

DANIEL 6:20: AN ARAMAIC CALQUE ON AN AKKADIAN EXPRESSION*

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Abstract

It is suggested in this contribution that in Dan 6:20 בְּנִגְהָא is not a gloss but rather an Aramaic calque on the Akkadian expression, ina/ana mimmu šēri ina namāri, “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, šēru (= נִגְהָא), “daybreak, daylight.” There is also the possibility that the word בְּנִגְהָא was incorrectly copied and should be vocalized as an infinitive, בְּנִגְהָה, 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, perturbedly pondering Daniel's precarious position, spent a sleepless night (vs. 19),¹ and “at the very break of dawn's first light hurriedly arose” to see what had befallen him (vs. 20): בְּאֲדִין מְלָכָא בְּשִׁפְרִפְרָא יְקוּם בְּנִגְהָא וּבְהִתְבַּהֲלָהּ.² In this verse there appear two nouns, שִׁפְרִפְרָא and נִגְהָא, which are *hapax legomena* in Biblical Aramaic. The first of the two, שִׁפְרִפְרָא (written, according to the Masoretic text, first with a minuscule פ and then with a majuscule פ), is formed by a reduplication of the last two consonants of a tri-consonantal root, שִׁפַּר,³ which appears in Syriac, שִׁפְרָה and שִׁפְרָה, meaning Aurora,⁴ and is the interdialectal etymological equivalent of Arabic سَفَرَ (*safara*), “to shine,” referring to the dawn (cf. also أَسْفَرَ (*asfara*). It appears⁵ in the Aramaic Targum to Isa 58:8, כִּכְן יִתְגַּלִּי בְּשִׁפְרִפְרָא (עד יצא כנ גה צדקה); Job 3:4, שִׁפְרִפְרָא (אל תופע עליו נהרה); Lam 2:19, מִטְרַתָּא דְּשִׁפְרִפְרָא (בראש אשמרות); and also in an appendix at the end of the book of Esther (10:3) in both Aramaic Targums: הוּא מִרְדְּכֵי דְמִי לְכֹכַב נֹגְהָא דְמִזְהַר בִּינֵי כֹכְבֵיָא וְדְמִי לְשִׁפְרִפְרָא דִּי

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1. Compare the similar motif and wording in Esth 6:1.

2. In 4QDan^b, the reading is: [כא בשפרפרא]בגהא ובאתבה[לה]. According to the spacing, it is apparent that יְקוּם was omitted. See Ulrich E et al., *Qumran Cave 4-XI: Psalms to Chronicles*, DJD 16 (Oxford, 2000), 261–262.

3. Compare similarly, e.g., אֲדַמְדַם, Lev 13:42; 14:49; שִׁהֲרַח רֵת, Song of Songs 1:6; הִפְכַּפְךָ, Prov 21:8; הִפְרַפְרַת, Isa 2:20. See Kautsch, E and Cowley, AE, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*² (Oxford, 1957), 234–235, 84b.

4. Dalman, G, *Aramäisch-neuhebräische Handwörterbuch*² (Frankfurt am Main, 1922), 433a; Brockelmann, C, *Lexicon Syriacum*² (Halle, 1928), 797a.

5. For citations, see Sperber, A, *The Bible in Aramaic*, III (Leiden, 1962), ad loc. (Hebrew).

נפק בעדן צפרא, “He, Mordecai, is comparable to the planet Venus that shines amongst the stars and resembles the dawn that comes forth at morning time.”

The second noun, נגהא,⁶ 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: נגה);⁷ and once in the plural, נגהות, Isa 59:9; but also in Rabbinic Hebrew,⁸ designating, in addition, the planet Venus, כוכבא נוגהא (cf. the reference above to the two Targums to the book of Esther).⁹

Because of the unusual combination of these two synonymous nouns in one and the same verse, commentators have assumed that the second, בנגהא, functions as an Aramaic gloss which was inserted to clarify the rare substantive, בשפרפרא, similar to what has been suggested for Dan 4:12, where the phrase בעשב ארעא appears at the end of the same verse containing בדתאא ברא בר. 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.¹⁰ It is here suggested that in Dan 6:20 בנגהא is not a gloss either, but rather an Aramaic calque on the Akkadian expression, *ina/ana mimmû šēri ina namāri*, “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,”¹¹ and the noun, *šēru* (= נגה), “daybreak, daylight.”¹² Furthermore, if the reconstruction of the citation from Gilgamesh VIII:64 is correct: *ina mimmû šēri ina namāri Gi[lgameš itbīma]*, “When the first light of dawn shone, Gi[lgameš arose],” this would supply an exact cognate equivalent to our verse.¹³ In light of this, there is also the possibility that the word בנגהא was incorrectly copied and should be vocalized as an infinitive, בנגה, 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.¹⁴

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6. The root appears both in Syriac, נגהא, and in the Ugaritic epic of Kirta (*KTU*² 1.16.I:37): *wgh nir rbt*, “the shining of the great light” (an epithet of the sun). See Pardee, D, “The Kirta Epic,” in: Hallo, WW (ed.), *The Context of Scripture*, I (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1997), 340.
 7. See Levine, BA, “The Deir-‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” in: Hallo, WW (ed.), *The Context of Scripture*, II (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2000), 143.
 8. Sokoloff, M, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (Ramat Gan, 1990), 340; idem, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Ramat Gan, 2002), 728–729; Jastrow, M, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York, 1950), 872–873.
 9. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 619.
 10. For textual doublets, see Tov, E, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 1992), 241–243.
 11. *CAD*, N/I, 209–218. Compare also the noun form, *namārītu*, “dawn,” *ibid.*, 208.
 12. *CAD*, Š/II, 331.
 13. For a citation from a neo-Babylonian text, without the substantive *mimmû* (literally, “any”): *ina šēri ina namāri*, see Lambert, WG, “Nebuchadnezzar King of Justice,” *Iraq* 27 (1965), 6:26.
 14. See Paul, SM, “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1–6,” in: Collins, JJ and Flint, PW (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, I (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001), 55–68, with additional bibliography. After this article was submitted for publication, Dr. Sol Cohen brought to my attention further attestations of this substantive in Christian Palestinian Aramaic. See Duensing, H, *Christliche-Palästinisch-Aramäische Texte und Fragmente Göttingen 1906* (Jerusalem, 1971), 115; Kohut, A, *Arukh ha-Shalem*², VIII (Vienna, 1926), 139.