Abstract

It is suggested in this contribution that in Dan 6:20 בְּנָגְהָא is not a gloss but rather an Aramaic calque on the Akkadian expression, ina/ana mimmû šēri ina namāru, “When the first light of dawn shone,” which occurs several times in the Gilgamesh epic, tablets VI:88; VIII:1, 64, 90, 206; XI:48, 97, which is comprised of the Akkadian verb, namāru, “to dawn, shine brightly,” and the noun, šēri (=נֹגהָאַה), “daybreak, daylight.” There is also the possibility that the word בְּנָגְהָא was incorrectly copied and should be vocalized as an infinitive, בְּנָגְהֵהּ, thus creating an exact parallel to the Akkadian verb, namāru.

This, then, would add yet another example to the multiple influences of Akkadian words and phrases upon the Aramaic of the book of Daniel.

In Chapter 6 of the book of Daniel, which pertains to the miraculous rescue of Daniel from the lions’ den, it is reported that the king, perturbingly pondering Daniel’s precarious position, spent a sleepless night (vs. 19), and “at the very break of dawn’s first light hurriedly arose to see what had befallen him (vs. 20):

בֵּאדַיִן מַלְכָּא בִּשְׁפַּרְפָּרָא יְקוּם בְּנָגְהָא וּבְהִתְבְּהָלָה

In this verse there appear two nouns, שְׁפַּרְפָּרָא and נָגְהָא, which are hapax legomena in Biblical Aramaic. The first of the two, שְׁפַּרְפָּרָא (written, according to the Masoretic text, first with a minuscule פ and then with a majuscule פ, 3) is formed by a reduplication of the last two consonants of a triconsonantal root, שפר, 4 which appears in Syriac, שַׁפְרָה and שֻׁפְרָה, meaning Aurora, 4 and is the interdialectal etymological equivalent of Arabic سَفْرَة (safara), “to shine,” referring to the dawn (cf. also سَفْرَة (asfara)). It appears 5 in the Aramaic Targum to Isa 58:8, בְכֵן יתגלי בנהורך (Heb. אורך אז יִבָּקַע כשחר; 62:1, שפרפרא נהורא עד יתไกล כ); in Est 4:8, שפרפרא לא תפף עלוי (Heb. אל תּופַף עליו נְהָרָה; 7:4, שפרפרא עד עידן); in Lam 2:19, שפרפרא מטרתא ד, and in Version 2 of that Targum, בשֵׁרוּי מטרת שפרפרא (Heb. בראש אשמֻרות); and also in an appendix at the end of the book of Esther (10:3) in both Aramaic Targums: רָא שפרפרא.

1. Compare the similar motif and wording in Esth 6:1.
2. In 4QDan, the reading is: בְּנָגְהָא. According to the spacing, it is apparent that יקום was omitted. See Ulrich E et al., Qumran Cave 4·XI: Psalms to Chronicles, DJD 16 (Oxford, 2000), 261–262.
4. Dalman, G, Aramäisch-neuhebräische Handwörterbuch* (Frankfurt am Main, 1922), 433a; Brockelmann, C, Lexicon Syriacum* (Halle, 1928), 797a.
5. For citations, see Sperber, A, The Bible in Aramaic, III (Leiden, 1962), ad loc. (Hebrew).
Daniel 6:20: An Aramaic Calque on an Akkadian Expression

The second noun, נגַהא, which is well attested not only in Biblical Hebrew both as a verb, “to shine,” in the qal, Isa 9:1; Job 18:5; 22:28; and in the hiph’il, 2 Sam 22:29 = Ps 18:29; Isa 13:10; and as a noun, “brightness, light of heavenly bodies,” in the singular twenty times, e.g., Amos 5:20; Isa 50:12; 60:19; 62:1; Ezek 1:13; Hab 3:11 (compare also the Deir Alla inscription, first combination, lines 6–7: נגַהא), and once in the plural, נגָהוֹת, Isa 59:9; but also in Rabbinic Hebrew, כוכב נגַהא, designating, in addition, the planet Venus, נוֹגהַא (cf. the reference above to the two Targums to the book of Esther). Because of the unusual combination of these two synonymous nouns in one and the same verse, commentators have assumed that the second, נגַהא, functions as an Aramaic gloss which was inserted to clarify the rare substantive, בָּשָׂפָר פָּרָא, similar to what has been suggested for Dan 4:12, where the phrase בָּשָׂפָר פָּרָא appears at the end of the same verse containing נְגֹהוֹת. This latter example, however, is most likely not a misplaced gloss (since there would be no reason to gloss this clearly understandable expression), but rather is an example of a textual doublet created by the preservation of two variant synonymous readings. It is here suggested that in Dan 6:20 נגַהא is not a gloss either, but rather an Aramaic calque on the Akkadian expression, ina/ana mimmû šērī ina namāri, “When the first light of dawn shone,” which occurs several times in the Gilgamesh epic, tablets VI:8; VIII:1, 64, 90, 206; XI:48, 97, which is comprised of the Akkadian verb, namāri, “to dawn, shine brightly,” and the noun, šēru (= נֹגהַא), “daybreak, daylight.” Furthermore, if the reconstruction of the citation from Gilgamesh VIII:64 is correct: ina mimmû šērī ina namāri Gil[gamesh arosel], “When the first light of dawn shone, Gilgamesh arose,” this would supply an exact cognate equivalent to our verse. In light of this, there is also the possibility that the word נגַהא was incorrectly copied and should be vocalized as an infinitive, נגַהֵה, thus creating an exact parallel to the Akkadian verb, namāri. This, then, would add yet another example to the multiple influences of Akkadian words and phrases upon the Aramaic of the book of Daniel.

10. For textual doublets, see Tov, E, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis, 1992), 241–243.
12. CAD, Š/II, 331.