the bottom, making it difficult to put anything under it. By turning the vessel upside-down, the wide upper part of the vessel would easily cover and extinguish the lamp.

These observations and interpretations lead to the conclusion that Jesus did not make multiple sayings about lamps on lamp stands, but his one statement was open to multiple readings once it was written down in a script in which a ך and ך and a ך and ך were easily confused.

NOTES

1. This is the translation of the Hebrew text of Shem Tob Ibn Shaprut (Howard 1987: 16–17; 1995: 16–17). On the use in Hebrew of the third person masculine plural for a personal indefinite (i.e., "people generally") see GKC 144°.
2. Liddell and Scott: 1140, "= Latin *modius*, a dry measure, = 1/6 of the corn-measure called μῆδινος. Arndt and Gingrich (1957: 527) defined this Latin loanword as "a peck-measure."
3. Liddell and Scott: 1067, "lamp stand."
4. Hill (1972: 116) conjectured, "The impersonal plural ('*men* light . . .'), which is infrequent in Greek (save in special *legousi* ['men say'] phrase) but common in Aramaic, and use of the definite article ('under *the* measure . . . upon *the* lamp stand') to denote a single person or thing as being present to the mind under given circumstances (an acknowledged Semitism) suggest the Aramaic origin and authenticity of the saying." The same conclusion was

expressed earlier by Black (1967: 126–127) and later by Gundry (1994: 77). See above, note 1, for the Hebrew use of the indefinite personal 3mpl.

5. Liddell and Scott: 1607, “vessel or implement of any kind.”

6. Liddell and Scott: 961, “that on which one lies, couch, used at meals or for bed.”

7. Liddell and Scott: 1000; Arndt and Gingrich: 455; Oepke 1966: 959, κρύπτω “to conceal something, to keep secret, to keep something from being seen; κρυπτός “hidden, secret, a hidden thing, a hidden place”; κρύπτη “a dark or hidden place, a cellar.”

8. The phrase οὐδὲ ὑπὸ τὸν μόνδιον is omitted by p^{45} p^{75} L Ξ 0124 f1 700 al sy^s sa (UBS: 260) and the NEB. Marshall (1978: 488) suggested that the phrase “could be due to assimilation to the parallels; but the structure of Mark 4:21 suggests that the original wording had two phrases as here (of which Matthew has omitted one).”

9. Gundry (1993: 212–216) suggested that the Greek ἔρχεται may reflect the Aramaic אָתָּא in the ^o*Ittaphal* form meaning “was [the lamp] brought?” W. Lane (1974: 165) rendered this verse quite literally, “Does the lamp come for the purpose of being placed under the measure or under a couch? Does it not come for the purpose of being placed on a lamp stand?”

10. Guillaumont 1959: 22–23. Crum 1939: 212–213, noting that ܡܐܥܥܥܥܥ [*maage*] also means “ear.” Some have conjectured that the scribe’s intent was to write ܡܐܕܝܢܝܢ / μόνδιον “bushel.”

11. Note עַפְעַף “eyelid,” perhaps from “fluttering.” While עוֹף means “to fly” and עִיף means “to faint” (BDB 733, 746), עִיף and עוֹף stem III (not cited in BDB) is the cognate of the Arabic عيف

and عوف (^cyf/^cwf) which Lane (1874: 2198, 2212) defined as “[birds that] circled over a thing, or over the water, or over carcasses or corpses . . . going to and fro and not going away, desiring to alight.” This derivation is well supported by the Sumerian proverb cited by Scott (1965: 143) “Possessions are sparrows . . . in flight which can find no place to alight.” The עִיף and עוֹף in Pro 23:5 reflect paronomasia rather than repetition.

12. The confusion of ך and ך and the confusion of ן and ן is widely attested with many examples compiled by Delitzsch (1920: 103–104 § 104^{a-c} and 105^{a-c}).

13. J. Payne Smith 364. On the loss of the ם in Hebrew, see GKC §23^f.

14. J. Payne Smith 363. This word occurs in Hebrew and Arabic although the Hebrew is not cited in Jastrow or BDB. For the Arabic see the next note.

15. Lane 1893: 2940, “a pillow, or cushion upon which one reclines, or rests . . . anything that is used as a pillow or put beneath the head, whether of household-furniture or stones or earth.” Hava (1915: 868) and Wehr (1979: 1250) cite the verb *وسد* (*wassad*) “to place a pillow beneath the head.” The loss of the initial ן in the Syriac and Hebrew cognate would be like the loss of the ן of יסוד׃ “foundation” in the by-form סוד “foundation” (BDB 696).

16. BDB 696. Liddell and Scott (1966:1601) defined στρούς as “a pit for keeping corn.” Lane (1867: 1276) defined *زير* (*zîr*)” as “a large water jar, wide in the upper part and nearly pointed at the bottom.”

17. Jastrow 961; for the variants יסוד׃, מוֹסָד and מִסָד see BDB 414.